

# Magnetorotational instability

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Efficient transport of angular momentum in accretion disks has been an important topic in astrophysics research for several decades. Magnetorotational instability (MRI) has been shown to be the most probable mechanism for efficiently transporting angular momentum. In this review we provide an overview of the theoretical analysis of magnetohydrodynamics that gives rise to MRI. We also survey the current body of research on MRI, including attempts to generate the instability experimentally and numerically.

## 1. Introduction

Turbulence generating magnetorotational instability (MRI) was first discovered by Velikhov (1959) and Chandrasekhar (1960), and was later re-discovered by Balbus & Hawley (1998) for astrophysical applications. MRI has since then been confirmed by robust numerical simulations, but to date has not been verified experimentally or through observations. To understand the importance of MRI, we have to look into the accretion disk theory where many astrophysical phenomena take place in.

Accretion disks are disk made up of gas, dust, and plasma that rotates around and gradually collapses onto an object in the center, e.g., leading to the formation of a star (see Figure 1 for a visualization). However, accretion can happen only with an efficient mechanism for rapidly transporting angular momentum outwards (Julien & Knobloch 2010). It was suggested that turbulence drives angular momentum outwards but there was no known mechanism that would generate turbulence.

These Keplerian disks satisfies the Rayleigh stability criterion (see Rayleigh 1916) against centrifugal instability. Thus, there has to be other mechanisms that generates turbulence. Many instabilities such as barotropic (Dubrull *et al.* 2005) and finite amplitude shear instabilities (Dubrulle *et al.* 2005; Lesur & Longaretti 2005) have been suggested but none of them are sufficient for the angular momentum transport outward required (Ji *et al.* 2006). Magnetic field-induced instabilities MRI seem to be the most promising.

MRI is a linear instability that is triggered by weak poloidal magnetic field. It is axisymmetric and occurs in Rayleigh-stable regime where the angular velocity decreases outwards, which is the case for the accretion we are interested in. The efficiency of angular momentum transport depends on the saturation of MRI (Balbus & Hawley 1991, 1998).

MRI is not only applicable to astrophysical phenomena but geophysical ones as well, e.g., the Earth's magnetic field (Petitdemange *et al.* 2008). It is used to better understand how planetary magnetic field might have formed on Earth or other planets and how the field is sustained or decayed through time.

In this report, we attempt to explain and illustrate the instability in an astrophysical sense and go through what has been done experimentally and numerically in terms of MRI.

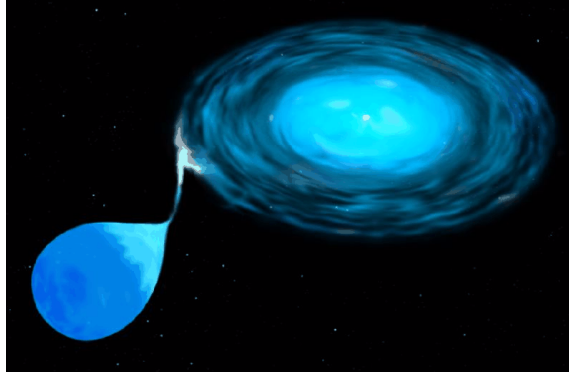


FIGURE 1. Artist's illustration of an accretion disk in a binary system. Taken from <http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/ap991219.html>.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Perfectly conducting fluid in magnetic field

The magnetic field lines are tied to the conducting fluid in which they are embedded. We can show this by comparing a transport equation of magnetic field with a equation for a line element moving with fluid. We first combine Ohm's Law in ideal conductor and Faraday's equation to get a transport equation for magnetic field,

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{\partial \mathbf{B}}{\partial t} &= \nabla \times (\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{B}) \\ &= \mathbf{B} \cdot \nabla \mathbf{u} - \mathbf{u} \cdot \nabla \mathbf{B} - \mathbf{B} \nabla \cdot \mathbf{u}.\end{aligned}\tag{2.1}$$

Assuming incompressibility, we get

$$\frac{D\mathbf{B}}{Dt} = (\mathbf{B} \cdot \nabla) \mathbf{u},\tag{2.2}$$

where  $\frac{D}{Dt}$  is the convective derivative defined as

$$\frac{D}{Dt} = \frac{\partial}{\partial t} + (\mathbf{u} \cdot \nabla).\tag{2.3}$$

Considering a short line element  $d\mathbf{l}$  moving with fluid, we can express the rate of change of  $d\mathbf{l}$  as

$$\frac{D}{Dt}(d\mathbf{l}) = \mathbf{u}(\mathbf{x} + d\mathbf{l}) - \mathbf{u}(\mathbf{x}) = (d\mathbf{l} \cdot \nabla) \mathbf{u}.\tag{2.4}$$

Comparing Equations 2.2 and 2.4 above, we can conclude that  $\mathbf{B}$  and  $d\mathbf{l}$  obey the same equation (Davidson 2001). Therefore, the field lines are frozen into the fluid.

