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Article

A New Lumped Approach for the Simulation of the Magnetron Injection Gun for MegaWatt-Class EU Gyrotrons

Nicolò Badodi ¹, Antonio Cammi ^{1,*}, Alberto Leggieri ², Francisco Sanchez ³ and Laura Savoldi ⁴¹ Department of Energy, Politecnico di Milano, via la Masa 34, 20156 Milano, Italy; nicolo.badodi@polimi.it² Microwave & Imaging Sub-Systems, THALES Vélizy-Villacoublay, F-78141 Vélizy-Villacoublay, France; alberto.leggieri@thalesgroup.com³ Fusion for Energy (F4E), Josep Pla 2, 08019 Barcelona, Spain; francisco.sanchez@f4e.europa.eu⁴ MAHTEP Group, Dipartimento Energia, Politecnico di Torino, 10124 Torino, Italy; laura.savoldi@polito.it

* Correspondence: antonio.cammi@polimi.it

Abstract: In the framework of the ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor) project, one of the key components of the reactor is the ECRH (Electron Cyclotron Resonance Heating). This system has the duty to heat the plasma inside the tokamak, using high frequency and power radio waves, produced by sets of 1MW gyrotrons. One of the main issues related to the gyrotron operation is the output power drop that happens right after the beginning of a pulse. In this work, we study the underlying phenomena that cause the power drop, focusing on the gyrotron's MIG (Magnetron Injection Gun) of the 1MW, 170 GHz European Gyrotron prototype for ITER. It is shown how the current emission and the temperature of the emitter are tightly bound, and how their interaction causes the power drop, observed experimentally. Furthermore, a simple yet effective lumped-parameter model to describe the MIG's cathode thermal dynamics is developed, which is able to predict the power output of the gyrotron by simulating the propagation of the heat inside this component. The model is validated against test results, showing a good capability to reproduce the measured behavior of the system, while still being open to further improvements.

Keywords: ECRH; gyrotrons; magnetron injection gun; lumped model; ITER



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1. Introduction

In the framework of nuclear fusion research, a worldwide aggressive research program is addressing the main issues concerning the operation of magnetic-confinement devices, i.e., tokamaks [1], such as ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor) [2], under construction in France or JT-60SA [3], under commissioning in Japan, and stellarators [4], such the Wendenstein 7X [5], under operation in Germany. For both kinds of configurations, for present and future machines, the plasma inside the vacuum chamber needs to be heated up to temperatures of 100–200 MK, which requires dedicated heating technologies. The Electron Cyclotron Resonance Heating (ECRH) is one of the plasma heating systems, and it consists of a cluster of MegaWatt-class gyrotron units [6], delivering power in the form of radiofrequency within the mm-range wavelength in continuous wave (CW) operation. The gyrotron tube used to heat plasma in the Wendenstein 7X reactor is shown in Figure 1 as an example.

Gyrotrons [6] are electron cyclotron masers, where electromagnetic energy (at a frequency near the electron cyclotron frequency or one of its harmonics) is radiated by a beam of weakly relativistic electrons, rotating (“gyrating”) in an external longitudinal magnetic field with a perpendicular velocity in the so-called resonator, which, in Figure 2a, is addressed as the “cavity”.



Figure 1. TH1507 140GHz W-7X dedicated gyrotron.

