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Simulation of the first stages of a turbofan using OpenFOAM

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1 Introduction

During the development of the course '*Application of Open-Source CFD to engineering problems*' we have learned the basics of how to use and solve real-world cases and situations related with fluid mechanics using OpenFOAM, an open source CFD tool. The first days of the course, several possible projects were presented and we had to choose one of them and make a report. After agreeing with the professor, we decided to simulate an option that was not on that list. Since we are really interested in propulsion, we thought that it was a good idea to try to simulate the flow inside the first stages of compression of a turbofan engine.

These type of engines are the most used propulsion system in the aerospace industry. It presents several advantages to other systems such as the turboprop or the turbojet; for example, this kind of engine takes advantage of the flow that goes through the fan (that cannot be more compressed or heated given that the combustion chamber has a limited volume) and comes out through the rear nozzle. This results in a higher thrust for the same amount of fuel that is burned. Thus, it is no surprise that state-of-the-art planes such as the Airbus 380 or the Boeing 747 use this kind of propulsion system.

In order to do a realistic simulation, we have been gathering lots of information of this type of engines and their typical working conditions. Also, we have been searching for information about how could we solve a geometry that is rotating. Several simulations and comparisons will be presented in this report to analyze the validity of the results obtained.

It will be presented in this report how to use the Multiple Reference Frame utility (MRF) as well as the boundary conditions, the mesh generation and the solver that has been used for the case. Additionally, several hypotheses will be considered in order to alleviate the computation time (given that this project has been simulated in a laptop).

2 Case

2.1 Description of the case

The aim of the current project is to analyze the airflow inside the first stages of a turbofan. The turbofan consists of an initial stage where a fan is placed. This first stage increases the pressure of the air that goes through it and, as it can be seen in 2.1, a part of the incoming airflow goes to the low pressure compression stage (main or primary flow) and the other goes to the conducts (secondary flow). As the secondary flow advances through the conduct, the main flow enters the engine core where it goes through the low pressure and high pressure compression stages. By increasing the pressure of the air, the density also increases; thus, a higher mass flow can be mixed with the fuel and burned in the combustion chamber. After this process, the gases go through the turbines, interchanging energy with them (pressure and velocity, mainly), and they arrive at the nozzle, where the air is accelerated, and a thrust force is obtained.