### 2.2. Magnetic tension

When the fluid elements are displaced from their equilibrium position, the magnetic field lines move together with fluid elements and behave like elastic bands frozen-into the fluid. Using Ampere's law, the Lorenz force ( $\mathbf{J} \times \mathbf{B}$ ) may be written as

$$\mathbf{J} \times \mathbf{B} = -\nabla \left( \frac{B^2}{2\mu} \right) + \frac{(\mathbf{B} \cdot \nabla) \mathbf{B}}{\mu} = -\nabla \left( \frac{B^2}{2\mu} \right) + \frac{\partial}{\partial s} \left[ \frac{B^2}{2\mu} \right] \hat{e}_t - \frac{B^2}{\mu R} \hat{e}_n,\tag{2.5}$$

where  $R$  is radius of curvature,  $s$  is a coordinate along a magnetic field line, and  $\hat{e}_t$  and  $\hat{e}_n$  are tangential and normal unit vectors respectively. The last two terms are magnetic tension forces in tangential and normal directions. These forces can also be interpreted as tensile stress of  $B^2/2\mu$  acting on the end of the tube (Davidson 2001).

This tensile force which is also known as Faraday or Maxwell tension is analogous to a force acting on a spring. Considering a displacement  $\boldsymbol{\xi} = \mathbf{v}\delta t$ , the Faraday's equation can be written as  $\delta\mathbf{B} = ikB\boldsymbol{\xi}$ . The magnetic tension for small displacement per unit density  $\rho$  is

$$\frac{(\mathbf{B} \cdot \nabla)\delta\mathbf{B}}{\mu\rho} = \frac{ikB\delta\mathbf{B}}{\mu\rho} = -\frac{k^2B^2}{\mu\rho}\boldsymbol{\xi} = -K\boldsymbol{\xi}, \quad (2.6)$$

where  $K$  is comparable to the spring constant (Balbus & Hawley 1998). The equation has same form of Hooke's Law for a spring.

### 2.3. Magnetorotational instability

We present a relatively simple physical explanation of the magnetorotational instability from Balbus (2011). Consider Keplerian motion of conducting fluid orbiting around a central body of mass  $M_c$ . Two adjacent fluid elements  $m_i$  and  $m_o$ , at radial position  $r_i$  and  $r_o$ , are orbiting around gravitational center with angular velocities  $\Omega_i = \sqrt{GM_c/r_i^3}$  and  $\Omega_o = \sqrt{GM_c/r_o^3}$  respectively. Therefore the angular velocity of the inner element is higher than that of the outer element ( $d\Omega^2/dr < 0$ ), but the angular momentum of the inner element is smaller than that of the outer element ( $dr^4\Omega^2/dr > 0$ ).

If a magnetic field line connects the conducting fluid elements, the magnetic field will move along with the two elements. Because of the velocity shear in Keplerian motion, the magnetic field will be stretched and bent. Therefore the magnetic field will exert a restoring force on the fluid element, pulling back the inner element and dragging the outer element forward. The inner element loses angular momentum, therefore falling to an orbit of smaller radius. On the other hand the outer element gains angular momentum and moves to an orbit of larger radius (Balbus 2011). This outward angular momentum transport makes the small initial displacement larger. The magnetic fields are further stretched, resulting in positive feedback and making the system unstable. This instability is known as a magnetorotational instability (MRI) and is illustrated in Figure 2.

One can show that the dispersion relation for the incompressible ideal flow rotating with angular velocity  $\Omega_0$  is

$$\omega^4 - [2(k^2V_A^2) + \kappa^2]\omega^2 + (k^2V_A^2)\left[(k^2V_A^2) + r\frac{d\Omega^2}{dr}\right] = 0, \quad (2.7)$$

where  $\omega$  and  $k$  are angular frequency and wave number of a perturbation  $\xi \propto e^{i(kz+\omega t)}$ ,  $V_A = B/\sqrt{\mu\rho}$  is Alfvén speed for the imposed magnetic field  $B$ , and  $\kappa^2$  is the epicyclic frequency, defined as

$$\kappa^2 = 4\Omega_0^2 + r\frac{d\Omega^2}{dr}. \quad (2.8)$$

See Balbus & Hawley (1991, 1998); Balbus (2003) for more details. If  $d\Omega^2/dr < 0$ , then one of  $\omega^2$  has negative root for long wave length modes satisfying

$$k^2 < -\frac{r}{V_A^2}\frac{d\Omega^2}{dr}. \quad (2.9)$$

Therefore, the instability criterion for the magnetorotational instability (MRI) is represented as

