

# Design and Analysis of a Novel Deployable Robotic Grasper

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**Abstract** - In order to grasp large-scale unknown objects, a novel deployable robotic grasper is presented in this paper, which is composed of a train of basic metamorphic mechanism modules. Firstly, a detailed mechanism design is introduced, in which a scissor-shaped mechanism is used to design basic module so that it has single deployment mobility and a particular metamorphic mechanism is applied to change its mobility from deployment motion to grasping motion. Then, metamorphic process, mobility analysis, and singularity analysis of the basic module are conducted and the assembling of the grasper is illustrated. Secondly, the deploy/fold ratio and its influencing factors are discussed. Thirdly, the workspace of the grasper is demonstrated, which shows that the grasper has large reachable workspace. In addition, kinematic equation and dexterity of the proposed grasper are also presented. Finally, the shape adaptability and grasping simulation are conducted, which shows that the grasper has good grasping performances and can be used to grasp large-scale unknown objects.

**Index Terms** - Deployable robotic grasper, Metamorphic mechanism, Deploy/fold ratio, Shape adaptability.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Currently, robotic grasping has become a hot research topic, which has aroused the interests of a large of researchers. [1]. At present, those proposed grasping schemes previously can be mainly divided into serial mechanisms, parallel mechanisms, and serial-parallel mechanisms. Serial mechanisms usually achieve better results in grasping lightweight objects due to its small stiffness [2]. Compared with serial mechanisms, parallel mechanisms have complementary merits in the robotic graspers, the advantages of which include higher stiffness, lower inertia, and a higher carrying capacity. However, the traditional parallel mechanisms always have very limited workspace [3]. In order to utilize their advantages and avoid their disadvantages, serial-parallel mechanisms were designed, which usually is assembled via connecting a train of parallel modules in series [4]. Obviously, serial-parallel mechanisms not only have great stiffness but also have large reachable workspace by controlling the number of parallel modules.

However, series-parallel mechanisms have not been used too much in the design of robotic grasper, the main reason of which includes two factors. On the one hand, traditional series-parallel mechanisms cannot be deployed. So it cannot be conveniently transported and stored [5] [6] [7] [8] [9]. Inspired by such challenge, Li proposed a novel grasping manipulator

for grasping large-scale unknown objects [10]. On the other hand, the end-effectors of serial-parallel mechanisms are not suitable for grasping tasks while serial-parallel mechanisms always have so many actuators. So how to achieve more motions with fewer actuators become a key point. Numerous studies have shown that metamorphic mechanism will be a nice answer out of the dilemma [11] [12]. A large number of researchers have applied metamorphic mechanism into their own design [13].

Based on above analysis, due to various disadvantages such as small workspace, small stiffness, and large volume of those graspers proposed previously, so it is difficult to apply them into grasping large-scale unknown objects. Therefore, a type of robotic grasper, which can be used to grasp large-scale unknown objects, needs to be designed. Such type of robotic grasper is required the following features:

1. The robotic grasper needs good stiffness to grasp large mass objects, so truss-shaped structure must be adopted in design.
2. A good deploy/fold ratio is necessary for convenient of storage and transportation.
3. Robotic grasper is required good shape adaptability for grasping unknown objects.
4. Lightweight is essential for grasping objects, under-actuated grasper is a good method to solve such a problem.

This paper presents a novel deployable robotic grasper, which is composed of five basic deployable metamorphic mechanism modules. In each module, scissor-shaped mechanism is used to perform deployment motion. Especially kinematic metamorphic mechanism is adopted to change mobility from deployment motion to grasping motion. To ensure grasping stiffness of the robotic grasper, truss-shaped structure is applied into the design of the module. Then, the analysis of deploy/fold ratio, workspace, dexterity, and shape adaptability proves that the proposed grasper has excellent grasping performances. The rests of this paper are organized as follows. In the next section, a detailed mechanism design is introduced. Then, metamorphic process, mobility analysis, and singularity analysis of the basic module are presented and the assembling of the grasper is illustrated. In Section 3, the deploy/fold ratio and its influencing factors of the robotic grasper are discussed. In section 4, dexterity and workspace of the grasper are proposed. Section 5 discusses shape adaptability and grasping simulation for different-shaped objects. Section 6 concludes this paper.