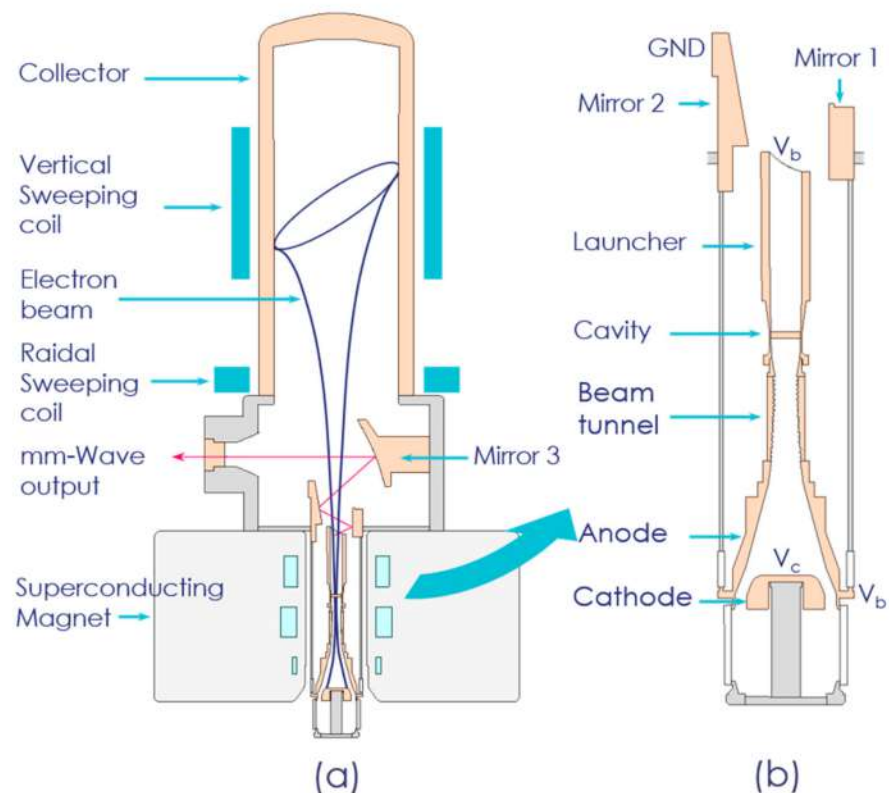


Figure 2. Schematic view of a gyrotron. (a) Cross-sectional view of the whole tube. (b) Cross-sectional view of the cathode–resonator–mirrors assembly.

The gyrotron subsystem in charge of generating the beam current to produce the radio frequency (RF) wave is the Magnetron Injection Gun (MIG). This is composed of a central cathode and an external anode, mounted one inside the other, as shown in Figure 2a.

Electrons emitted by the anode are accelerated inside the electric field produced by the application of a cathode–anode electric potential. They are then shaped into a hollow beam and guided towards the resonating cavity, by the powerful magnetic field generated by the superconducting magnet. Once the electron beam enters the cavity, the beam–wave interaction causes the generation of an RF-wave, which is then extracted and guided outside the device, by a series of mirrors, to be used in plasma-heating and other applications.

Focusing on the cathode, which is shown in detail in Figure 3, we can notice that it assumes a mushroom-like external shape, necessary for the correct shaping (together with the anode configuration) of the external electric field. The internal configuration is quite complex, with the presence of numerous thermal shields. This is due to the fact that the electron emission region must be extremely well-defined, to obtain the desired beam shape and device performance. Thus, only the emitter ring must be heated up, in order to emit electrons, while the surrounding components must be kept as cool as possible, to avoid spurious emissions from other regions of the cathode.

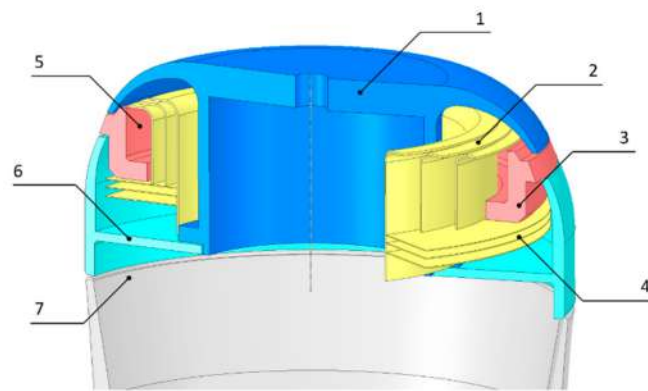


Figure 3. Magnetron Injection Gun (MIG) scheme: (1) nose-cone, (2) upper thermal shields, (3) emitter ring, (4) lower thermal shields, (5) filament cavity, (6) prolongator, and (7) base.

The emitter ring itself is made of a material which can withstand the high operational temperatures required and that promotes electron emission by having low material-to-vacuum work function. In the case of the European gyrotron for ITER [7,8], of special interest here, the emitter is constituted by a substrate of sintered tungsten impregnated by barium-calcium aluminate. To generate the amount of current necessary to drive, e.g., the 1MW ITER gyrotron, the surface of the emitter ring must reach temperatures of about 1200 K. An electrical heating element is placed purposely in the cavity formed by the emitter ring and the thermal shields, as shown in Figure 3, labeled as “Filament cavity”.

