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Influence of thermal parameters on the dendritic arm spacing and the microhardness of Al-5.5wt.%Sn alloy directionally solidified


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Influence of thermal parameters on the dendritic arm spacing and the microhardness of Al-5.5wt.%Sn alloy directionally solidified

Abstract

Al-Sn alloys are widely used in tribological applications. In this study, thermal, microstructural and microhardness (HV) analysis were carried out with an Al-5.5wt.%Sn alloy ingot produced by horizontal directional transient solidification. The main parameters analyzed include the growth rate ($V_L$) and cooling rate ($T_R$). These thermal parameters play a key role in the microstructural formation. The dendritic microstructure has been characterized by primary dendritic arm spacing ($\lambda_1$) which was experimentally determined and correlated with $V_L$ and $T_R$. The behavior presented by the Al-5.5wt.%Sn alloy during solidification was similar to that of other aluminum alloys, i.e., the dendritic network became coarser with decreasing cooling rates, indicating that the immiscibility between aluminum and tin does not have a significant effect on the relationship between primary dendritic arm spacing and the cooling rate. The dependence of the microhardness on $V_L$, $T_R$ and $\lambda_1$ was also analyzed. It was found that for increasing values of $T_R$, the values of HV decrease. On the other hand, the values of HV increase with increasing values of $\lambda_1$.

Keywords: Horizontal directional solidification, unsteady-state heat flow, primary dendrite arm spacing, microhardness, Al-Sn Alloys.

Resumo

As ligas Al-Sn são amplamente utilizadas em aplicações tribológicas. Nesse estudo, análises térmica, microestrutural e dureza (HV) foram realizadas ao longo de um lingote da liga Al-5,5%Sn, obtido por solidificação direcional horizontal transitória. Os principais parâmetros analisados incluem a velocidade de deslocamento da isoterma líquida ($V_L$) e a taxa de resfriamento ($T_R$). Esses parâmetros térmicos desempenham um papel fundamental na formação da microestrutura. A microestrutura dendrítica foi caracterizada através dos espaçamentos dentríticos primários ($\lambda_1$), os quais foram determinados, experimentalmente, e correlacionados com $V_L$ e $T_R$. O comportamento apresentado pela liga Al-5,5% Sn, durante a solidificação, é semelhante ao de outras ligas de alumínio, isto é, observa-se rede dendrítica mais grosseira com a diminuição da taxa de resfriamento, indicando que a imiscibilidade entre o
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1. Introduction

Alloys of the Al-Sn system are known to have good mechanical and tribological properties, making the alloys of this system suitable for applications requiring satisfactory wear resistance, for example automotive bearings (Yuan et al., 2000). The metallographic structure is characterized by a heterogeneous aluminum matrix with tin particles dispersed throughout the matrix. This type of structure determines the tribological behavior of the alloy, with the unyielding matrix being responsible for mechanical strength while the particles of Sn act as a solid lubricant (Perrone et al., 2002). Due to the limited miscibility of Sn in Al, it is expected that the rapid solidification conditions significantly affect the tribological properties by the modification of the microstructure (Cruz, 2008; Cruz et al., 2010).

When a metallic alloy is solidified, the most frequently observed solid morphology is the dendritic microstructure (Kaya et al., 2013), which is characterized by its microstructure parameters. Numerous solidification studies (Okamoto and Kishitake, 1975; Rocha et al., 2003; Peres, et al., 2005; Carvalho et al., 2013), all for Al-based alloys, have been reported with a view to characterizing the microstructure parameters, such as primary dendrite arm spacing \( \lambda_1 \) and secondary dendrite arm spacing \( \lambda_2 \), all destined for vertical upward directional solidification. In this case the influence of the convection is minimized when the solute is rejected for to the interdendritic regions, providing the formation of an interdendritic liquid denser than the global volume of liquid metal. When the process is carried out vertically downward, the system provides the melt convection that arises during the process. In the horizontal unidirectional solidification, when the chill is placed on the side of the mold, convection in function of the composition gradients in the liquid always occurs.

\[
H = H_0 + k \times d^{1/2} \quad \text{and} \quad \sigma = \sigma_i + k \times d^{1/2}
\]

(1)

where \( H \) is the hardness of the material; \( \sigma \) is the yield stress, \( "d" \) is the average grain size; \( H_0, \sigma_i \) and \( k \) are particular constants obtained experimentally for the material. However, for some metallic systems, the dendrite arm spacing may have a more significant effect on the resulting mechanical properties of the material than the actual grain size.