## II. DESIGN OF DEPLOYABLE ROBOTIC GRASPER

### A. Design of the Metamorphic Module

Basic metamorphic mechanism module is made up of three parts including deployable mechanism, metamorphic mechanism, and supporting mechanism.

In order to realize the deployment motion, scissor-shaped mechanism is used into module design as shown in Fig. 1. Link 6 and link 7 are connected by revolute joint  $R_{13}$ , then the scissor-shaped mechanism is connected with upper metamorphic mechanism by revolute joints  $R_5$ ,  $R_6$  and lower metamorphic mechanism by revolute joints  $R_7$ ,  $R_8$ . The two metamorphic mechanisms and the scissor-shaped mechanism constitute the grasping sub-mechanism, which will directly contact with different-shaped objects.

In supporting mechanism, link 8 is rigidly connected with link 9 and upper metamorphic mechanism. Similarly, link 15 is rigidly connected with link 14 and lower metamorphic mechanism. Then, link 10 is connected with link 9 by revolute joint  $R_{11}$  and link 11 by prismatic joint  $P_5$ , link 11 is connected with link 12 by revolute joint  $R_{10}$  and lower metamorphic mechanism by revolute joint  $R_9$ . Finally, link 13 is connected with link 15 by prismatic joint  $P_6$  and link 12 by revolute joint  $R_{12}$ .

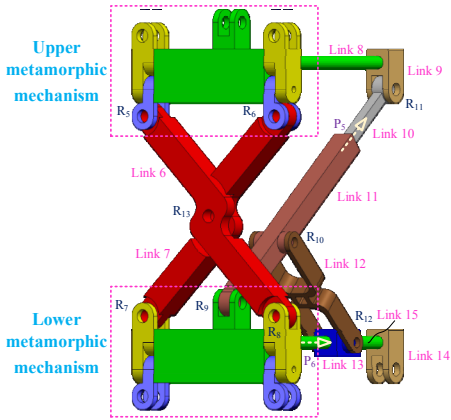


Fig. 1 Basic metamorphic mechanism module.

Metamorphic mechanism is as shown in Fig. 2, which is composed of five links. Link 1 is connected with link 3 by revolute joint  $R_1$  and link 5 by prismatic joint  $P_1$ . Similarly, link 2 is connected with link 4 by revolute joint  $R_2$  and link 5 by prismatic joint  $P_2$ . When the module performs the deployment motion, the scissor-shaped mechanism is in operation. Due to special structure designs of link 3, link 4, and link 5 are as shown in partial view A of Fig. 2, link 3 and link 5 actually form prismatic joint  $P_3$ , link 4 and link 5 form prismatic joint  $P_4$ . In such process, the upper metamorphic mechanism relate to the lower metamorphic mechanism have a translational mobility, the scissor-shaped mechanism is equivalent to prismatic joint  $P$  in the side view of module as shown in Fig. 3(a). Based on the modified Grübler–Kutzbach mobility criterion, the mobility of deployment motion can be calculated as:

$$M = d(n - g - 1) + \sum_{i=1}^g f_i + v - \xi = 3(6 - 7 - 1) + 7 + 0 + 0 = 1 \quad (1)$$

where  $d$  is the rank of the mechanism, the rank of the planar mechanism is 3;  $n$  is the number of links, which is 6 in this module;  $g$  is the number of joints, which is 7 in this module;  $f_i$  is the degree of freedom for the  $i$  joint;  $v$  is the number of redundant constraints, which is 0 in this module;  $\xi$  is the number of local mobility, which is 0 in this module.