While the technology of gyrotrons is progressing in Europe [9] and around the world [6,10], some issues are still to be addressed and solved, to guarantee an optimized long-pulse operation at the full-rated power. Among them, as far as the MIG’s cathode is concerned, we find the design of a suitable control system to guarantee a constant current [11], which, in fact, tends to decay during the gyrotron operation, jeopardizing the device performance. During the long pulse tests performed on the 1MW, 170 GHz European Gyrotron prototype for ITER, for instance, it has been observed that the cathode current undergoes a drop of more than 20% over the course of few seconds, after the beginning of the shot [7,8,12]. Up to now, the main technique utilized to counteract this phenomenon consists in the pre-programming of heating sequences of the MIG’s cathode, to reach the desired current level during the gyrotron operation [11]. This technique has been proven effective for stabilizing the current during the testing of the device, since, by rising the heating power before the start of a pulse, it is possible to overcome the time delay associated with the heat propagation inside the system. This allowed the operators to maintain the emitter surface temperature and, thus, the emitted current, as steady as possible. However, when operating inside fusion plants, gyrotrons are required to be turned on and off without previous notice. This happens because their operation is subordinated to the

control of the central system of the plant. Thus, pre-programming of the heating sequences is not suitable as a power-stabilization technique, since the instance in which gyrotrons must be turned on or off is not known in advance.

Different works over the control systems of vacuum tube devices have been carried on in the past over systems whose requirements differ substantially from the ones analyzed in this work, or for the stabilization of different parameters of high power gyrotrons. The work from Idehara et al. [13] describes the stabilization of the output power of gyrotrons used for high-power spectroscopy that, however, have a much faster response than MW lever fusion gyrotrons. Another relevant paper refers to the control of medium-sized RF sources for NMR spectroscopy devices, which, however, are continuously operated and thus require only long-term feedback stabilization of the operational parameters [14]. A lot of research [15,16] has been done, instead, on the frequency, mode, and phase stabilization of various sizes of gyrotron devices, but none focuses on the control of the thermal behavior of the MIG's cathode.

In this work, we concentrate on the test-case of the MIG of a European gyrotron designed for ITER (1 MW and 170 GHz [7,8,12]), and we develop a lumped-parameter dynamic model for its cathode that is capable of capturing the physical phenomena that are responsible for the current drop in the gyrotrons, when operated at high power levels. The purpose behind the lumped model development is twofold: First, having a numerical model able to predict the evolution of the system can allow operators to calculate and implement in the experiments different sequences of input heating power, as to minimize the occurrence of the current drop when performing controlled tests. This would allow, for example, the performing of long shots with minimal presence of current drop and thus allow a full test with RF production on the gyrotron. The second purpose of this model is to have a simple tool that will allow us to verify the effects of the implementation of a suitable control system that is able to suppress undesired current decay.

The paper is organized as follows: First, we focus on the detailed description of the physics of thermionic emission in the operational regime of the gyrotron MIG, which is fully relevant for the current drop phenomenon. After the reason of the current decay is identified, the lumped-parameter thermal–electric model is presented and then validated by comparison with experimental data from the Fusion for Energy (F4E)'s FALCON facility, at the EPFL (École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne) premises in Lausanne.

2. The MIG of the 1MW European Gyrotron for ITER

2.1. Geometry and Materials

In this section, with reference to Figure 3, we provide a detailed explanation of the geometry of the MIG's cathode and the materials of which it is composed.

