

Review of Optical Fiber Sensing Technology and Principle

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Abstract: Distributed Optical fiber sensor (DOFS) has developed greatly in precise measurement. OTDR and OFDR are two most significant techniques in DOFS. This paper reviewed scattering theory and principles of OTDR, OFDR system and their derivative system. Advantages and drawbacks of OTDR and OFDR are proposed especially with respect of spatial resolution and sensing range. Improvement methods on above crucial parameters and recent practical application scenario are also referred.

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1. Introduction

As information technology and industry developed further, optic fiber based sensors has achieved great applications in many areas such as aerospace industry, precision instrument design, military facilities and so on. It also appears increasingly larger commercial potential and market shares especially for distributed sensors(Figure.1). Optical fiber sensors are usually divided into four categories([1]): 1.Point sensors, which is carried out by a single detect point in measurement space, based on devices like Fabry-Perot sensors and single Fiber Bragg Grating(FBG) sensors; 2.Quasi-distributed sensors: which utilized fixed number measuring points on fiber, such as multiplexed FBG sensors; 3.Integrated sensors, measuring a average information of some physical quantity in a certain spatial region, but only a single value is provided; 4. Distributed sensors: provide a certain spatial resolution measurement with any points along a fiber cable. Distributed optical fiber sensors (DOFS) is able to capture various distributedly parameters which is coupled with refractive index along fiber under test, such as strain, stress, temperature, etc. In contrast to extrinsic optical fibers, which are utilized for transferring information and obtaining light signal generated on the sensing point, distributed optical fiber sensors belongs to intrinsic optical fibers and converting information resulted by environmental changes which modulate signals' phase, intensity and frequency. Intrinsic backscattering including Rayleigh, Raman and Brillouin scattering are three mainly researched and used physical process on DOFS. Detailed comments are reviewed in section 2. In terms of time domain or frequency domain, DOFS are classified as optical time domain reflectometry (OTDR) and optical frequency domain reflectometry (OFDR). Back-scattering light intensity decays in fibers as sensing range increases, so spatial resolution and sensing range are in balance, therefore SNR is crucial to DOFS system. OTDR has already achieved huge commercial value, series of technology such as ϕ -OTDR, B-OTDR, C-OTDR, P-OTDR, etc based on OTDR are growing maturely. However, OTDR index such as dynamic range(50dB), sensing distance(10^2 km) and spatial solution(10^{-1} m) can not satisfy increasing demand on precision. By using tunable laser source(TLS), the input signal's frequency can be modulated linearly in time, local oscillator(LO) and back-scattering signal thus generate interference beat frequency which can enhance SNR. With overall centimeter to micrometer spatial resolution, OFDR can measure temperature, strain, vibration, etc more precisely. Further, OFDR are also showing tremendous application prospect on 2D shape, 3D shape measuring.

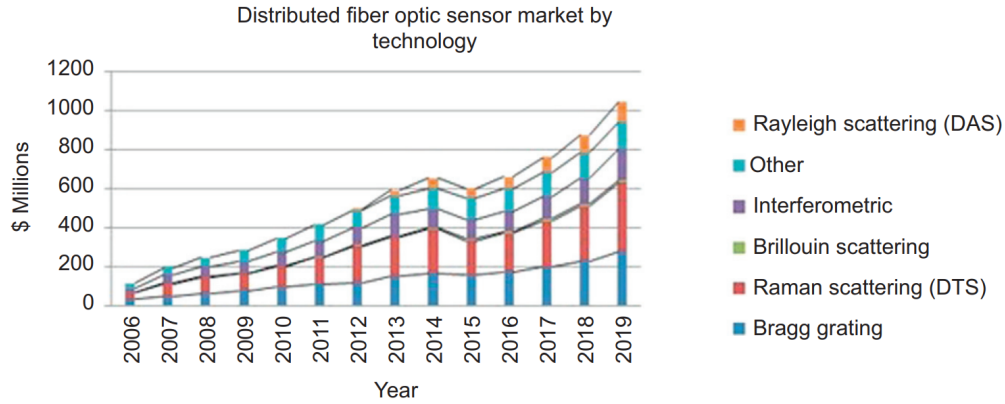


Fig. 1. Photonic Sensor Consortium Market Survey Report (Fig. 5.1, [1])