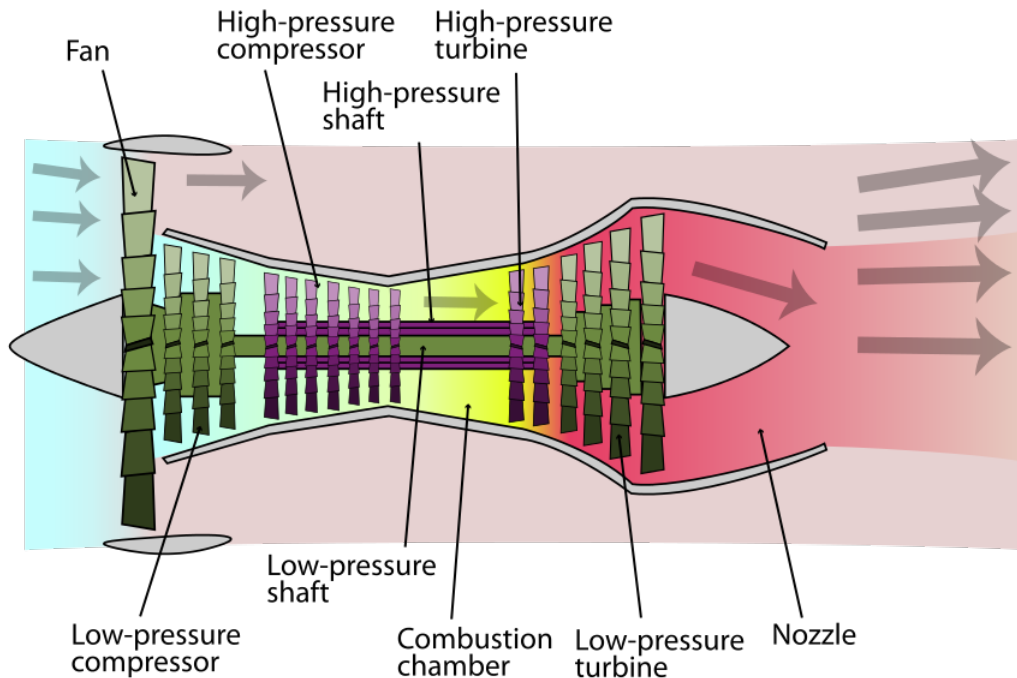


Figure 2.1: Parts of a turbofan

To simulate the flow in the first stages of the turbofan, we have downloaded the following turbine model from *GrabCad*, shown in 2.2. This model is pretty similar with the one shown above (2.1) and the simulation will take place between the back side of the fan and the back side of the second compressor. There are several realistic and potentially functional models on *GrabCad*; however, this model has been selected because it did not present incompatibilities with *SolidWorks* and *Salome*. Given that all the parts of the model have to be clearly differentiated in order to export them as *STL* files, we could not use an assembly.



Figure 2.2: Model used

2.2 Hypotheses

Given that we are not able to use a supercomputer and the computational power that is available to us is very limited since we are using our own personal computers to run this simulation, several hypotheses have to be made to alleviate the calculation time, as mentioned before. Some of them can be assumed and some other will make the case a non-realistic project. These hypotheses are presented below.

- Viscous flow
- Incompressible flow

- Newtonian flow
- Stationary flow
- Laminar flow

Clearly, the flow is not incompressible in reality; the aim of the turbofan is to compress the air to seek for a more efficient combustion. However, all of the compressible solvers are really difficult to use and the computational time is also higher given that we have a high number of control volumes (as discussed in the next section) due to a really complex geometry. Thus, although it will not be a completely real flow, we will be also able to see how the low pressure section of the engine increases the pressure of the flow and how the velocity field changes as it goes through the turbine.

The simulation will take into account that it is a tridimensional, that it behaves as a newtonian fluid and it will be run under stationary flow conditions (that is: the velocity in the inlet is always uniform and has a fixed value). With these hypothesis, we can begin to discuss the geometry of the *blockMesh* as well as the refined mesh and the boundary conditions and final results within the next sections.

3 Pre-processing

3.1 Mesh generation

3.1.1 Selection of the tutorial

The first thing that needs to be done is the selection of the tutorial that will work as a base to run the simulation of the case. Among all the tutorials that can be found on the *OpenFOAM* folder, we have selected the **FALTA!** for several reasons.

3.1.2 blockMesh

The definition of the *blockMeshDict* is the first part that needs to be modified. The *blockMesh* must contain the geometry that has to be simulated and we must have an idea of the vertex of the parallelogram that will contain the first stages of the turbofan. In order to do that, the geometry has to be opened using either *Salome* or *Paraview*. Then the axes must be showed and write the points down on the *blockMesh* file. This modification is presented below.

```
vertices
(
    (0.77 0 0)
    (1.35 0 0)
    (1.35 2.3 0)
    (0.77 2.3 0)
    (0.77 0 2.3)
    (1.35 0 2.3)
    (1.35 2.3 2.3)
    (0.77 2.3 2.3)
);
```

It can be clearly seen that the domain of the mesh is a 0.58x2.3x2.3m rectangular prism.

Once the boundaries of the *blockMesh* are defined, the number of cells that it will have has to be set. It has to be taken into account that a very dense

mesh will not be efficient when simulating the case given that we will use the *snappyHexMesh* later and it will be over densified. On the other hand, a very coarse mesh will not be efficient either because additional divisions will have to be set when generating the refined mesh and the computational time might grow. Thus, a solution between a mesh with a very high number of cells and a very low number of cells has to be attained.