- The main component responsible for the electron emission is the emitter ring, which, in Figure 3, is labeled as element #3. The beam current generation occurs on its external surface, due to the thermionic effect. Here, due to their thermal agitation, electrons are able to overcome the material-vacuum potential barrier and leave the surface. To promote this phenomenon, the material of which the emitter ring is composed must be characterized by a low metal-vacuum work function. For this reason, this component is built using a sintered tungsten substrate which is impregnated with barium-calcium aluminate.
- To direct all the heat injected into the system towards the emitter ring, a set of thermal shields are mounted around the heating element, contained in the cavity formed by the emitter ring and the shields, labeled as #5 in Figure 3. The thermal shields themselves, labeled as #2 and #4, respectively, are made of polished and highly reflective material. This is due to the fact that the main mechanism of heat transfer between components is radiative heat transfer, since the cavity of the gyrotron is evacuated.
- Parts #1 (the nose cone) and #6 (the prolongator) in Figure 3 are used as a support for the emitter ring and for the thermal shields. Their shape and alignment are crucial for obtaining high efficiency in the RF power production, since they modify the electric

field configuration inside the MIG. The electric field, together with the magnetic field, determine the direction of the electrons towards the resonant cavity and the shaping of the beam.

2.2. Working Conditions

Magnetron Injection Guns installed on vacuum tube devices to generate the beam current can be operated in two different regimes that depend on their working parameters [17,18]. The most common regime, in which small telecommunication tubes and the majority of scientific research apparatus work, is the Space Charge Limited (SCL) regime. Here the accelerating electric field inside the tube is not strong enough to drive away from the surface of the emitter all the electrons expelled due to the thermionic effect. This causes the formation of a charge cloud around the emitter ring, that limits the current below the value of the one emitted by pure thermionic effect. In this regime, raising or lowering the electric field influences directly the amount of electrons that manage to escape from the surface, and thus the beam current is dependent on the accelerating voltage applied between the electrodes [17]. This situation is represented by the black curve of Figure 4, named Lang–Blodgett.

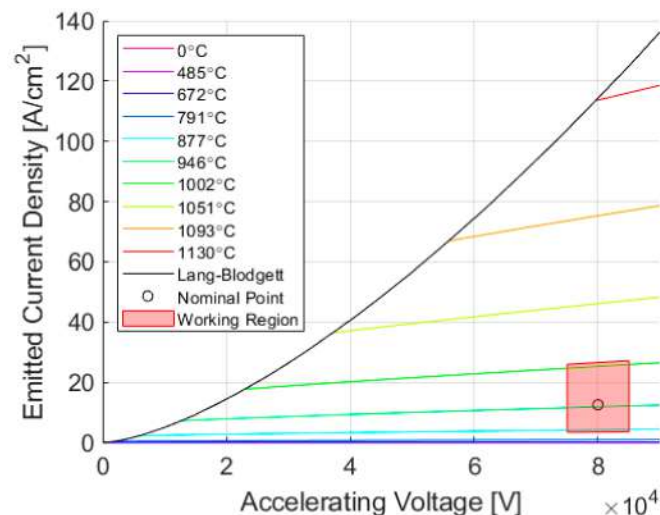


Figure 4. Graphical representation of the operational regimes of the emitter.

The second regime is called Temperature Limited (TL) regime and is encountered in devices in which the accelerating potential is sufficiently high to drive away from the surface of the emitter all the electrons generated via the thermionic effect. When this regime is reached, a saturation effect is encountered, and raising the electric field does not affect the amount of electrons emitted by the cathode anymore. Only the temperature of the emitter is now affecting the number of electrons emitted per unit time, which is equal to the one emitted by thermionic effect [18]. This situation is shown by one of the colored curves of Figure 4, which shows the current saturation in the TL regime. The slight dependence of the current on the accelerating potential still present in the saturation zone is due to small variations in the work function of the metal when an electric field is applied to its surface. This phenomenon is studied in the next paragraphs.

The cathode working region depends fundamentally on three different parameters: the work function of the material that composes the emitting region, its surface temperature, and the value of the anode–cathode potential [17–19]. In Figure 3, we can observe a plot of the different regime as a function of the accelerating voltage. Below the black curve named “Lang–Blodgett”, the regime is TL, while the curve itself describes the SC regime. The colored curves represent different values of the emitted current in the TL regime for varying temperature of operation of the emitter ring, while the red square represents the expected region in which the MIG’s cathode operational parameters fall.