The microhardness analysis is reported by Fan et al. (2010) as a relatively simple way to accomplish the complex task of predicting mechanical properties of alloys. In the case of Ti–Al alloys, Vickers microhardness (HV) is already used for quality control in the production of turbochargers, automotive valves and compressor blades. Kaya et al. (2004) reported the effect of the lamellar spacing of Pb–Cd, Sn–Zn and Bi–Cd eutectic alloys on microhardness. In some recent studies with binary Al–Fe hypoeutectic alloys, Hall–Petch type relationships between hardness and the scale of the microstructure have been proposed for alloys solidified under transient heat flow conditions (Silva et al., 2012). It was shown that the hardness increases with the increase in alloy solute content and with the decrease in cell/dendritic spacing for any alloy examined. In recently published studies, Kaya et al. (2008; 2013) correlated the microstructural parameters \( \lambda_1 \) and \( \lambda_2 \) of aluminum based alloys with hardness values, measured on the transverse and longitudinal sections of the cast product under steady-state solidification conditions. The results showed that the increasing of the dendritic arm spacing promoted reduction of the tested hardness, i.e., the studies indicate that the structure refinement degree yields materials with higher hardness and therefore with greater wear resistance. Thus, the aim of the present work was to experimentally investigate the influence of thermal parameters on the dendritic arm spacing and the microhardness of the Al-5.5wt.-%Sn alloy directionally solidified in a horizontal solidification device.

2. Experimental procedure

2.1 - Sample Preparation and Solidification
Horizontal unidirectional solidification experiments were carried out with the Al-5.5wt.%Sn alloy in unsteady-state heat flow conditions in order to simulate solidification conditions typical of industrial foundry processes. The casting assembly used in solidification experiments was recently published (Nogueira et al., 2012, Carvalho et al., 2013). It was designed in such a way that the heat was extracted only through the water-cooled system placed in the lateral mold wall, promoting horizontal directional solidification. The carbon steel mold used had a wall thickness of 3 mm, a length of 110 mm, a height of 60 mm and a width of 80 mm. The lateral inner mold surfaces were covered with a layer of insulating alumina and the upper part of the mold was closed with refractory material to prevent heat losses. The thermal contact condition at the metal/mold interface was also standardized with the heat extracting surface being polished.

The alloy was melted in situ and heated until a superheat of 10% above the liquidus temperature (T_L) using an electrical furnace. Approaching the superheat temperature, the mold was taken from the heater and set immediately on a water cooled carbon steel chill. Water was circulated through this cooling jacket keeping the carbon steel plate during the solidification at a constant temperature of about 25°C and thus inducing a longitudinal heat transfer from the mold. During the solidification process, temperatures at different positions in the casting during solidification of the alloy investigated in this study are shown in Figure 1. It is well known that the primary dendritic arm spacing are dependent on solidification thermal variables such as V_L and T_R, all of which vary with time and position during solidification. In order to determine more accurate values of these parameters, the results of experimental thermal analysis have been used to determine the displacement of the liquidus isotherm, i.e., the thermocouple readings have also been used to generate a plot of position from the metal/mold interface as a function of time corresponding to the liquidus front passing by each thermocouple. A curve fitting technique on such experimental points has generated power functions of position as a function of time. The derivative of this function with respect to time has yielded values for V_L. The T_L profile was calculated by considering the thermal data recorded immediately after the passing of the liquidus front by each thermocouple. The method for measuring the tip cooling rate was used recently by Rocha et al. (2003).

2.3 - Metallographic Analysis

Selected transverse (perpendicular to the growth direction) sections of the directionally solidified specimens at 10, 15, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90 and 100 mm from the metal-mold interface were polished and etched with a solution of 5%NaOH in water for micrograph examination. Image processing system Olympus BX51 and Image Tool (IT) software were used to measure primary arm spacing (about 20 independent readings for each selected position, with the average taken to be the local spacing) and their distribution range. The method used for measuring the primary arm spacing on the transverse section was the triangle method utilized by Rocha et al. (2003).