2. Scattering Theory

2.1. Rayleigh Scattering

Rayleigh scattering theory was first proposed to explain the phenomena when light pass through atmosphere, it is applied when particle size is much shorter than the light's wavelength. The scattering intensity is proportional to the fourth power of the inverse wavelength. Rayleigh scattering is a elastic process, and it is caused by the polarization of the particle. So the scattering light has the same length with input light. Generally, Rayleigh scattering could be proved as a result of the fluctuation of air density. Similarly, in optical fiber, Rayleigh scattering is due to the fluctuation of refractive index profile along the fiber. The fluctuation is caused by random and incoherent thermal fluctuation, the scattering light has no energy lost or gain.

2.2. Brillouin Scattering

Brillouin scattering refers to the interaction of light and the material waves in a medium. There are three mainly material wave: phonons caused by acoustic modes, polaritons caused by charge displacement modes and magnons magnetic spin oscillation modes. The light in the medium may interact with above three quasiparticle, thus loss energy(wavelength shift larger, which is referred to stokes process) or gain energy(wavelength shift shorter, which is referred to Anti-stokes process), thus a inelastic or nonlinear scattering.

2.3. Raman Scattering

Raman scattering is caused by the vibration of molecular bond. Molecular vibration energy is known to be quantized and can be modeled using the quantum harmonic oscillator approximation:

$$E = h(n + \frac{1}{2})\mu = h(n + \frac{1}{2})\frac{1}{2\pi}\sqrt{\frac{k}{m}} \quad (1)$$

Where n is the quantum number. The energy range for molecular vibrations is approximately from 5 to 3500 cm^{-1} . A molecule can be excited to a higher vibration mode through the direct absorption of a photon, which falls in the terahertz or infrared range. This inelastic scattering process is called Stokes Raman scattering, an increase in photon energy which leaves the molecule down to a lower vibration energy state is called anti-Stokes scattering. Compared to Brillouin scattering which shows a larger scale of medium properties, Raman scattering can represent information of medium chemical composition and molecular structure.

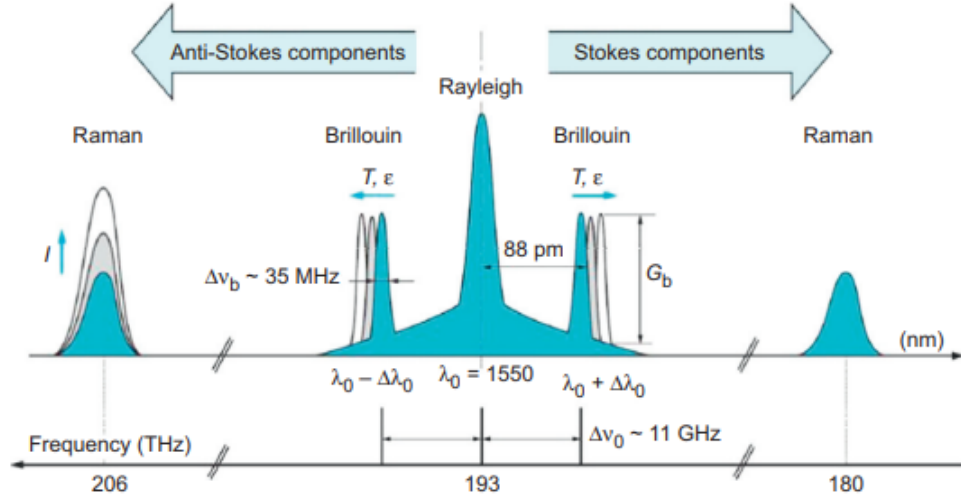


Fig. 2. The optical spectrum of the scattering phenomena in silica (SiO₂) optical fibers, used in distributed sensing, for an injected laser wavelength of 1550 nm. (Fig. 5.3, [1])

Figure.2 shows scattering light wavelength shift caused by Rayleigh, Brillouin and Raman scattering.