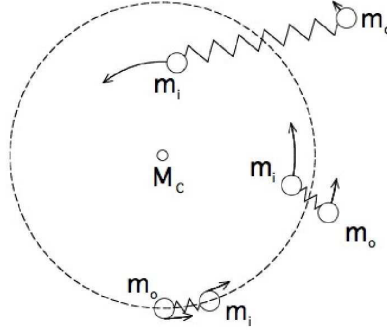


FIGURE 2. A schematic diagram from Balbus (2011) showing magnetorotational instability. Two fluid elements  $m_i$  (inner) and  $m_o$  (outer) orbit a mass ( $M_C$ ) with the magnetic tension between the two elements represented by a spring. Over time  $m_i$  loses angular momentum, moving closer to  $M_C$  while  $m_o$  gains angular momentum and moves away from  $M_C$ .

radially decreasing angular velocity,

$$\frac{d\Omega^2}{dr} < 0. \quad (\text{UNSTABLE}) \quad (2.10)$$

Note that the MRI is different from the conventional hydrodynamic instability known as Taylor-Couette centrifugal instability. The Taylor-Couette centrifugal instability criterion for axisymmetric perturbation is represented as radially decreasing angular momentum (Charru & de Forcrand-Millard 2011):

$$\frac{dr^4\Omega^2}{dr} < 0. \quad (\text{UNSTABLE}) \quad (2.11)$$

67 The Keplerian disk is a good example of flows which are stable to the hydrodynamic instability  
68 but unstable to the MRI.

### 69 3. Theoretical analysis

70 Acheson & Hide (1973) and Knobloch (1992) showed the linear stability analysis of rotating  
71 magneto-fluid bounded in coaxial cylinder. The case of gaseous astrophysical disks in unbounded  
72 geometry was shown in Balbus & Hawley (1991). The condition for stability was shown to have a  
73 radially increasing angular velocity profile. We present a linear stability analysis of MRI for radially  
74 bounded case following Acheson (1972), Acheson (1973), Knobloch (1992), and Julien & Knobloch  
75 (2010).

#### 76 3.1. Governing equation

The wave dispersion equation of a cylindrical magneto-fluid can be obtained from the magnetohydrodynamic (MHD) equations. Assuming the fluid is inviscid and perfectly conducting, the ideal

MHD equations are

$$\rho \left( \frac{\partial \mathbf{u}}{\partial t} + \mathbf{u} \cdot \nabla \mathbf{u} \right) = -\nabla p + \mathbf{J} \times \mathbf{B}, \quad (3.1)$$

$$\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot (\rho \mathbf{u}) = 0, \quad (3.2)$$

$$\frac{d}{dt} \left( \frac{p}{\rho^\gamma} \right) = 0, \quad (3.3)$$

$$\mathbf{E} + \mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{B} = 0, \quad (3.4)$$

$$\nabla \times \mathbf{E} = -\frac{\partial \mathbf{B}}{\partial t}, \quad (3.5)$$

$$\nabla \times \mathbf{B} = \mu \mathbf{J}, \quad (3.6)$$

77 where  $\mathbf{u}$  fluid velocity,  $\rho$  is fluid density,  $p$  is pressure.  $d/dt = \partial/\partial t + \mathbf{u} \cdot \nabla$  is convective derivative  
 78 and  $\gamma$  is the ratio of specific heats.  $\mathbf{E}$ ,  $\mathbf{B}$  and  $\mathbf{J}$  are electric field, magnetic field and current density  
 79 respectively (Freidberg 1987).

To investigate the magnetorotational instability, one can consider homogeneous incompressible fluid rotating with angular velocity  $\Omega(r) = V(r)/r$  in externally imposed magnetic fields  $\mathbf{B}_0 = [0, B_\phi(r), B_z(r)]$ . Combining electromagnetic equations with momentum relation, we get the appropriate MHD equations,

$$\frac{\partial \mathbf{u}}{\partial t} + (\mathbf{u} \cdot \nabla) \mathbf{u} = -\frac{1}{\rho} \nabla \left( P + \frac{\mathbf{B}^2}{2\mu} \right) + \frac{1}{\mu\rho} (\mathbf{B} \cdot \nabla) \mathbf{B}, \quad (3.7)$$

$$\frac{\partial \mathbf{B}}{\partial t} + (\mathbf{u} \cdot \nabla) \mathbf{B} = (\mathbf{B} \cdot \nabla) \mathbf{u}, \quad (3.8)$$