This basic mesh has been divided every $0.05m$. It means that we have done 12 divisions in the x direction, 46 on the y direction and 46 more on the z direction.

```
blocks
(
    hex (0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7) (12 46 46) simpleGrading (1 1 1)
);
```

Finally, the different faces of the mesh must be defined depending on if they are the inlet and outlet faces or the lateral faces. To do this, the vertices are numbered according to their appearance in the *blockMeshDict* and the faces are defined by those numbers. Since, the vertex numeration has been kept the same as the one that comes as default in every tutorial case; it is easier to define the inlet face of the *blockMesh* as well as the outlet face that will be used to define the boundary conditions.

```
boundary
(
    frontAndBack
    {
        type patch;
        faces
        (
            (3 7 6 2)
            (1 5 4 0)
            (0 3 2 1)
            (4 5 6 7)
        );
    }
    inlet
```



```

{
    type patch;
    faces
    (
        (0 4 7 3)
    );
}
outlet
{
    type patch;
    faces
    (
        (2 6 5 1)
    );
}
);

```

The *blockMesh* file is presented below. This is the final file that has been used to generate the *blockMesh* and it is included in the *.zip* file attached to this report. Only the parameters mentioned above have been modified; the rest is equal to the tutorial case that has been selected.

```

/*-----*- C++ -*-----*\
| ===== |
| \\      / F ield      | OpenFOAM: The Open Source CFD Toolbox |
| \\      / O peration  | Version: 4.0 |
|  \\    / A nd         | Web:      www.OpenFOAM.org |
|   \\/    M anipulation | |
\*-----*-*/
FoamFile
{
    version      2.0;
    format       ascii;
    class        dictionary;
    object       blockMeshDict;
}

// * * * * *

```

```

convertToMeters 1;

vertices
(
    (0.77 0 0)
    (1.35 0 0)
    (1.35 2.3 0)
    (0.77 2.3 0)
    (0.77 0 2.3)
    (1.35 0 2.3)
    (1.35 2.3 2.3)
    (0.77 2.3 2.3)
);

blocks
(
    hex (0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7) (12 46 46) simpleGrading (1 1 1)
);

edges
(
);

boundary
(
    frontAndBack
    {
        type patch;
        faces
        (
            (3 7 6 2)
            (1 5 4 0)
            (0 3 2 1)
            (4 5 6 7)
        );
    }
    inlet
    {
        type patch;
        faces
        (

```

```

        (0 4 7 3)
    );
}
outlet
{
    type patch;
    faces
    (
        (2 6 5 1)
    );
}
);

// ***** //

```

The log obtained when the *blocMesh* has been generated is presented below. As it can be seen, no errors were found during the computation of this basic mesh. We can see that the number of cells is relatively high (**POSAR N. CELLS**) but perfectly suitable to proceed with the refinement of the mesh. Additionally, a caption of the basic mesh is presented in 3.1.

```
Writing polyMesh
-----
Mesh Information
-----
boundingBox:  (0.77 0 0) (1.35 2.3 2.3)
nPoints:  28717
nCells:  25392
nFaces:  79396
nInternalFaces:  72956
-----
Patches
-----
patch 0 (start:  72956 size:  2208) name:  frontAndBack
patch 1 (start:  75164 size:  2116) name:  inlet
patch 2 (start:  77280 size:  2116) name:  outlet

End
```