3. OTDR

3.1. Principle of OTDR

The modulated input impulse light pass through the fiber and continuously back-scatter to the detector, when meet inhomogeneities and impurities caused by the change of thermal, stress, strain and pressure, etc in the environment, the intensity of scattering light increase suddenly and can be detected by Photo detectors. A schematic diagram is shown below as Fig.3. The intensity vary with time domain information can be converted into distance domain. It appears a overall exponential decay along distance:

$$P(z) = P_0 e^{-\alpha z} \quad (2)$$

where α is the average loss coefficient.

For the pulse width W , Rayleigh scattering light power along fiber is:

$$P_R(z) = P(z) s \alpha_s W \frac{v}{2} = P_0 e^{-\alpha v t} s \alpha_s W \frac{v}{2} \quad (3)$$

s is Rayleigh scattering power capture coefficient[2], v is the light travel velocity along fiber, α_s is Rayleigh scattering coefficient.

Some sudden change points during the decay signals indicates localize breaks, connectors, fiber splices or bendings along the fiber. OTDR technique can be utilized for fiber quantity test and analysis, including losses, defect and so on. However, when dealing with long distance, the noise greatly affect the dynamic range ($D = L\alpha$, L is the test distance) of OTDR. Besides the direct back-scattering light only captures obvious physical parameter change, for small variation, the resolution is limited to satisfy. Some further developed techniques such as C-OTDR, P-OTDR and ϕ -OTDR can solve the questions.

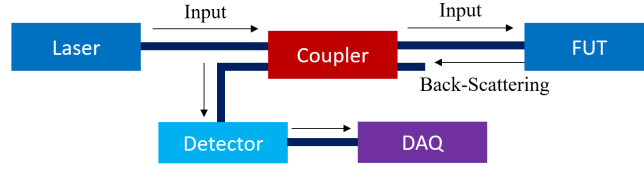


Fig. 3. Schematic diagram of OTDR

3.2. C-OTDR

C-OTDR operates based on heterodyne coherent detection. An AOM is equipped in this system, the input narrow band light is thus applied with a frequency shift, the frequency-shifted back scattering signal interference with local signal and generate a beat frequency signal. With balanced detection, the common mode is cut off, a band pass filter keeps mid-frequency and most of the noise is removed thus increasing dynamic range and SNR. C-OTDR requires good quantity of laser's monochromaticity and frequency stability. A demonstration diagram is shown below Fig.4.

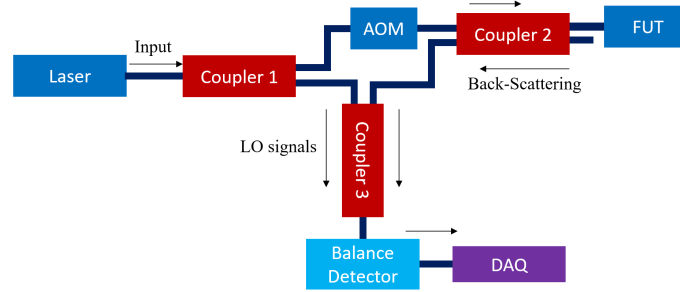


Fig. 4. Schematic diagram of C-OTDR

3.3. P-OTDR

P-OTDR utilize polarization distribution in fiber to obtain high resolution sensing information. The polarization controller set after coupler ensures a fixed input polarization state, and plays as a polarization analyser for back scattering signal. The polarization distribution information along the fiber is converted into intensity variation and captured by the detector. Suppose at distance l from the start point, a thermal change or strain change is induced in the region Δl . The changed birefringence causes a change of phase:

$$\Delta\phi = \Delta\beta\Delta l \quad (4)$$

The thermal $\theta(l)$ and stress distribution $T(l)$ can be calculated from the phase change:

$$\theta(l) - \theta(0) = c_\theta \frac{d\phi}{dt} \quad (5)$$

$$T(l) - T(0) = c_T \frac{d\phi}{dt} \quad (6)$$

Specific expression of c_θ and c_T are derivated in [3].