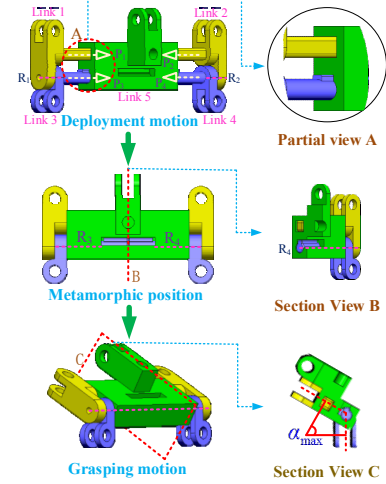


Fig. 2 Metamorphic process of the metamorphic mechanism.

When module is deployed in metamorphic position, it is obvious that physical limit is designed to ensure the module can be only deployed in this configuration as shown in section view B of Fig. 2. No doubt that the link 1, link 2, and link 5 can be rotated around the axes of  $R_1$  and  $R_2$ , such process is called grasping motion. At present, link 3 and link 5 actually form the revolute joint  $R_3$ , link 4 and link 5 actually form the revolute joint  $R_4$ . Link 5 relate link 3 and link 4 have one revolute mobility  $R$  in the side view of module as shown in Fig. 3(b).

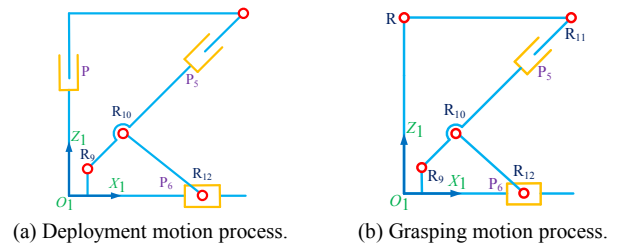


Fig. 3 Metamorphic motion of the module.

In the grasping motion process, based on the modified Grübler–Kutzbach mobility criterion, the mobility of grasping motion can be calculated as:

$$M = 3(6 - 7 - 1) + 7 = 1 \quad (2)$$

Based on the aforementioned analysis, metamorphic mechanism module has one degree of freedom in both deployment motion process and grasping motion process. So only one actuator is needed to perform two motions, which is of great significance to the lightweight of the grasper. Besides, special structure design ensures that the basic module has definite maximum grasping angle,  $\alpha_{\max}$ , as shown in section view C of Fig. 2. Such design of maximum grasping angle has important impact on the size of the module.

In addition to mobility analysis, singular analysis is also important because it determines whether the grasper can successfully complete the deployment motion and grasping motion. A coordinate frame  $\{O_1-X_1Y_1Z_1\}$  is established with  $Z_1$ -axis along the translational direction of the prismatic pair  $P$ ,  $X_1$ -axis along the translational direction of the prismatic pair  $P_6$ ,  $Y_1$ -axis is determined by the right-hand rule, as shown in Fig. 3. Then, the twist system of deployment motion in the side view of module can be given as

$$\begin{cases} \mathcal{S}_p = (0, 0, 0; 0, 0, 1) \\ \mathcal{S}_{p_5} = (0, 0, 0; d_{p_5}, 0, f_{p_5}) \\ \mathcal{S}_{p_6} = (0, 0, 0; 1, 0, 0) \\ \mathcal{S}_{R_9} = (0, 1, 0; d_{R_9}, 0, f_{R_9}) \\ \mathcal{S}_{R_{10}} = (0, 1, 0; d_{R_{10}}, 0, f_{R_{10}}) \\ \mathcal{S}_{R_{11}} = (0, 1, 0; d_{R_{11}}, 0, f_{R_{11}}) \\ \mathcal{S}_{R_{12}} = (0, 1, 0; d_{R_{12}}, 0, f_{R_{12}}) \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

Obviously, the rank of the twist system is 3 and the twist system is linear correlation, so the sum of the twist system can be given as

$$w_p \mathcal{S}_p + w_{p_5} \mathcal{S}_{p_5} + w_{p_6} \mathcal{S}_{p_6} + \sum_{i=9}^{12} w_{R_i} \mathcal{S}_{R_i} = 0 \quad (4)$$

where  $w_p$ ,  $w_{p_5}$ ,  $w_{p_6}$ ,  $w_{R_i}$  ( $i=9, \dots, 12$ ) are linear correlation coefficient.