From this analysis, we can see that the operational regime of the electron gun can be identified as the temperature limited regime, and thus the emitted current will be fundamentally dependent on the temperature of the emitter region surface. The phenomenon can be described by the Richardson–Dushman equation [20] (Equation (1)).

$$J_{RD} = 120T^2 \exp\left(-\frac{W_0 + c \cdot T - \Delta W}{K_b T}\right) \left[\frac{A}{\text{cm}^2} \right] \quad (1)$$

where W_0 represents the material work function, the term $c \cdot T$ is a correction term that keeps into account the variation of the work function with temperature, and the term ΔW implements into the model the Schottky lowering of the surface potential barrier due to the presence of an external electric field. All the terms are known from the material characteristics, except for the Schottky barrier lowering [19]. That term can be considered fixed and constant, since it is directly related to the value of the electric field on the surface of the emitter by Equation (2) [20]:

$$\Delta W = -\sqrt{e^3 \frac{E}{4\pi\epsilon_0}} [\text{eV}] \quad (2)$$

which is itself directly related to the value of the anode–cathode applied voltage.

To retrieve the electric field value over the emitter surface, a finite-element simulation of the entire MIG was performed, using the software ANSYS®. In Figure 5, an azimuthal slice of the full computational domain is shown, to allow for the visualization of the various boundaries. The actual simulation domain is composed of the whole portion of vacuum included between the MIG’s cathode and anode. The choice of simulating the whole domain instead of simplifying it comes from the fact that the equations solved in this case are simple, and a steady state simulation was performed. Thus, the computational effort in this case is low.

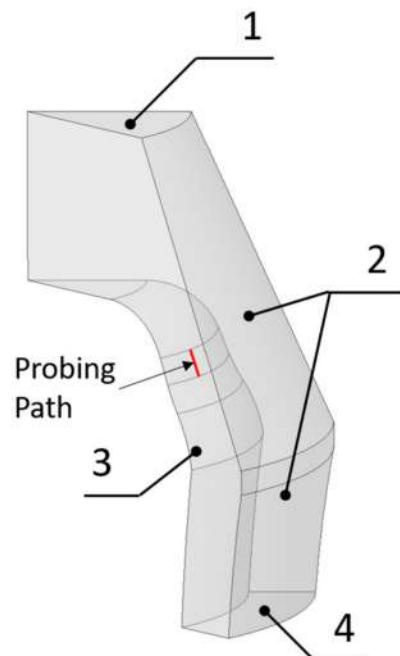


Figure 5. Azimuthal portion of the full domain used for the electric field simulation: (1) top boundary, (2) MIG’s anode surface, (3) MIG’s cathode surface, and (4) bottom boundary. The red line marks the probing path used for the generation of the plot in Figure 6.

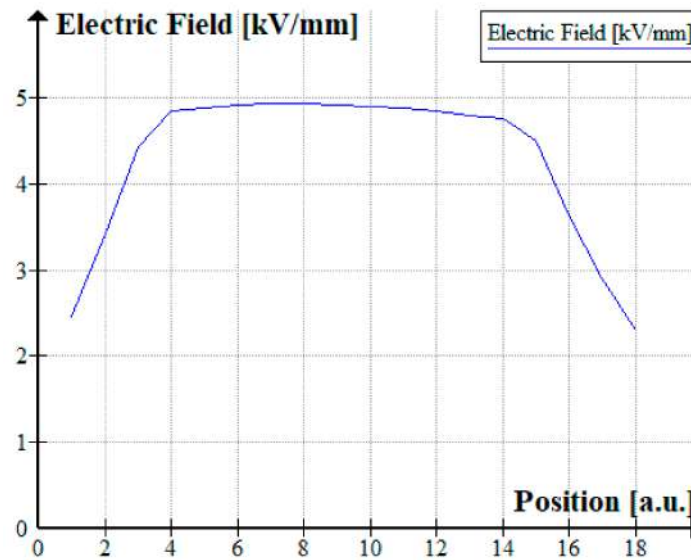


Figure 6. Electric field intensity on the surface of the emitter ring over the linear position along the emitter-ring surface.

On this domain, the Poisson equation is solved, to retrieve the electric field value present on the cathode surface when operating at nominal conditions. The boundary conditions for our case are the following:

- A potential of -50 kV is applied to the MIG's cathode, which, in Figure 5, is labeled as #3.
- A potential of $+30$ kV is applied to the MIG's anode, which is labeled as #2.
- On the flat top and bottom surfaces, labeled as #1 and #4, no boundary conditions are specified.