Although P-OTDR utilizes polarization distribution can measure more precisely, it still has few shortcomings that impede commercialization:

1. The polarization stability of system itself. To capture polarization distribution information in high precision, polarization state stability is a crucial factor, but it is greatly sensitive to environment change thus difficult to maintain pure state in a general application scenario.
2. The temperature and stress or other physical information are coupled together in the back forward signals, decoupling temperature and stress influence from the source is a to-be-solved question.
3. P-OTDR also meets trouble in increasing spatial resolution and SNR.

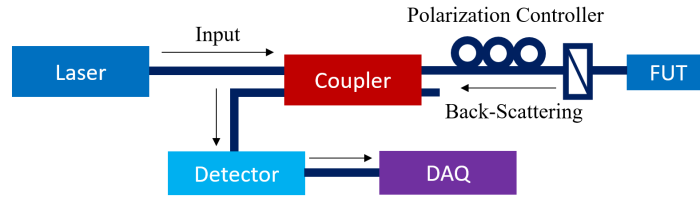


Fig. 5. Schematic diagram of P-OTDR

3.4. ϕ -OTDR

ϕ -OTDR relies on Hooke law and elasto-optical effect, completing sensing by modulating scattering light phase information based on optical path change. Environmental change or disturb induce light path variation:

$$\Delta z_{path} = (n_0 + \Delta n)(l + \Delta l) - n_0 l \quad (7)$$

$$\Delta n = e_z \xi n_0 \quad (8)$$

$$\Delta l = e_z l \quad (9)$$

where e_z is axis strain deformation, ξ is elasto-optical coefficient, is elastic coefficient. Phase change can be represented as:

$$\Delta \phi = 2\pi \frac{\Delta z_{path}}{\lambda} \quad (10)$$

Back scattering light can be written as[2]:

$$P_s(t) = |E_0|^2 e^{-2\alpha mn} [\sum_{k=1}^N p_k \gamma_k + 2 \sum_{k=1}^{N-1} \sum_{l=k+1}^N p_k p_l \gamma_k \gamma_l \cos[2\phi_{kl}(t)]] \quad (11)$$

E_0 is the input light intensity, n is spatial resolution, p and γ is polarization coefficient and reflection coefficient, ϕ_{kl} is the k th and l th scattering light phase difference.

The spatial resolution of ϕ -OTDR is determined by: $\Delta z = ct_w/2$, t_w is the pulse width, to obtain a better spatial resolution needs smaller t_w , but energy of input light decrease thus limit sensing range. So is a contradictory to satisfy both spatial resolution and sensing range.

Signal attenuation is a key difficulty in ϕ -OTDR, it can be categorized as interference attenuation and polarization attenuation. The attenuation causes mismatch of LO and signal, and damage the beat signal energy, badly influence system SNR.[4] It is first believed that the attenuation is

caused by Rayleigh scattering coefficient random fluctuation, and further explained as refractive index unevenly distribution. Avoiding attenuation will benefit ϕ -OTDR DAS technique further development.

Detecting impulse respond band width and sensing range is also hard to enhance synchronously. To obtain high fidelity signals in some scenario, large impulse respond band width is greatly required, however, neighboring back scattering signals will mix-up in this situation thus reduce sensing range.

3.5. B-OTDR

Brillouin scattering has two typical configuration, one is based on spontaneous Brillouin scattering caused by Brownian motion of molecules in the silica fiber. The onther configuration is based on stimulated Rayleigh scattering due to the electrostriction effect of the silica fiber[1].

As there is frequency shift in back scattering signal, coherent detection method is usually used in B-OTDR. To decouple temperature and strain variation, B-OTDR also includes a reference fiber remaining in unstrained state to eliminate the effect of strain, thus ensure the precise measurement of temperature and strain distribution along fiber.

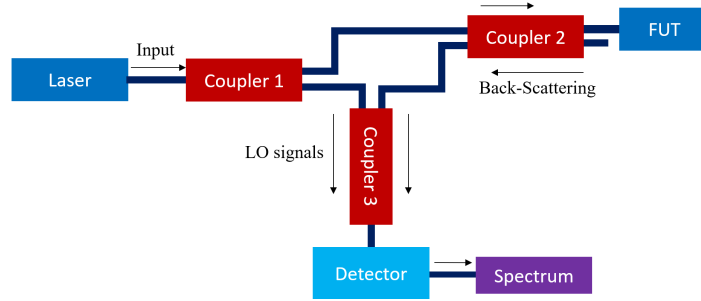


Fig. 6. Schematic diagram of B-OTDR

NTT Communication Lab in Japan reaches 3°C temperature resolution and 100m spatial resolution, over 1.2km sensing range in 1990 based on B-OTDR. And they extended sensing range to 22km with 1°C temperature resolution, 10m resolution three years later[5].