![Figure 1](image)

(a) Cooling curves showing the liquidus (T_L) and solidus (T_E) temperatures of the alloy studied and (b) Cooling curves recorded by five thermocouples inside the casting.

2.4 - Measurement of Microhardness

The mechanical properties of any solidified materials are usually determined with hardness tests, tensile strength tests, ductility tests, etc. Since true tensile strength testing of the solidified alloys gave inconsistent results with wide scattering, due to strong dependence on the solidified sample surface quality, the mechanical properties were monitored by hardness...
testing, which is one of the easiest and most straightforward techniques (Kaya et al., 2013). Thus, microhardness measurements in this work were carried out using a Shimadzu HMV-2 hardness measuring test device using a 50 g load and a dwell time of 10 s, according to the ASTM: E 384-11e1 and Kaya et al. (2008, 2013).

3. Results and discussion

Figure 2 presents microstructures of a cross section of the samples at 10, and 60 mm from metal/mold interface, showing the primary dendrite arms. Figure 3(a) shows the average experimental values of primary dendritic spacing as a function of distance from the metal/mold interface obtained in this work. It is observed that dendrite arm spacing increases with the distance from the heat-extracting surface of the alloy investigated. It is noted that this behavior is reflected in correlation with the growth rate and cooling rate, i.e., primary spacing increases with decreasing thermal parameters, as shown in Figures 3 (b) and (c).

Figure 2
Solidification microstructure: (a) P = 5 mm, \( V_L = 0.75 \) mm/s, \( T_R = 6.6 \) °C/s and \( \lambda_1 = 65 \) µm; (b) P = 60 mm, \( V_L = 0.60 \) mm/s, \( T_R = 1.30 \) °C/s and \( \lambda_1 = 119 \) µm.

Figure 3
(a) Primary dendrite arm spacing as a function of: (a) distance from metal-mold interface; (b) tip growth rate; (c) tip cooling rate and (d) Comparison of experimental and theoretical primary dendrite arm spacing as a function of cooling rate.

The \( R^2 \) is the least-squares correlation coefficient.

Results from literature for Aluminum based binary alloys: Al-Cu (Rocha et al., 2003), Al-Si (Peres et al., 2005; Carvalho et al., 2013) and Al-Sn (Cruz et al., 2010) alloys also indicate an increase in spacing with decreasing \( V_L \) and \( T_R \). Observed by Cruz et al. (2010), the Al-Sn is an immiscible binary alloy system, with an Al-rich dendritic matrix involving an Sn-rich eutectic mixture distributed along the interdendritic regions. For positions closer to the cooled casting, i.e., at high values of the cooling rate, a more extensive distribution of the eutectic mixture is attained, which is consequently associated with the fineness of the interdendritic spacing. Notice that Figure 3(c) shows that power laws equal to -1.1 and -0.55 characterize the experimental variation of primary spacing with growth rate and cooling rate, respectively, i.e: \( \lambda_1 = 62(V_L)^{-1.1} \) and \( \lambda_1 = 144(T_R)^{-0.55} \). This is in agreement with observations reported by Rocha et al. (2003A);Peres et al.2005), Carvalho et al (2013) and Cruz et al.(2012) who stated that exponential relationships \( \lambda_1 = \) constant \( (T_R)^{-0.55} \) best generate the experimental variation of primary dendritic arms with cooling rate along the unsteady-state solidification of Al–Cu, Al–Si and Al-Sn alloys, respectively.

Figure 3(d) shows the comparisons between the present experimental results of primary spacing with theoretical predictions furnished by unsteady-state pre-
Properties: Hunt–Lu’s model (HL) (1966) and Bouchard–Kirkaldy’s model (BK) (1997), with a calibration factor \( a_1 = 250 \) for Al–Sn alloys, as suggested by these authors and \( a_1 = 50 \), suggested this work. It is observed that the theoretical values calculated from both models overestimate the experimental values. On the other hand, for \( a_1 = 50 \), a good approximation is observed between the experimental results and those calculated by BK. Similarly, Cruz (2008) also noted that the experimental data did not fit the model of Bouchard-Kirkaldy for primary growth. The author attributes this behavior to the extensive range of solidification of the Al-Sn system, and the large difference in density between the two components (virtually immiscible), which significantly increases under heat extraction conditions in the vertical direction, which phenomenon can be attributed to results observed in this work. The predicted dendritic spacing calculated for unsteady solidification by Hunt-Lu’s and Bouchard-Kirkaldy’s models are subjected to deviations caused mainly by the unaccounted diffusion relaxations and coring reductions for primary spacing. The thermophysical properties of the Al-5.5wt.%Sn alloy, used to calculate the theoretical values of \( \lambda_1 \) were obtained from Thermo-Calc software and are summarized in Table 1. Comparison between the results obtained in this work with those of Cruz (2008) and Okamoto-Kishitake (1975) is performed, as shown in Figure 4. The results of Cruz underestimate Okamoto-Kishitake’s values. On the other hand, noted is an excellent approximation of obtained experimental results with those of Okamoto-Kishitake. This can be attributed to the compositions of the alloys being very close.