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{u} = 0, \quad (3.9)$$

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{B} = 0. \quad (3.10)$$

### 3.2. Linear perturbation equation and eigenvalue problem

We can get linearized equations by perturbing the basic state by small amount of  $\mathbf{u}_1$  and  $\mathbf{b}_1$  for velocity and magnetic fields. The linear perturbation is assumed to have the form

$$f = \Re \left[ \hat{f}(r) e^{i(m\phi + kz + \omega t)} \right]. \quad (3.11)$$

According to Acheson (1972), the normal mode equations are

$$\hat{b}_r = \frac{\hat{u}_r}{\omega} \left( k B_z + \frac{m B_\phi}{r} \right), \quad (3.12)$$

$$\hat{b}_\phi = -\frac{(\hat{u}_r B_\phi)'}{i\omega} + \frac{k}{\omega} (\hat{u}_\phi B_z - \hat{u}_z B_\phi), \quad (3.13)$$

$$\hat{b}_z = -\frac{(r \hat{u}_r B_z)'}{r i \omega} - \frac{m (\hat{u}_\phi B_z - \hat{u}_z B_\phi)}{r \omega}, \quad (3.14)$$

$$\hat{u}_z = -\frac{(r \hat{u}_r)'}{r i k} - \frac{m \hat{u}_\phi}{r k}, \quad (3.15)$$

$$\left( 1 + \frac{m^2}{r^2 k^2} \right) r i \hat{u}_\phi = -\frac{m}{r k^2} (r \hat{u}_r)' - \frac{\hat{u}_r}{\left( V_{Az} + \frac{m V_{A\phi}}{r k} \right)^2 \frac{k^2}{\omega^2} - 1} \left\{ -\frac{2\Omega r}{\omega} + \frac{2k V_{A\phi}}{\omega^2} \left( V_{Az} + \frac{m V_{A\phi}}{r k} \right) \right\}, \quad (3.16)$$

where  $V_{A\phi} = B_\phi(r)/\sqrt{\mu\rho}$  and  $V_{Az} = B_z(r)/\sqrt{\mu\rho}$  are Alfvén speeds for associated external magnetic field components.

Solving the normal mode equation set for radial velocity perturbation  $\hat{u}_r = u$  and considering axisymmetric perturbation ( $m = 0$ ), Acheson (1973) obtained following eigenvalue problem,

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{d}{dr} \left[ (\omega^2 - k^2 V_{Az}^2) \left( \frac{du}{dr} + \frac{u}{r} \right) \right] - k^2 \left[ \omega^2 - k^2 V_{Az}^2 + r \frac{d}{dr} \left( \frac{V_{A\phi}^2}{r^2} - \frac{V^2}{r^2} \right) \right] u \\ = -\frac{4k^2}{r^2} \frac{(k V_{A\phi} V_{Az} + \omega V)^2}{(\omega^2 - k^2 V_{Az}^2)} u. \end{aligned} \quad (3.17)$$

### 3.3. Stability criterion

#### 3.3.1. Standard magnetorotational instability

Consider a standard MRI of radially bounded coaxial fluid cylinder with externally imposed axial magnetic field but without axial current flowing. Therefore, we have  $V_{Az} = \text{constant} \neq 0$  and  $V_{A\phi} = 0$ . Considering boundary condition  $u(r_1) = u(r_2) = 0$ , we multiply the eigenvalue equation by complex conjugate of  $u$  and integrate over radial coordinate,

$$(\omega^2 - k^2 V_{Az}^2)^2 = \frac{k^2}{D} \int_{r_1}^{r_2} \left[ \frac{\omega^2}{r^2} \frac{d}{dr} r^2 V^2 - r^2 k^2 V_{Az}^2 \frac{d}{dr} \left( \frac{V^2}{r^2} \right) \right] |u|^2 dr, \quad (3.18)$$

where

$$D \equiv \int_{r_1}^{r_2} \left( r \left| \frac{du}{dr} \right|^2 + \frac{|u|^2}{r} + k^2 r |u|^2 \right) dr > 0. \quad (3.19)$$

According to Chandrasekhar (1960),  $\omega^2$  must be real. We get stable modes with  $\omega^2 > 0$  and unstable modes with  $\omega^2 < 0$ . If the angular velocity increases radially outward,  $\frac{d}{dr} \left( \frac{V^2}{r^2} \right) > 0$ , the system is stable because  $\omega^2$  is bounded from below by positive number,

$$\omega^2 > \frac{r^2 k^2 V_{Az}^2 \frac{d}{dr} \left( \frac{V^2}{r^2} \right)}{4 \frac{V^2}{r} + r^2 \frac{d}{dr} \left( \frac{V^2}{r^2} \right)} > 0. \quad (3.20)$$

If we have radially decreasing angular velocity profile,  $\frac{d}{dr} \left( \frac{V^2}{r^2} \right) < 0$ , somewhere  $r_1 < r < r_2$ , then  $\omega^2$  may have negative solution which makes the system unstable.