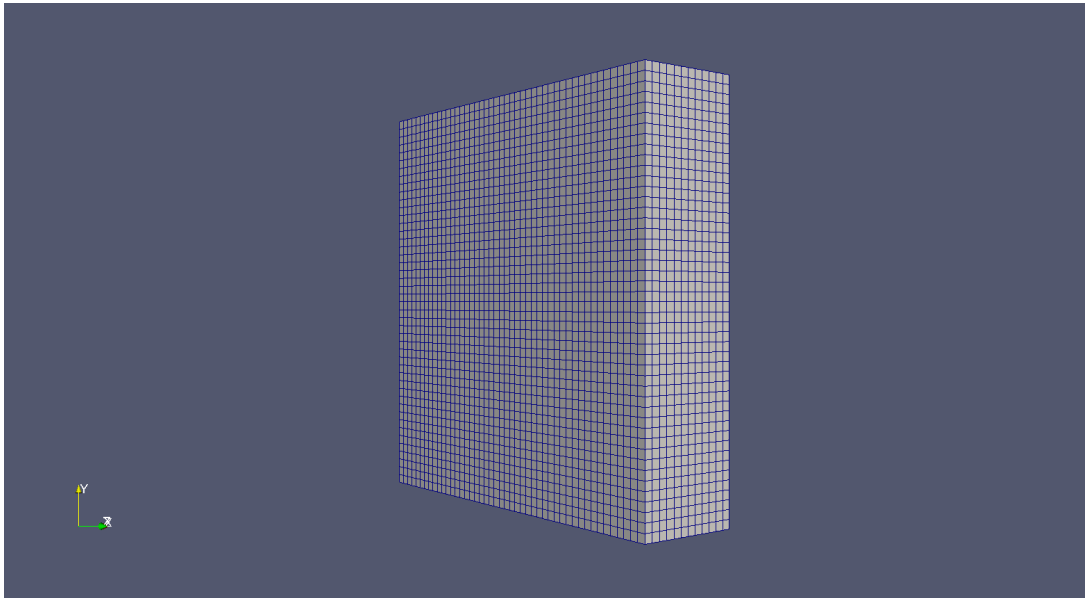


Figure 3.1: blockMeshcaption

3.1.3 Mesh refinement

To refine the mesh, the *snappyHexMesh* utility is used (included in *OpenFOAM*) and several parameters have to be modified in order to obtain a dense mesh that is suitable for the simulation of this complex geometry. It has to be considered that a particular geometry has a relative velocity as well; this is, the rotor is rotating, and so the first and second stages of the Low Pressure Compression of the turbofan engine, while the nacelle and the combustor are static.

In the *snappyHexMeshDict* several parameters have to be modified. First, the *snappyHexMesh* must be aware of the geometries that it has to take into account. As it can be seen below, the files *Fan.stl*, *HPSpool.stl*, *LPSpool.stl* and *NacelleStator.stl* have been included here.

```
geometry
{
    box1x1x1
    {
        type searchableBox;
        min (1.5 1 -0.5);
        max (3.5 2 0.5);
    }

    Fan.stl
    {
        type triSurfaceMesh;
        regions
        {
        }
    }
    HPSpool.stl
    {
        type triSurfaceMesh;
        regions
        {
        }
    }
    LPSpool.stl
```

```

{
    type triSurfaceMesh;
    regions
    {
    }
}
NacelleStator.stl
{
    type triSurfaceMesh;
    regions
    {
    }
}
};

```

Next, the number of control volumes has to be limited to ensure that the laptop is capable of running a simulation. This number has been limited to two million cells, which is a pretty high number and the following lines have to be modified.

```

// Overall cell limit (approximately). Refinement will stop immediately
// upon reaching this number so a refinement level might not complete.
// Note that this is the number of cells before removing the part which
// is not 'visible' from the keepPoint. The final number of cells might
// actually be a lot less.
maxGlobalCells 2000000;

```

The next step is to define the refinement required of the mesh for the different geometries that will be simulated. It can be clearly seen in this section that we have included the same *STL* files that we did before. The higher the level of the refinement, the denser the mesh will be and the better it will resemble to the real geometry. But the limitation here is the computational power so, the maximum refinement number cannot be as high as we would like to. Thus, depending on the complexity of the geometry, several minimum (the first number) and maximum (the second number) refinement levels have been defined.

```

// Surface based refinement

```

```

// ~~~~~

// Specifies two levels for every surface. The first is the minimum level,
// every cell intersecting a surface gets refined up to the minimum level.
// The second level is the maximum level. Cells that 'see' multiple
// intersections where the intersections make an
// angle > resolveFeatureAngle get refined up to the maximum level.

refinementSurfaces
{
    Fan.stl
    {
        // Surface-wise min and max refinement level
        level (3 5);

        // Optional region-wise level specification
        regions
        {
        }
        patchInfo
        {
            type patch;
            inGroups (meshedPatches);
        }
    }

    HPSpool.stl
    {
        // Surface-wise min and max refinement level
        level (3 5);

        // Optional region-wise level specification
        regions
        {
        }
        patchInfo
        {
            type patch;
            inGroups (meshedPatches);
        }
    }

    LPSpool.stl

```

```

    {
        // Surface-wise min and max refinement level
        level (6 8);
cellZone rotor; cellZoneInside inside;

        // Optional region-wise level specification
regions
    {
    }
patchInfo
    {
        type patch;
        inGroups (meshedPatches);
    }
}

NacelleStator.stl
{
    // Surface-wise min and max refinement level
    level (4 6);

    // Optional region-wise level specification
regions
    {
    }
patchInfo
    {
        type patch;
        inGroups (meshedPatches);
    }
}
}