3.6. Raman scattering based OTDR

Raman scattering light intensity is relatively low to be detected, so mutimode fibers with high NA are used to increase the backward signal's intensity. However, mutimode fibers' large attenuation limits its sensing range so restricts many application scenarios.

4. OFDR

4.1. Principle of OFDR

With the tunable laser source(TLS) linearly tuning frequency:

$$\nu = \nu_0 + \gamma t \quad (12)$$

The input optical field in time domain can be written as:

$$E_r(t) = E_0 e^{j[2\pi f_0 t + \pi \gamma t^2 + e(t)]} \quad (13)$$

Where $f_0 = 2\pi\nu_0$, and $e(t)$ is noise in phase. The reflected signal thus represented as:

$$E_s(t) = \sqrt{R(\tau)} E_0 e^{j[2\pi f_0(t-\tau) + \pi\gamma(t-\tau)^2 + e(t-\tau)]} \quad (14)$$

159 And $R(\tau)$ is reflectivity in fibers $z=v\tau/2$, the beating signals from the interference of $E_r(t)$
160 and $E_s(t)$ are:

$$I(t) = 2\sqrt{R(\tau)} E_0^2 \cos[2\pi[f_0\tau + \gamma\tau t + \frac{1}{2}\gamma\tau^2 + e(t) - e(t-\tau)]] \quad (15)$$

161 With FFT in DAQ, spectrum information are obtained and beat frequency $f_b = \gamma\tau$ is extracted.

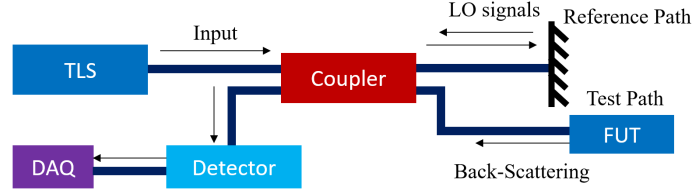


Fig. 7. Schematic diagram of OFDR

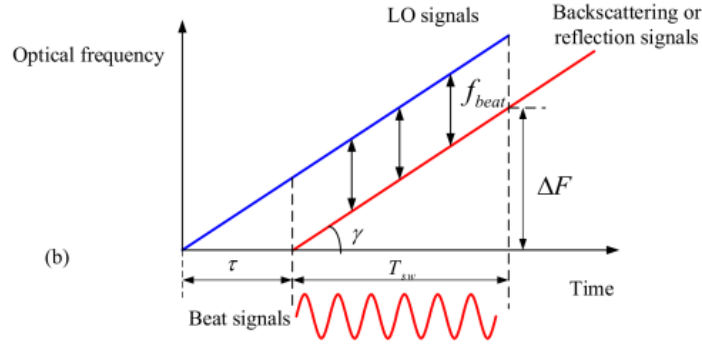


Fig. 8. Linearly tuning optical frequency and beating signals come from the LO light and received light.(Fig.1(b),[6])

162 4.2. Important parameters in OFDR

163 4.2.1. Frequency tuning range

164 The back signal from point z along the fiber can be related with beat frequency f_b :

$$z = \frac{f_b v}{2\gamma} = \frac{f_b c}{2n\gamma} \quad (16)$$

$$\Delta z = \frac{\Delta f_b c}{2n\gamma} = \frac{c}{2n\lambda T} = \frac{c}{2n\Delta F} \quad (17)$$

165 From the equation above, spatial resolution strongly relate with frequency scan range. However,
166 increasing ΔF raises pressure on hardware and analysis efficiency, so it is theoretically up level
167 limited.