### 3.3.2. Helical magnetorotational instability

When the external nonzero magnetic fields in axial and azimuthal directions are considered, it was found that the eigenvalue equation can be written as

$$\frac{d}{dr} r \frac{du}{dr} - \frac{u}{r} - k^2 r u = \frac{k^2}{(\omega^2 - k^2 V_{Az}^2)^2} \left[ r^2 \frac{d}{dr} \left( \frac{V_{A\phi}^2 - V^2}{r^2} \right) (\omega^2 - k^2 V_{Az}^2) - \frac{4}{r} (k V_{A\phi} V_{Az} - \omega V)^2 \right] u. \quad (3.21)$$

According to Knobloch (1992) and Julien & Knobloch (2010), the exponentially growing mode  $\omega = -i\lambda$ ,  $\lambda > 0$  is possible when the eigenvalue relation has the form

$$(\lambda^2 + k^2 V_{Az}^2)^2 = \frac{k^2}{D} \int_{r_1}^{r_2} \left[ r^2 \frac{d}{dr} \left( \frac{V_{A\phi}^2 - V^2}{r^2} \right) (\lambda^2 + k^2 V_{Az}^2) + \frac{4}{r} (k V_{A\phi} V_{Az} - i\lambda V)^2 \right] |u|^2 dr. \quad (3.22)$$

Considering the imaginary part of the equation, we have

$$\int_{r_1}^{r_2} \frac{1}{r} V_{\phi} V |u|^2 dr = 0. \quad (3.23)$$

Knobloch (1992) showed that exponentially growing instability is only possible when  $V_{A\phi}$  or  $V$  changes sign somewhere in  $r_1 < r < r_2$ .

## 4. Laboratory experiments

Attempts to generate MRI in laboratory environments did not begin until 2001, four decades after the first magnetohydrodynamic (MHD) experiments (Donnelley & Ozima 1960). In contrast to MRI, the first MHD experiments focused on stabilizing, rather than generating, instabilities within Taylor-Couette flow using magnetic fields. Experiments aimed at generating MRI in flows relevant to accretion disks were not devised until after published work indicating MRI's role as the transport mechanism of angular momentum within accretion disks (Balbus & Hawley 1991).

### 4.1. Standard magnetorotational instability

Beginning with Ji *et al.* (2001), researchers have attempted to produce MRI by applying an axial magnetic field to a stable, quasi-Keplerian flow. Unfortunately, to-date no group has been able to experimentally generate the standard MRI due to technical issues. Specifically, researchers have been unable to create an experimental setup which can withstand the required flow conditions for MRI (Ji *et al.* 2001; Goodman & Ji 2002). Additionally, researchers have had difficulty eliminating Ekman circulation within their setups, which can transport angular momentum and therefore whose presence can contaminate any experimental results (Kageyama *et al.* 2004).

Although definitive identification of MRI has yet to be reported, Sisan *et al.* (2004) reported instabilities using a spherical Couette flow. The experimental setup applied a magnetic field coaxially to an inner rotating sphere with an outer fixed sphere and liquid sodium as the conducting fluid (see Figure 3). Once the magnetic field was increased beyond a threshold value, instabilities within the flow were observed which Sisan *et al.* (2004) classified as MRI. Gissinger *et al.* (2011) later numerically reproduced the results of Sisan *et al.* (2004), but identified the instabilities as shear

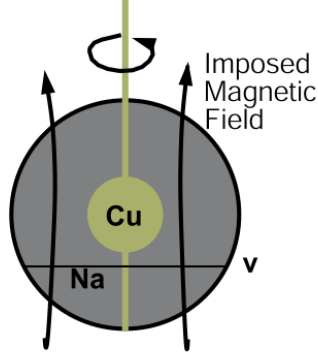


FIGURE 3. Diagram from Sisan *et al.* (2004) showing the experimental setup used to generate MRI. The fixed outer steel sphere contains liquid sodium (the conducting fluid), with the magnetic field imposed coaxially to the rotating inner copper sphere. The magnetic fields and fluid velocity are measured using Hall probes and Doppler velocimetry.

layer instabilities, also known as the Schercliff layer, caused by the imposed magnetic field and the spherical boundaries. Unfortunately, the spherical boundaries means the Schercliff layer are unlikely to be relevant to accretion disks which are not spherical.