The results are reported in Figure 6, where the solution is sampled over the cells that compose the emitter ring surface, along the path shown in red in Figure 5. Here the electric field assumes a constant value of 4.9 kV/mm over most of the surface of the emitter ring and drops to lower values near its edges. With those electric field values, the Schottky lowering is in the order of 0.1 eV, which is enough to influence significantly the emitted current, due to the exponential nature of the equation [20].

From the Richardson–Dushman equation, the amount of heat that the electron current extracts from the emitting surface, when leaving it, can be computed. To do this, the current density is multiplied from the average electron energy [21], and thus the relation shown in Equation (3) is obtained:

$$q_p''(T_c) = (W_0 + 2K_b T) \cdot 120 T^2 \exp\left(-\frac{W_0 + c \cdot T - \Delta W}{K_b T}\right) \left[\frac{W}{\text{cm}^2}\right] \quad (3)$$

where q_p'' is the cooling power per unit area associated to the electron emission phenomenon.

Following this simple analysis, we can deduce that the underlying cause to the current drop phenomenon observed during the gyrotron long pulse operation is in fact related to proportionality of the electron beam generated from the emitter surface on its temperature. When electrons are emitted, they remove some energy from the emitter, causing a lowering of the surface temperature and, thus, a drop in the current via a feedback phenomenon. After a certain amount of time, the system reaches an equilibrium, in which the cooling power of the beam is counterbalanced by the heat diffusing to the surface through the material of which the emitter is composed.

3. A Lumped Model for the MIG's Cathode Thermal Behavior and Current Emission

3.1. Justification for a Lumped-Parameter Model

To investigate if the choice of a lumped parameter model is suitable for the description of the European 170 GHz, 1MW gyrotron's cathode, preliminary FEM (Finite Element Method) simulations were performed to inspect the temperature field inside the emitter ring and the other components. In particular, the software OpenFOAM [22] was utilized for simulating, in detail, the heat transfer between various parts of the system by implementing both conduction and radiation. For the second heat transfer mode, the Radiation Transfer Equation (RTE) was solved by using the implemented fvDOM model, which is based on the discrete ordinate method for solving directional-dependent transport equations [23,24].

The computational domain for the FEM simulation is shown in Figure 7 and is implemented with the classical wedge shape, which is the standard OpenFOAM model to represent axial-symmetric geometries [24]. This configuration was chosen over the complete revolved geometry for computation reasons, to reduce the CPU-time required for performing a single simulation. The domain is composed of several interacting bodies. They are surrounded by a vacuum, which is implemented in this simulation as low-pressure stationary air, with a fictitiously extremely low thermal conductivity ($10^{-10} \left[\frac{W}{m \cdot K} \right]$). Note that the stationarity for the air is imposed, to avoid errors caused by its buoyancy.

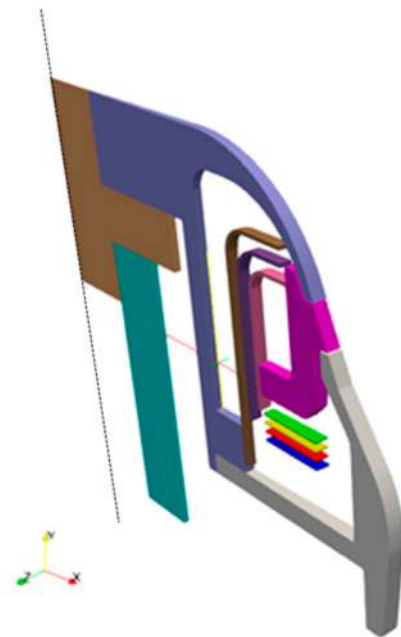


Figure 7. Scheme of the solution domain utilized for the FEM simulation. Each body is represented with a different color. The computational domain is represented as a wedge of 2° . The black dotted line represents the rotation symmetry axis.