The dependence of the microhardness on the growth rate, cooling rate and the primary dendrite arm spacing for the investigated alloy is shown in Figures 5 (a), (b), (c) and (d), respectively. It can be seen from Figures 5 (a) e (b) that an increase in the growth rate and cooling rate leads to a decrease in the microhardness. The variation of the microhardness as a function of the dendritic spacing can be noted in Figures 5 (c) and (d), respectively. It can be observed that an increase in the \( \lambda_1 \) values also increases the HV values. This result is in accordance with the study of Cruz (2010), which observed that for the Al-Sn alloys, the wear volume decreases with increasing \( \lambda_1 \). According to the author the lower wear volume observed for coarser dendritic structures for the Al-Sn alloys seems to be associated with the larger Sn-rich interdendritic regions. He also assumed that the lubrication effect of the soft Sn-rich areas seems to be improved for coarser microstructures. Variation of micro-indentation hardness with solidification and microstructure parameters in the Al based alloys was investigated recently by Kaya et al. (2008, 2013). The exponent value of \( \lambda_1 \) obtained in this work (0.30) is between to the values of 0.28, 0.40, and 0.43, 0.35 obtained by Kaya et al. (2008, 2013) for Al-based alloys (Al-Si, Al-Cu and Al-Ti alloys), solidified in an Bridgman system.

![Figure 4](image-url)

Comparison between the results obtained in this work with those of Cruz (2008) and Okamoto-Kishitake.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Density</th>
<th>Latent heat of fusion</th>
<th>Solute diffusivity</th>
<th>Gibbs-Thomson coefficient</th>
<th>Solidus temperature</th>
<th>Liquidus temperature</th>
<th>Partition coefficient</th>
<th>Liquidus slope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbol/units</td>
<td>( \rho \ [\text{kg/m}^3] ) (solid)</td>
<td>( L \ [\text{J/kg}] )</td>
<td>( D \ [\text{m}^2/\text{s}] )</td>
<td>( \Gamma \ [\text{m./K}] )</td>
<td>( T_s \ [\text{C}] )</td>
<td>( T_L \ [\text{C}] )</td>
<td>( k_o )</td>
<td>( m_1 \ [\text{K/wt.pct}] )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-5.5wt.%Sn</td>
<td>3011.6</td>
<td>39700.0</td>
<td>( 3 \times 10^9 )</td>
<td>( 9 \times 10^4 )</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The principal results of the present work can be summarized as follows:

(1) Experimental observations show that the values of $\lambda_1$ decrease as the $V_L$ and $T_R$ increase. Relations between $\lambda_1$ with the growth rate and cooling rate were obtained by the following experimental laws:

$$\lambda_1 = 62(V_L)^{-1.1}$$

$$\lambda_1 = 144(T_R)^{-0.55}$$

(2) The values of HV for directionally solidified Al-5.5wt%Sn alloy were measured. It was found that the values of microhardness increase with the decreasing of the values of $V_L$ as well as with the increasing of the values of the $\lambda_1$. Microhardness has shown to be significantly affected by the thermal parameters and by the scale of the primary dendrite arm spacing. Experimental laws have been determined correlating HV with $V_L$, $T_R$ and $\lambda_1$, giving as results:

$$HV = 21(V_L)^{0.71}$$

$$HV = 32(T_R)^{0.13}$$

$$HV = 8.2(\lambda_1)^{1.10}$$

$$HV = 37 - 1593(\lambda_1)^{-1/2}$$

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6. References


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Angela de Jesus Vasconcelos et al.  


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