However, because the twists,  $\mathcal{S}_{R_9}$ ,  $\mathcal{S}_{R_{10}}$ , and  $\mathcal{S}_{R_{11}}$  are always parallel and coplanar to each other in both deployment motion and grasping motion, so they are linear correlation and one conclusion can be drawn as

$$\sum_{i=9}^{12} w_{R_i} \mathcal{S}_{R_i} = 0 \quad (5)$$

Therefore, because the twists  $\mathcal{S}_{p_5}$  and  $\mathcal{S}_{p_6}$  are linear independence, we have  $w_p \neq 0$ , there is no singularity in deployment motion of the module. Similarly, in grasping motion process of the module, only twist  $\mathcal{S}_p$  is replaced by twist,  $\mathcal{S}_R = (0, 1, 0; 0, 0, f_{R_9})$ . Apparently,  $w_R \neq 0$ , so there is also no singularity in grasping motion of the module.

### B. Assembling of the Grasper

In order to complete the assembly of the grasper, first, we need to study the connection of two adjacent modules. Unlike the traditional serial graspers, which always rigidly connect two adjacent modules, the proposed grasper is assembled by mobile connections of the modules. The key problem is that these basic modules are not rigid links but movable mechanisms, so two adjacent modules must be connected without influencing their motions. In addition, another significant requirement is that each module of grasper can be deployed synchronously. Detailed connection is as shown in Fig. 4.

Connecting mechanism is made up of a metamorphic mechanism, link 8<sub>C</sub>, and link 9<sub>C</sub>. Link 8<sub>C</sub> is rigidly connected

with metamorphic mechanism and link 9<sub>C</sub>. Then, scissor-shaped mechanism of upper module is connected with connecting mechanism by revolute joint  $R_{C7}$  and  $R_{C8}$ . Link 11 of upper module is connected with connecting mechanism by revolute joint  $R_{C9}$ . Link 15 of upper module is connected with connecting mechanism by prismatic joint  $P_{C6}$ . Finally, scissor-shaped mechanism of lower module is connected with connecting mechanism by revolute joint  $R_{C5}$  and  $R_{C6}$ , link 10 of lower module is connected with connecting mechanism by revolute joint  $R_{C11}$ .

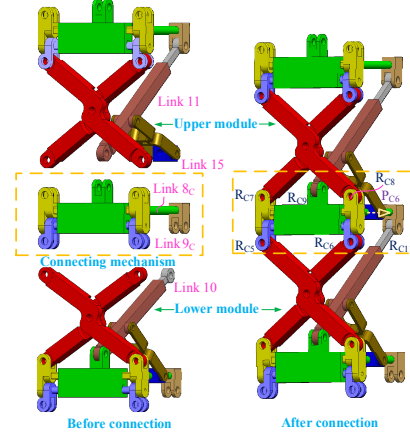


Fig. 4 Module connection.

Using this connecting method, the two adjacent modules can achieve coupled deployment mobility and independent grasping mobility.

In addition, to ensure that every module can be deployed to the middle of the grasper, a unique design is as shown in Fig. 5. Link 16 is connected with scissor-shaped mechanism of the first module by revolute joint  $R_{14}$  and base by prismatic joint  $P_7$ . In this way, a deployable robotic grasper composed of five modules could be assembled, the folded configuration and grasping configuration is as shown in Fig. 6.