#### 4.2. Helical magnetorotational instability

As noted in Section 4.1, a difficulty with generation of MRI is attaining sufficient speeds without damaging the experimental setup. Although researchers are actively working on solving this issue, there are also several groups researching helical MRI (HMRI), a modified type of MRI which requires less extreme flow conditions. Although accretion disks do not exhibit azimuthal magnetic fields, HMRI experiments are still valuable in understand the underlying physics involved in MHD.

HMRI is MRI generated by applying both axial and azimuthal magnetic fields to a magnetized fluid, and was first proposed by Hollerbach & Rudiger (2005). Hollerbach's paper showed that the addition of an azimuthal magnetic field would allow MRI to be generated at Reynolds numbers  $10^3$  less than those of standard MRI. Generation of HMRI has since been experimentally proven by the PROMISE experiments (see Stefani *et al.* 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012). Figure 4 illustrates a typical experimental setup for generating HMRI.

## 5. Numerical simulations

On top of experiments mentioned in the previous section, numerical simulations are also employed to explore MRI. Direct numerical simulations (DNS) are typically used with the advance of supercomputers and dramatically decreased computing time. DNS of the magnetohydrodynamics (MHD) Navier–Stokes equations have had much success in the determination of the existence of MRI. Many of the numerical simulations assume axisymmetric, vertically global and incompressible flow if Alfvén speed slower than sound speed as occurs in that regime that is stable to Taylor–Couette, the MHD equations can be simplified to be incompressible since it is not fundamental to the instability (Balbus & Hawley 1991) with some exceptions (Sano *et al.* 1998).

We begin with the widely used local shearing box model (Balbus & Hawley 1991) which has special properties of the model equations that makes it easier to simulate (see Figure 5). This



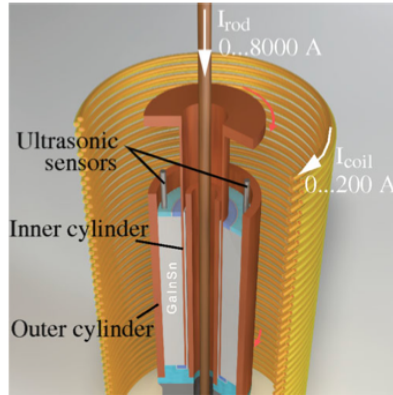


FIGURE 4. Diagram of a typical HMRI experimental setup from Ji (2010). The liquid metal is placed between the inner and outer cylinders, with imposed axial and azimuthal magnetic fields.

model was also computationally more feasible at that time instead of a global 3D model. The special properties are that the toroidal field drops out, there is no distinction between inward and outward directions (symmetry) and MRI becomes an exponentially growing instability (Julien & Knobloch 2010).

Periodic boundary conditions were used with an added shearing component to the radial direction. “Method of characteristics-constrained transport” algorithm as explained in Hawley *et al.* (1995) was implemented. This model with an initial input magnetic field with zero- volume average initiates MRI but may obliterate the magnetic field and thus suppress the turbulence.

The comparison of the 3D simulations results from Hawley *et al.* (1995) with the 2D results from Balbus *et al.* (1994) shows significant difference. The 2D results have a general channel/streaming flow solution whereas the 3D results may go through the channel flow but eventually evolves further into a turbulent flow with some not going through the channel flow at all. Vertical component of gravity, hence buoyancy, was ignored and since their simulations showed significant density contrast, the shearing box model is not self-consistent. Purely hydrodynamic turbulence did not give significant angular momentum transport needed even when the initial conditions had strong turbulence structures. Their 3D results suggest that accretion disks are well described by Euler’s, ignoring the viscous terms from Navier–Stokes (Hawley *et al.* 1995). They also note that saturation of MRI is important in the efficiency of the angular momentum transport.

A figure of numerical result using the shearing box model by Balbus & Hawley (1998) clearly showing MRI is shown in Figure 6. They observe the generation of MRI radially inward and outward (Balbus & Hawley (1991)). Further in time, these become sheets of instabilities (Hawley & Balbus (1992)) that are coupled by magnetic field but are reconnected by numerical dissipation (Julien & Knobloch (2010)).