```

The next step is to select a point within the mesh. So, the *locationInMesh* has to be modified with the x, y, and z-coordinates of a point with that feature.

```

// After refinement patches get added for all refinementSurfaces and
// all cells intersecting the surfaces get put into these patches. The
// section reachable from the locationInMesh is kept.
// NOTE: This point should never be on a face, always inside a cell, even

```



```
// after refinement.
locationInMesh (.97443222 1.40534444343 1.24221211);
```

Finally, the *surfaceFeatureExtract* has been used. What this option does it to refine even more the mesh near the points that have complex geometries such as the edges of the blades. This is particularly useful for the turbofan given that it has a high number of blades and a twisting geometry that will resemble more to the reality when using this option. Thus, the following lines within the *snappyHexMeshDict* must be modified.

```
// Explicit feature edge refinement
// ~~~~~

// Specifies a level for any cell intersected by explicitly provided
// edges.
// This is a featureEdgeMesh, read from constant/triSurface for now.
// Specify 'levels' in the same way as the 'distance' mode in the
// refinementRegions (see below). The old specification
//      level 2;
// is equivalent to
//      levels ((0 2));

features
(
    {
        file "NacelleStator.eMesh";
        level 5;
        //      levels ((0.0 2) (1.0 3));
    }
    {
        file "LPSPool.eMesh";
        level 7;
        //      levels ((0.0 2) (1.0 3));
    }
);
```

All of the other parameters of the *snappyHexMeshDict* have not been modified.

3.2 Boundary conditions

The known initial values of the the pressure and the velocity have to be defined in the program to carry out the simulation.

We consider that the velocity at the output of the mesh, in the direction X , is $30m/s$. To change this parameter, we have to modify the file **0.orig/U**.

```
/*-----*- C++ -*-----*\
| =====|
| \\ / F i e l d | OpenFOAM: The Open Source CFD Toolbox |
| \\ / O p e r a t i o n | Version: 4.0 |
| \\ / A n d | Web: www.OpenFOAM.org |
| \\ / M a n i p u l a t i o n |
\*-----*/
FoamFile
{
    version      2.0;
    format       ascii;
    class        volVectorField;
    object       U;
}
// * * * * *

dimensions      [0 1 -1 0 0 0 0];

internalField    uniform (0 0 0);

boundaryField
{
    LPSPool.stl
    {
        type      noSlip;
    }

    NacelleStator.stl
    {
        type      noSlip;
    }
}
```

```

    inlet
    {
        type            fixedValue;
value uniform (30 0 0);
    }

    outlet
    {
        type            zeroGradient;
    }
}

// ***** //

```

Another consideration is that the pressure at the inlet of the mesh is XXXX. To change this parameter, we have to modify the file **0.orig/p**.

```

/*-----* C++ *-----*\
| ===== |
| \\      / F i e l d      | OpenFOAM: The Open Source CFD Toolbox |
| \\      / O p e r a t i o n | Version: 4.0 |
|  \\    / A n d      | Web:      www.OpenFOAM.org |
|   \\/    M a n i p u l a t i o n |
\*-----*/
FoamFile
{
    version      2.0;
    format       ascii;
    class        volScalarField;
    object       p;
}
// ***** //

dimensions      [0 2 -2 0 0 0 0];

internalField    uniform 0;

boundaryField
{
    LPSPool.stl

```

```

{
    type            zeroGradient;
}

NacelleStator.stl
{
    type            zeroGradient;
}

inlet
{
    type            fixedValue;
    value           uniform 0;
}

outlet
{
    type            zeroGradient;
}
}

// ***** //

```

3.3 Properties

The properties of the flow have to be defined as explained in the hypothesis section. The *transportModel* is Newtonian and the kinematic viscosity ν is $1.5e - 05 m^2/s$.

To change all these parameters, we have to modify the file **constant/transportProperties**.

```

/*-----*- C++ -*-----*\
| ===== |
| \ \      / F i e l d      | OpenFOAM: The Open Source CFD Toolbox |
| \ \      / O p e r a t i o n | Version: 4.0 |
| \ \      / A n d      | Web: www.OpenFOAM.org |
| \ \ /      M a n i p u l a t i o n |
\*-----*/

```

```

FoamFile
{
    version      2.0;
    format       ascii;
    class        dictionary;
    object       transportProperties;
}
// * * * * *

transportModel  Newtonian;

nu              [0 2 -1 0 0 0] 1.5e-05;

// *****

```

Another hypothesis made have been that the flow of the simulation is laminar. To impose this hypothesis *simulationType* is laminar.