168 4.2.2. Frequency tuning speed

169 γ is another crucial factor of OFDR system. Increasing the tuning speed reduces sensing time
170 and improves measuring precision and stability, but it also rises necessary sampling rate of data
171 acquisition.

172 4.2.3. TLS band width

173 The coherent length of laser source is:

$$L = \frac{c}{n \pi \Delta \nu} \quad (18)$$

174 To increase sensing range of the system, a short band width source is needed.

175 4.3. Nonlinear Phase Noise and solutions

176 4.3.1. Nonlinear Phase Noise

177 The tuning coefficient γ is not linearly stable in reality experiment, the nonlinearity makes beat
178 frequency drift and signal's peak is widened, reducing detection precision, so compensation
179 methods are needed to fix the frequency nonlinearity. Frequency sampling, software algorithm
180 and short tuning range are three common compensation methods. Frequency sampling method
181 uses DAQ clock which is triggered by optical frequency to sample an auxiliary interferometer
182 signal[7], but limits sensing range as a result of the length of delay line in auxiliary interferometer.

183 4.3.2. Software Algorithm

184 Software Algorithm method is actually signal process procedure when hardware fixed, which
185 can extract information that are needed from the whole signal, increase SNR and compensate the
186 influence of nonlinearity. Four methods are briefly reviewed here.

187 NUFFT uses Gaussian Kernel window to convolute nonlinear beat frequency signal, generating
188 a new frequency distribution and utilizes FFT convert signal to distance domain, deconvoluting
189 lastly to obtain the cared information. Ding et al[8] have reached 51m sensing range and 5cm
190 spatial resolution with NUFFT.

191 Song et al.[9] have used cubic spline interpolation algorithm to re-sample the interference
192 signal and achieved 300m sensing range and 0.3mm spatial resolution theoretically.

193 Fumihiko et al.[10] used concatenately generated phase method to compensate the different
194 segments of the main interference line and obtained a 40km sensing range 5cm spatial resolution.

195 Du et al.[11-13] constructed Deskew Filter method to eliminate nonlinear phase of LO light
196 and nonlinear phase of received light separately, reaching a 80km sensing range and 80cm spatial
197 resolution.

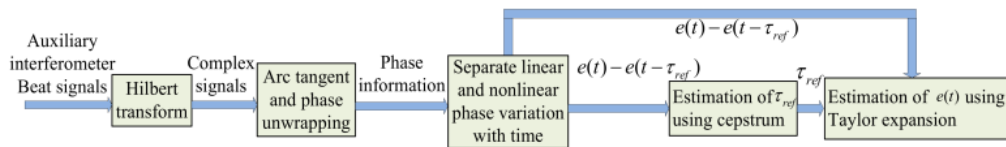


Fig. 9. Signal processing procedure of nonlinear phase restoration from an auxiliary interferometer.(Fig.9,[7])

198 4.3.3. Short Ranging

199 Shorting tuning range although restricts spatial resolution, the improved linearity in a short period
200 can increase sensing range, dynamic range and measurement SNR. Many methods in previous
201 work were reviewed in [7], such as Narrow linewidth laser method proposed by Ding et al.[14]
202 accomplished 170km sensing range and 200m spatial resolution, dynamic OFDR proposed by
203 Arbel et al.[15] reached 10km sensing range, Fraction Fourier Transform proposed by Shiloh et
204 al.[16] achieved 20km sensing range and 2.8m spatial resolution and so on. The sensing range
205 reaches from tens kilometers to hundreds kilometers and the spatial resolution reaches from
206 meters to centimeters.

207 4.4. Rayleigh back scattering spectra (RBS) shifts in OFDR

208 RBS is a method proposed by Froggatt et al.[17] that can increase spatial resolution to millimeters
209 and temperature measuring precision to 0.08 °C, strain to 0.8 $\mu\epsilon$. It is operating on both the
210 reference and the measurement signals on frequency domain, a sliding widow with width Δx
211 slides through distance domain of two signals FFT, and spectrum information in Δx obtained.
212 The strain and temperature variations can be obtained by calculating the cross-correlation of the
213 two spectrum signals. It brings higher pressure on calculating and data processing resource,
214 to obtain a precise resolution, Δx needs to be as small as possible. The responding time of
215 the system therefore is badly influenced. So it is a contradictory on precision and responding
216 sensitivity[18].