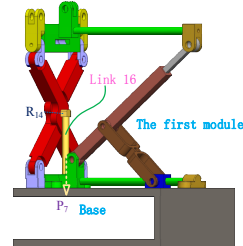
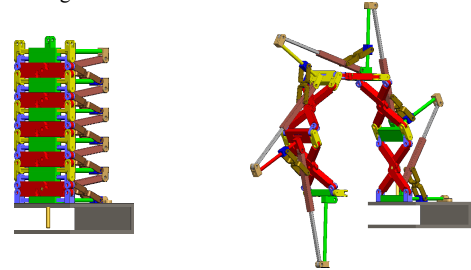


Fig. 5 Connection of base and the first module.



(a) Folded configuration. (b) Grasping configuration.  
Fig. 6 The grasper with five metamorphic modules.

## III. THE DEPLOY/FOLD RATIO ANALYSIS

For large-scale unknown objects, one of the most important problems is how to transport and store the deployable robotic grasper, so a good deploy/fold ratio is required. The method to raise the deploy/fold ratio is presented. The folded configuration and deployed configuration of the module are as shown in Fig. 7.

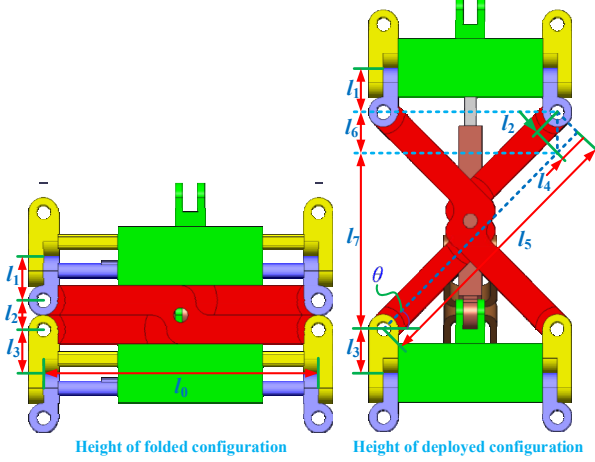


Fig. 7 Deploy/fold analyzed of the module.

The height of the folded configuration can be given as

$$H_1 = 2l_1 + l_2 + 2l_3 \quad (6)$$

where  $l_2$  is the minimum height of scissor-shaped mechanism,  $l_1$  and  $l_3$  have been given as shown in Fig. 7.

Adding a module to the grasper increases the height of the grasper by  $l_1 + l_2 + l_3$ . Thus, the minimum height of the grasper consisting of  $n$  modules is

$$H'_1 = l_1 + l_3 + n(l_1 + l_2 + l_3) \quad (7)$$

In addition, the maximum height of the module is as shown in Fig. 7. Based on geometric relations,  $l_4$ ,  $l_5$ ,  $l_6$ , and  $l_7$  can be determined by  $l_0$ ,  $l_1$ ,  $l_2$ ,  $l_3$ , and  $\theta$ , which can be summarized as

$$\begin{cases} l_5 = l_0 \\ l_4 = l_2 \tan \theta \\ l_6 = \frac{l_2}{\cos \theta} \\ l_7 = (l_5 - l_4) \sin \theta \end{cases} \quad (8)$$

where  $l_4$ ,  $l_5$ ,  $l_6$ , and  $l_7$  have been given in Fig. 7,  $\theta$  is the angle between horizontal direction and scissor-shaped mechanism.

The maximum height of the module can be given as

$$H_2 = 2l_1 + 2l_3 + l_6 + l_7 \quad (9)$$

So if the grasper is made up of  $n$  modules, the maximum height of the grasper can be given as

$$H'_2 = l_1 + l_3 + n(l_1 + l_3 + l_6 + l_7) \quad (10)$$

Substitute (8) into (10), we have

$$H'_2 = l_1 + l_3 + n \left[ l_1 + l_3 + \frac{l_2}{\cos \theta} + (l_0 - l_2 \tan \theta) \sin \theta \right] \quad (11)$$