In each solid zone, thermal conduction is allowed. The heat-diffusion equation for isotropic materials is solved, subject to the thermal flux on the surfaces caused by the presence of radiation in the vacuum. In the fictitious fluid mimicking the vacuum, the heat conduction is modeled but negligible, and the radiation transport equation is solved, so that the ray intensity for each cell and every direction is retrieved. This is then combined to the surface radiative properties of the solids, to generate a boundary heat flux term in each of them.

Continuity of temperature field is imposed between any solids and the medium implementing the vacuum around them, and between touching solids. The latter condition is equivalent to ignore any thermal resistances in the contact area.

The initial conditions are imposed for the temperature and ray intensity field, and the whole MIG is assumed to be in thermal equilibrium, at room temperature.

The mesh quality is checked by using the OpenFOAM utility checkMesh [25], to verify that mesh metrics respect strict quality conditions for the solver to produce reliable results. The equations were solved by using a time-varying scheme, and the whole system was simulated for 2000s, time necessary for all the solid to reach a stable temperature.

To check to what extent the temperature of the emitter remains uniform, the time evolution of the temperature field under a step-wise input power of various amplitudes is analyzed first. As we can see, in Figure 8, for an input power of 300 W, the maximum difference in temperature amounts to just -0.39% , and it is found to be between the average and the minimum temperature of the body, showing that, over the course of the whole heating sequence of the emitter, from room temperature to the nominal one, the internal temperature field remains quite uniform. Figure 9 reports the maximum deviations from the average temperature for different values of the heating power, showing that even for the high-power levels, close to the maximum operative power allowed for the cathode heater, the deviation remains lower than 1%, which we judge acceptable for the implementation for a lumped parameter model.

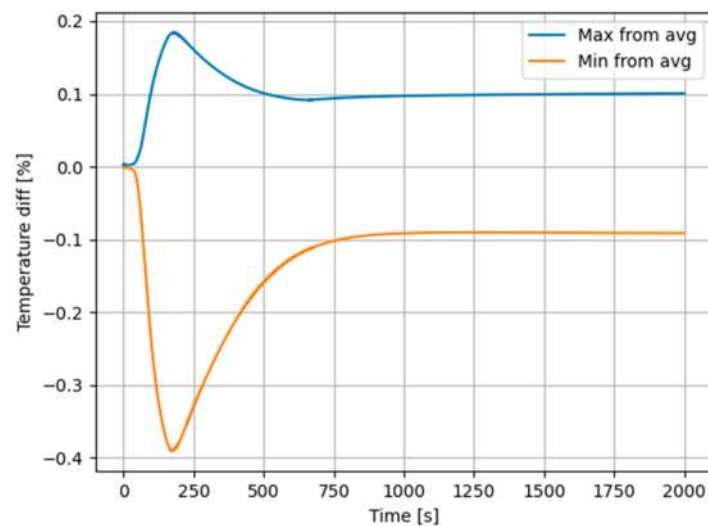


Figure 8. Time evolution of the maximum and minimum temperatures in the emitter ring for an input power of 300 W.

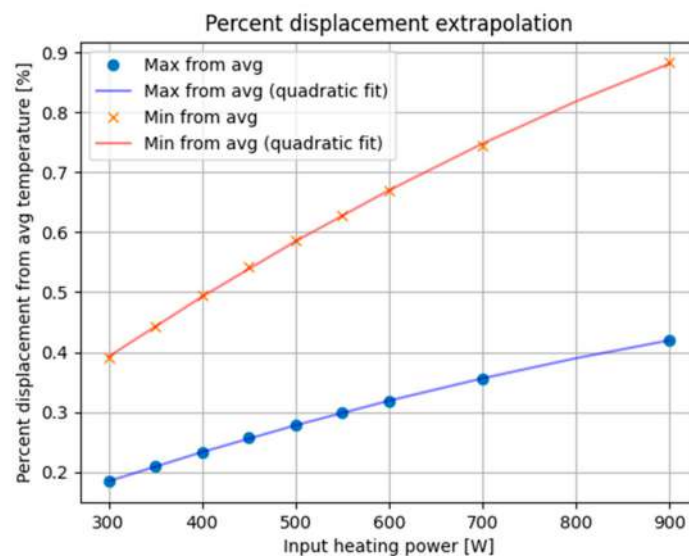


Figure 9. Maximum percent deviation from the average temperature for various power input.