217 4.5. OFDR application

218 4.5.1. Temperature and strain

219 As mentioned above, OFDR has great advantage on measuring thermal and strain distribution.
220 While the two physical parameters discrimination is also significant in a measuring system. A
221 general way to achieve that is utilizing two fibers with different response to temperature and
222 strain, such as a SMF and a reduced-cladding SMF, both scattering signals are measured, the
223 temperature and strain variation can be decoupled with coefficient that already known.

224 4.5.2. Vibration

225 Cross-correlation is a useful tool for measuring vibration. The back scattering signals is a charac-
226 teristic feature of a fiber and it's environment, using cross-correlation similarity analysis(CCSA)
227 can analyze the difference between test path and the reference path. Comparing CCSA of each
228 segment of the two path enable one to detect the vibration location and degree.

229 4.5.3. Pressure

230 Pressure variation is so small to be directly detected, so the transversal pressure is need to convert
231 to longitudinal strain applied on FUT. So pressure sensitive material such as high Poisson's ratio
232 and low Young modulus material can package fibers to previously enlarge the pressure variation
233 on FUT.

234 4.5.4. 2D shaping

235 Optical fibers attached to a 2D surface of some material can capture the deformation variation of
236 it. The strain brings curvature on the material, drifting the wavelength inside the fibers. With
237 the relationship[19] of fiber curvature and wavelength drift, the shape of the 2D surface can be
238 measured.

$$\delta\lambda = \frac{(1 - P_e)\lambda_c}{R} \quad (19)$$

239 Where P_e is elastic coefficient of the fiber.

240 4.5.5. 3D shaping

241 With three fibers or multi-mode fibers group together as a triplet, the 3D shape information
242 can be reconstructed by measuring strain distribution with OFDR, RBS. Under a pre-defined
243 geometry setting, dividing fibers into segments enables a specific spatial resolution on 3D shaping
244 information.

245 4.5.6. Others

246 Other parameters such as magnetic field, flow rate, gas density, radiation, etc. can all be measured
247 with Rayleigh Scattering signals along fiber. As temperature and strain variation is easier to
248 reconstruct, it is significant for measuring to use auxiliary device or material to convert the other
249 environmental information to temperature and strain.

250 5. Conclusion

251 Distributed optical fiber sensors has drawn great attention recent years, to meet general application
252 scenario and precise measurement on specific usage, dynamic range, sensing range, spatial
253 resolution are crucial factors in DOFS system. As Rayleigh scattering light has larger reflected
254 intensity compared to the Brillouin scattering and Raman scattering, it is still the major
255 measure physics basis. OTDR and OFDR based on Rayleigh scattering are two main designed
256 configurations and were widely extended and developed in the past few years. OTDR was
257 originally used in fiber defect and quantity detection, however, the spatial resolution and sensing
258 range are both limited. with various OTDR-based technique such as C-OTDR, P-OTDR, ϕ -
259 OTDR developed, heterodyne coherent detection, polarization state detection, phase detection
260 are equipped in the system to increase the sensing range and spatial resolution. OTDR system
261 still has unavoidable contradictory in sensing range and spatial resolution because reducing fibers
262 attenuation, ensuring laser's linewidth can not always be satisfied at the same time. OFDR working
263 on TLS provides high SNR beat signal, but the nonlinearity of frequency tuning causes peak
264 widen on frequency domain thus restricts further precision improvement. Frequency-sampling,
265 short tuning range on hardware and series algorithm developed on software side can well fix
266 the problem but raise other negative effect. Complicated algorithm requires more calculation
267 resource in the system so it has bad influence on responding time. Shorting tuning range increases
268 linearity but restricts spatial resolution. Comprising with RBS analysis, cross-correlation analysis
269 and special functional fiber design, OFDR can be equipped in many measuring scenario, such as
270 temperature, strain, vibration, pressure, etc. 2D and 3D shaping are also appearing great attention
271 on DOFS. With respect of different applications, OFDR based system can actually be designed
272 more adaptable to satisfy specific requirement.

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