Based on the above analysis, the deploy/fold ratio  $\rho$  can be easily obtained of the grasper with  $n$  modules as

$$\rho = \frac{l_1 + l_3 + n \left[ l_1 + l_3 + \frac{l_2}{\cos \theta} + (l_0 - l_2 \tan \theta) \sin \theta \right]}{l_1 + l_3 + n(l_1 + l_2 + l_3)} \quad (12)$$

One conclusion can be drawn that the deploy/fold ratio  $\rho$  is mainly determined by the values of  $l_0$ ,  $l_1$ ,  $l_2$ ,  $l_3$ , and  $\theta$ , in which the values of  $l_1$ ,  $l_2$ , and  $l_3$  are always determined by stiffness condition of the proposed grasper. So if stiffness condition of the grasper is determined, the values of  $l_1$ ,  $l_2$ , and  $l_3$  are also decided. Thus, it is difficult to change the deploy/fold ratio by adjusting the values of  $l_1$ ,  $l_2$ , and  $l_3$ .

However, the value of  $l_0$  determines the length of scissor-shaped mechanism and the angle  $\theta$  is the deployment angle of the scissor-shaped mechanism, which can be adjusted in design. With the increase of the angle  $\theta$  and the value of  $l_1$ , the deploy/fold ratio will increase while the stiffness of the module will decrease. In this paper, the maximum of  $\theta$  is  $45^\circ$  and the value of  $l_0$  is 95mm. The real deploy/fold ratio of the finger is  $\rho = 2.26$ , which ensures that the DRG not only can be folded into a compact configuration but also have higher grasping stiffness.

#### IV. WORKSPACE AND DEXTERITY ANALYSIS

To grasp objects with different shapes, a large reachable workspace is necessary in practice. The schematic diagram of the proposed grasper is as shown in Fig. 8. Then, a plane coordinate frame  $\{O-XY\}$  is set with  $X$ -axis towards the left of horizontal direction,  $Y$ -axis along to the up of vertical direction.

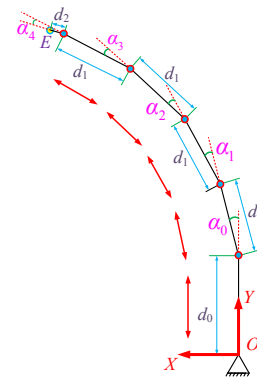


Fig. 8 Schematic diagram of the grasper.

Before the grasper carries out grasping motion, the modules are fully deployed, as shown in Fig. 9. Where the point  $A$  is the metamorphic position of module 1. Similarly, the point  $B_i$ ,  $C_i$ ,  $D_i$ , and  $E_i$  are the metamorphic positions of module 2, module 3, module 4, and module 5. The range of the grasping angle  $\alpha_i$  ( $i = 0, \dots, 4$ ) is from  $0^\circ$  to  $60^\circ$ . Assume that  $\alpha_i$  ( $i = 0, \dots, 4$ ) =  $0$ , the parameters of the arc scanned by the end-effector of the grasper are as shown in TABLE I. The workspace of the grasper is as shown in Fig. 9, which consists

of ten areas. So the workspace of the grasper can be given as

$$S = S_1 + S_2 + S_3 + S_4 + S_5 + S_6 + S_7 + S_8 + S_9 + S_{10} \quad (13)$$

It is clearly that the workspace of the grasper is quite large.