To change all these parameters, we have to modify the file **constant/turbulenceProperties**.

```

/*-----*-- C++ -*-----*\
| ===== |
| \\      / F ield      | OpenFOAM: The Open Source CFD Toolbox |
| \\      / O peration  | Version: 4.0 |
|  \\    /  A nd        | Web:      www.OpenFOAM.org |
|   \\/    M anipulation |
\*-----*/
FoamFile
{
    version      2.0;
    format       ascii;
    class        dictionary;
    object       turbulenceProperties;
}
// * * * * *

simulationType laminar;

RAS

```

```

{
    RASModel          kOmegaSST;

    turbulence        on;

    printCoeffs       on;
}

// *****

```

3.4 Rotation

How we have explained before, the project is based in the study of a flow inside the first stages of compression of a turbofan engine. Therefore, an important consideration is that the rotor is spinning at high speed. To impose this condition we must work with the Multiple Frame Reference (MRF) method. This method is based on adding source to momentum equation.

We will work with the **constant/MRFProperties** file and we must change the appropriate parameters. This method is based on the right hand rule, therefore the *axis* of rotation is (1,0,0). We consider that the rotor rotates at 5000 rpm, which is a common value for turbofan engines in flight conditions. It should be noted that the units used must be those of the International System, so we must convert 5000 rpm to *rad/s*. Furthermore, we must indicate the origin point in the axis of rotation, in our case it is (0 1.1675354 1.15542633). Finally, in section `nonRotatingPatches` we write list of patches that they are not rotating, in our case we only have the `NacelleStator`.

```

/*-----*- C++ -*-----*\
| ===== |
| \\      / F i e l d | OpenFOAM: The Open Source CFD Toolbox |
| \\      / O p e r a t i o n | Version: 4.0 |
|  \\    / A n d | Web: www.OpenFOAM.org |
|   \\ / M a n i p u l a t i o n |
\*-----*-*/
FoamFile

```

```

{
    version      2.0;
    format       ascii;
    class        dictionary;
    location     "constant";
    object       MRFPProperties;
}
// * * * * *

MRF1
{
    cellZone     rotor;
    active       yes;

    // Fixed patches (by default they 'move' with the MRF zone)
    nonRotatingPatches (
NacelleStator.stl
    );

    origin       (0 1.1675354 1.15542633);
    axis         (1 0 0);
    omega        523.5987756;
}

// *****

```

3.5 Control

First of all, the initial and final times of the simulation have to be defined. In our case, the *startTime* is 0 s and the *endTime* is 20 s. After this, the time step for the simulation has to be defined. We are interested in simulating each second of the simulation but we want that the program provides us the simulation data every 5 seconds, therefore the *deltaT* is 1 s and the *writeInterval* is 5 s.

To change all these parameters, we have to modify the file `system/controlDict`.

```

/*-----*- C++ -*-----*\

```

```

| ===== |
| \\      / F ield      | OpenFOAM: The Open Source CFD Toolbox |
| \\      / O peration  | Version: 4.0 |
| \\      / A nd        | Web:      www.OpenFOAM.org |
| \\      / M anipulation | |
| \\      / | |
\*-----*/
FoamFile
{
    version      2.0;
    format       ascii;
    class        dictionary;
    object       controlDict;
}
// * * * * *

application     simpleFoam;

startFrom       latestTime;

startTime       0;

stopAt          endTime;

endTime         20;

deltaT          1;

writeControl     timeStep;

writeInterval    5;

purgeWrite       0;

writeFormat      binary;

writePrecision   6;

writeCompression uncompressed;

timeFormat       general;

```



```

timePrecision    6;

runTimeModifiable true;

/*functions
{
    #include "streamLines"
    #include "wallBoundedStreamLines"
    #include "cuttingPlane"
    #include "forceCoeffs"
}

*/
// ***** //
```

4 The problem

EMPTY

5 Simulation

EMPTY