There are many variations of numerical simulations adapting the local shearing box model using different numerical methods etc. Fromang & Papaloizou (2007) and Fromang *et al.* (2007) have shown that numerical results using the box model with zero net flux are highly dependent on the numerical method used and resolution of the grid unless explicit diffusion coefficients and the appropriate dissipative scales are resolved. This issue has been considered in Lesur & Longaretti (2007) for cases with nonzero net vertical flux, where they found that both the viscosity and resistivity affect the amount of angular momentum transported by magnetohydrodynamic turbulence.

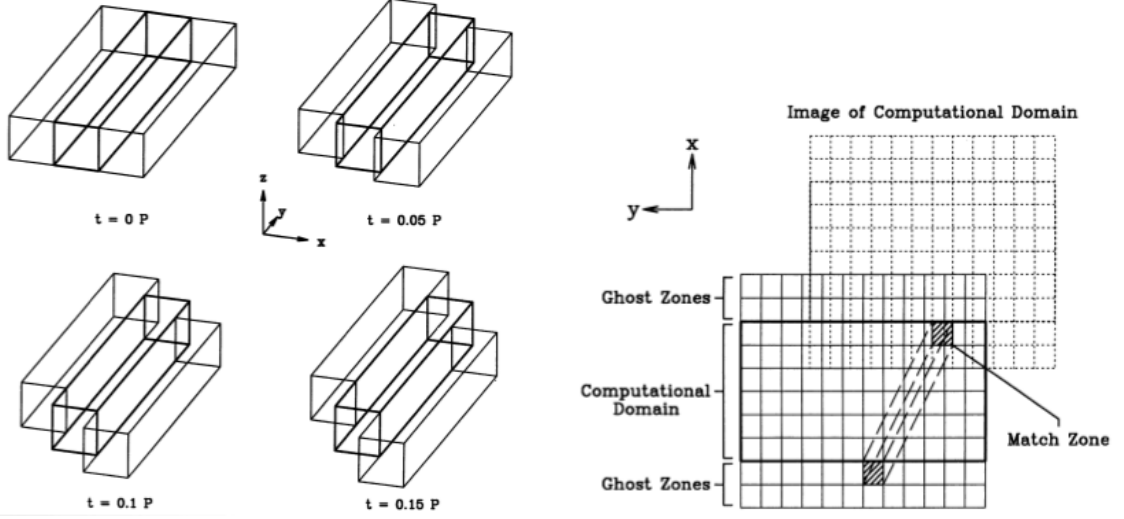


FIGURE 5. Diagram shows how the boxes shear in time (left) and boundary conditions (right) of the shearing box model from Balbus & Hawley (1991).

167 Sano *et al.* (1998) has shown that whether saturation occurs depends on the Elsasser number  $\Delta \equiv$   
 168  $v_A^2/\eta\Omega$ , which describes the relative balance of Lorentz forces to Coriolis forces. Non-axisymmetric  
 169 numerical simulations done by Fleming *et al.* (2000) suggest saturation does occur even when  
 170 Elsasser number  $\Delta \geq 1$  if non-axisymmetric disturbances are allowed to evolve.

171 Other variations of the shearing box models include vertically stratified disks as done in Miller  
 172 & Stone (1999), who found that turbulent magnetised disk can produce a magnetised corona in  
 173 laminar flow through MRI. Stone *et al.* (1996) presented a 3D MHD simulation of the nonlinear  
 174 evolution of MRI in a local shearing box method with a global vertical direction and vertically  
 175 stratified disk as well. They found that the instability generated and maintained MHD turbulence.

176 The use of the shearing box model has its limitations as pointed out by Hawley *et al.* (1995) and  
 177 Regev & Umrhan (2008) as they do not permit any dynamics involving the background shear,  
 178 which is taken as imposed and constant in space and time (Regev & Umrhan 2008). With regards  
 179 to resolution which is tied in with the model used, the efficiency of angular momentum transport  
 180 appears to decrease with improved resolution as shown by Fromang *et al.* (2007), suggesting that  
 181 transport rates estimated on basis of ideal MHD are affected by grid-scale dissipation and overesti-  
 182 mate the efficiency of angular momentum extraction by MRI. Kopyla & Korpi (2011) also worked  
 183 on resolution dependence of  $\alpha$ , the Shakura-Sunyaev number and the possible decline of the angular  
 184 momentum transport rate with decreasing  $\text{Pm}$ . Even though the shearing box model is restrictive in  
 185 resolving the behavior of the accretion disk, it is nonetheless useful in obtaining actual evidence for  
 186 MRI, as shown in Figure 6 (Balbus & Hawley 1998), as well as understanding the dynamo process  
 187 that sustains the magnetic field in planetary systems Lesur & Ogilvie (2008).