TABLE I  
THE PARAMETERS OF THE ARC

Arc	Center	Radius	Central angle
$G_1G_2$	$E_1$	$d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_1G_3$	$D_1$	$d_1+d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_1G_7$	$C_1$	$2d_1+d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_1G_{11}$	$B_1$	$3d_1+d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_1G_{16}$	$A$	$4d_1+d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_2G_4$	$D_1$	$D_1G_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_3G_4$	$E_2$	$d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_3G_6$	$C_1$	$C_1G_3$	$60^\circ$
$G_4G_5$	$C_1$	$C_1G_4$	$60^\circ$
$G_5G_6$	$E_3$	$d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_5G_8$	$B_1$	$B_1G_5$	$60^\circ$
$G_6G_7$	$D_2$	$d_1+d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_6G_9$	$B_1$	$B_1G_6$	$60^\circ$
$G_7G_{10}$	$B_1$	$B_1G_7$	$60^\circ$
$G_8G_9$	$E_4$	$d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_8G_{12}$	$A$	$AG_8$	$60^\circ$
$G_9G_{10}$	$D_3$	$d_1+d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_9G_{13}$	$A$	$AG_9$	$60^\circ$
$G_{10}G_{11}$	$C_2$	$2d_1+d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_{10}G_{14}$	$A$	$AG_{10}$	$60^\circ$
$G_{11}G_{15}$	$A$	$AG_{11}$	$60^\circ$
$G_{12}G_{13}$	$E_5$	$d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_{13}G_{14}$	$D_4$	$d_1+d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_{14}G_{15}$	$C_3$	$2d_1+d_2$	$60^\circ$
$G_{15}G_{16}$	$B_2$	$3d_1+d_2$	$60^\circ$

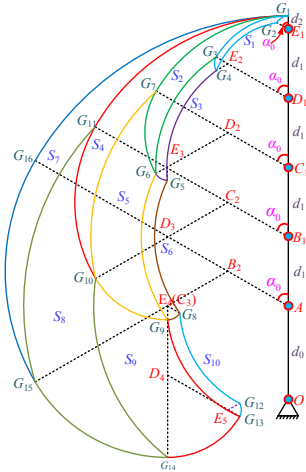


Fig. 9 Workspace of the grasper.

In addition, the dexterity of grasper is also significance because it determines the ability of the grasper position and orient the end-effector. To raise the dexterity, the approach presented in [14] is used in this paper. Such approach is to let

the grasping angles of the modules to be same. Based on this approach, we let  $\alpha_0 = \alpha_1 = \alpha_2 = \alpha_3 = \alpha_4 = \alpha$ , and assume that the range of  $d_1$  is  $40\text{mm} \leq d_1 \leq 114\text{mm}$ , then one can calculate the dexterity of the proposed grasper. As shown in Fig. 8, the position of the end-effector can be calculated by

$$\begin{cases} X_E = d_1 [\sin \alpha + \sin(2\alpha) + \sin(3\alpha) + \sin(4\alpha)] + d_2 \sin(5\alpha) \\ Y_E = d_0 + d_1 [\cos \alpha + \cos(2\alpha) + \cos(3\alpha) + \cos(4\alpha)] + d_2 \cos(5\alpha) \end{cases} \quad (14)$$

where  $E(X_E, Y_E)$  is the position of the end-effector,  $d_0$  is the distance from bottom of base to the axis of the first metamorphic position,  $d_1$  is the distance of the axis of two adjacent metamorphic positions,  $d_2$  is the distance from end-effector to the axis of the last metamorphic position.

The derivative of (14) is

$$\begin{pmatrix} \dot{X}_E \\ \dot{Y}_E \end{pmatrix} = \mathbf{J}(d_1, \alpha) \begin{pmatrix} \dot{d}_1 \\ \dot{\alpha} \end{pmatrix} \quad (15)$$

where  $\mathbf{J}(d_1, \alpha)$  represents the Jacobian matrix of the grasper, which can be calculated by

$$\mathbf{J}(d_1, \alpha) = \begin{bmatrix} \frac{\partial X_E}{\partial d_1} & \frac{\partial X_E}{\partial \alpha} \\ \frac{\partial Y_E}{\partial d_1} & \frac{\partial Y_E}{\partial \alpha} \end{bmatrix} \quad (16)$$

Now the dexterity measure  $w$  of the proposed grasper can be easily calculated as follows:

$$w = \sqrt{\det |\mathbf{J} \cdot \mathbf{J}^T|} \quad (17)$$

The dexterity measure value of the grasper is as shown in Fig. 10. One can see that the dexterity of the proposed grasper increases as the length  $d_1$  of the module increases.

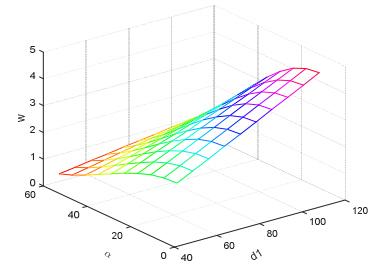


Fig. 10 The dexterity of the proposed grasper.

## V. ANALYSIS OF SHAPE ADAPTABILITY

In this section, shape adaptability and grasping simulation are conducted. Generally, grasping pattern can be mainly divided into two categories: finger-tip grasp and enveloping grasp. Finger-tip grasp has been widely used in many serial graspers, which only uses one point of link to contact with objects. The most important advantage of this grasping pattern is that it is easily to realize dexterous manipulation. Compared to finger-tip grasping pattern, enveloping pattern is suitable for large-scale unknown objects



because there exist multiple distributed contacting points. These contacting points will increase the stiffness of grasp especially for some large mass objects. As shown in Fig. 11, compared with two armed robot with simple hands, the proposed grasper has a compactly folded configuration and a large deployed configuration, a higher grasping stiffness is ensured by multiple distributed contacting points. The grasping simulation results shows that the grasper proposed has excellent grasping performances for different-shaped objects.

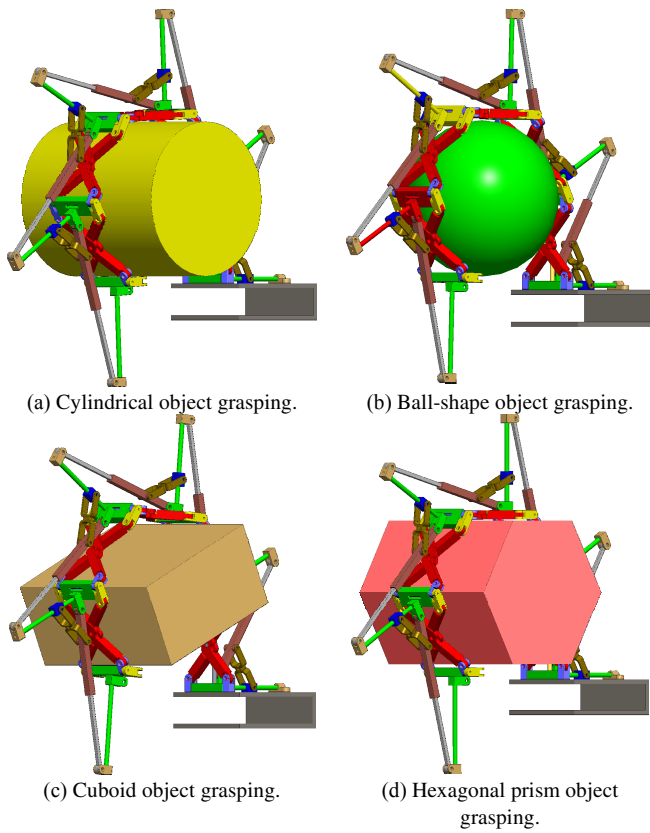


Fig. 11 Shape adaptability during the grasping motion.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The paper proposed a novel deployable robotic grasper. A detailed mechanism design is introduced and metamorphic process is illustrated. Analysis shows that only single actuator can be used to drive the module to conduct both deployment motion and grasping motion. Then, by analysing the deploy/fold ratio and its influencing factors, the methods of calculating and raising deploy/fold ratio are proposed. Kinematic analysis illustrates the proposed grasper has a large reachable workspace. Finally, shape adaptability and grasping simulation prove that the deployable robotic grasper can be used to grasp large-scale unknown objects.

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