188 Apart from the local shearing box model, with technological advances and the decrease in com-  
 189 putational cost, 3D global models have been implemented as well. Liu (2008) simulated nonlinear  
 190 development of MRI in a non-ideal magnetohydrodynamic Taylor-Couette flow (mimicking an on-  
 191 going Princeton MRI experiment) using ZEUS-MP 2.0 code (Hayes *et al.* 2006), which is a time-

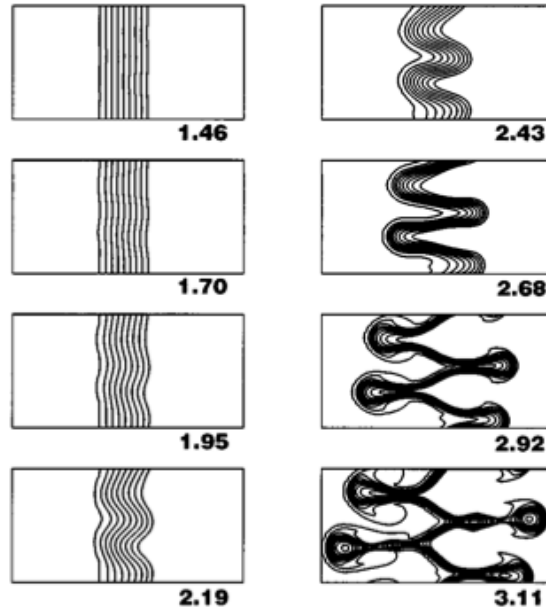


FIGURE 6. Numerical results from Balbus & Hawley (1998) showing the temporal evolution of MRI. The snapshots are  $(R, z)$  cross-sections of field lines, with the origin at the bottom left, and the time in number of orbits annotated to each snapshot.

explicit, compressible, astrophysical ideal MHD parallel 3D code with added viscosity and resistivity for axisymmetric flows in cylindrical coordinates. He shows that the saturation of MRI causes an inflowing ‘jet’ feature which is opposite to the usual Ekman circulation and enhances angular momentum transport radially outward, which is what is needed, agreeing with Hawley *et al.* (1995). Stable MRI regime ( $Re \leq 1600$ ) enhances vertical angular momentum transport while in unstable MRI regime ( $Re \geq 3200$ ), MRI kicks in, resulting in more radial angular momentum transport as compared with vertical (Liu 2008).

General relativistic global 3D MHD codes have been implemented to show the existence of MRI and explore other astronomical phenomena (Meier *et al.* 2001; De Villiers & Hawley 2003; Koide *et al.* 2000) (see Figure 7). Kersale *et al.* (2006) simulated global MRI to look more into the nonlinear properties and the formation of a jet that transports vertical magnetic flux. A 3D hydrodynamic simulations explores the nonlinear evolution of vertical shear instability in accretion disk and finds that vertical dependence destabilizes the disk, leading to velocity fluctuations that increases angular momentum transport (Arlt & Urpin 2004), contrary to Hawley *et al.* (1995).

## 6. Conclusion

We have presented an overview of magnetorotational instability, beginning with the theoretical analysis of magnetohydrodynamic conditions that give rise to the instability. In addition, we have summarized current experimental attempts to generate MRI, which to-date have not yielded positive identification of MRI due to technical difficulties in generating the required flow conditions.

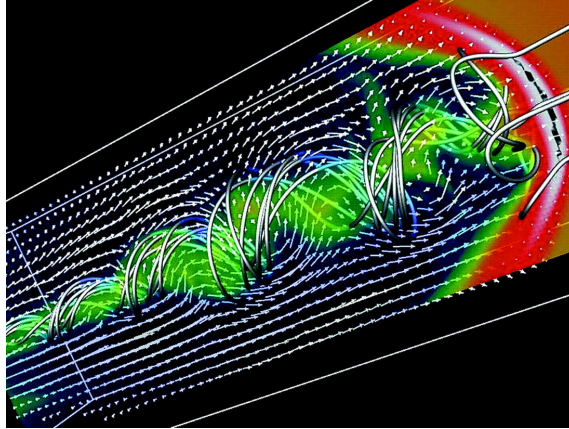


FIGURE 7. 3D MHD simulation with generated propagation of relativistic jet (Meier *et al.* 2001). Colors indicate plasma density, arrows indicate the velocity while the silver tube follows the magnetic line of force. The jet spirals and culminate into a shock front on the right.

211 Numerical simulations of MRI were also reported, which have provided insight into MRI, both in  
 212 regards to its underlying physics and its ability to transport angular momentum in accretion disks.

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