Measurement of absolute flow velocity vector using dual-angle, delay-encoded Doppler optical coherence tomography

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Received August 2, 2006; revised October 27, 2006; accepted November 3, 2006; posted November 20, 2006 (Doc. ID 73739); published February 2, 2007

Single-beam laser Doppler measurements of flow velocity are only sensitive to the velocity component parallel to the optical axis. We describe a simple modification to a standard Doppler optical coherence tomography (OCT) system using a single sample beam that provides velocity information from multiple angles within the beam. By introducing a glass plate midway into the OCT beam path, the sample beam is divided into several components, each with a different group delay and each providing a separate interferogram with its own effective Doppler angle. By combining the Doppler shift measured in each of these component interferograms, the flow velocity vector is fully determined. © 2007 Optical Society of America

OCIS codes: 170.4500, 170.3340, 170.3890.

Optical coherence tomography (OCT) is an emerging imaging modality that provides noncontact, high-resolution structural images of biological tissue.1,2 Based on principles of low-coherence interferometry, the amplitude of the interferometric signal is used to map varying reflectivity within the sample. Doppler optical coherence tomography (DOCT) is a functional extension of OCT that uses the phase of the OCT signal to detect moving scatterers within tissue.3,4 It is well known that the optical Doppler effect can be exploited to obtain velocity measurements of moving scatterers within living tissue. However, single-beam laser Doppler measurements of flow velocity are sensitive to only the velocity vector component parallel to the optical axis of the beam. Our target application is DOCT imaging of small vessels within the retina. When the angle of the probe beam with respect to the vessel is not known a priori, an absolute measurement of flow velocity in a plane will require single-beam measurements at no less than two different angles (absolute flow in 3D requires at least three angles). Techniques in laser Doppler velocimetry have been developed using beams at multiple angles to determine both the axial and transverse velocity components.5,6 More recently, techniques in DOCT have been developed to address this problem. The first uses measurements of Doppler frequency shift and Doppler frequency broadening to determine the Doppler angle.7 However, frequency broadening measurements can measure the total flow speed but not the vector direction in 3D. Moreover, the data suggest a significant increase in measurement uncertainty at slower velocities (i.e., less than 20 mm s^{-1}) and at angles near 90°. Another method employs the use of a quadrant detector in a free-space interferometer to determine the velocity.8 This technique is not amenable to fiber-based OCT systems. Dave and Milner have developed a technique using DOCT that measures velocity at two different angles and encodes the resultant OCT signals in orthogonal polarization states.9 In the context of the retina, polarization encoding is vulnerable to cross-talk due to birefringence in the cornea and crystalline lens. In this Letter, we demonstrate a technique, using a single sample beam, that provides velocity information from multiple angles within the beam. By introducing a glass plate into the OCT beam path, the sample beam is divided into two components, each with a different group delay and each probing the sample at a different angle. Because they experience different delays, the signals representing the two probe angles are independently detectable. By making use of the Doppler shift measured in each of these component interferograms, the flow velocity vector is fully determined in the plane of the two component beams. By aligning the plane of these component beams parallel to the length of the blood vessel, we can obtain an absolute measurement of velocity.

As illustrated in Fig. 1(a), to find a flow velocity vector $V$, one can obtain velocity measurements $v_1$ and $v_2$ with a known separation angle between the two measurements of $\theta$ by finding the angles of incidence $\alpha_1$ and $\alpha_2$, such that
with a peak field amplitude of $A_0$ on the optical axis, falling off by a factor of $e^{-2}$ at a radius of $r_0$. We assume that the glass plate intersects exactly half of the beam. The effective center of the half-beam is given by the amplitude-weighted first moment of the transverse distance $x$ from the center of the beam where the glass plate edge is located, as shown in Fig. 1(a),

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\int_0^\infty \int_0^\infty x A(r) 2 \pi r dr d\phi}{\int_0^\infty \int_0^\infty A(r) 2 \pi r dr d\phi}$$

$$= \frac{\int_0^\infty \int_0^\infty e^{-(r_0^2 - r^2/2)} r^2 dr d\phi}{\int_0^\infty \int_0^\infty d\phi} = \frac{r_0}{\sqrt{\pi}},$$

where $r$ and $\phi$ are the polar coordinates in the plane normal to the beam and $x = r \sin \phi$. If we consider the beam profile at the location of the lens of focal length $f$ in Fig. 1(a), then the effective angle between the two beamlets is given by

$$\theta = 2 \arctan(r_0/f \sqrt{\pi}),$$

where $\theta$ is defined in Fig. 1(a). The lines in Fig. 1(a) labeled $v_1$ and $v_2$ represent the rays at the effective center of beamlets 1 and 2, respectively.

To demonstrate the feasibility of delay-encoded DOCT, we used a conventional bench-top time-domain OCT imaging system with a broadband light source (1291 nm center wavelength, 21 µm coherence length). For an OCT sample beam with an $e^{-2}$ intensity width (i.e., $2r_0$) of 6.8 mm and an objective lens with a focal length of 30 mm, we calculated our effective separation angle to be $7.3^\circ$. For a standard Gullstrand eye, a beam of equivalent numerical aperture (6.8/30) would fit within a pupil of 4.3 mm, which is smaller than the average pupil size in dim light. To verify this angle calculation by measurement, a mirror was first placed in the sample plane. The optical axis of the scanning beam was set normal to the mirror surface, and a 5 mm thick glass plate was placed halfway into the probe beam proximal to the scanning mirrors. The angles at which each satellite peak experienced maximum amplitude were recorded, and the difference was taken to be the effective separation angle. Subsequently, a flow phantom consisting of a 0.6 mm inner diameter glass capillary tube containing flowing 5% Intralipid was placed in the sample beam and tilted on the same apparatus used for the previous experiment. Figure 1(a) shows the orientation of the phantom to the bisected OCT beam. A previously described autocorrelation algorithm was used to estimate velocity. The angles at which each satellite Doppler image measured zero flow were recorded and the difference was also taken to be a measurement of the effective separation angle. The phantom was then imaged by scanning

$$A(r) = A_0 e^{-(r_0^2 - r^2)/2},$$
The average RMS error of the velocity measurements was 0.48 mm s\(^{-1}\). These data are summarized in Table 2. Figure 2(b) shows the estimation of absolute velocity of moving scatterers. By introducing a glass plate into the sample beam of an existing OCT system, this method can be used to estimate Doppler angle and absolute velocity. Although this demonstration was performed using a time-domain OCT system, we believe this technique is as easily implemented in a spectral-domain system. However, it should be mentioned that to sufficiently separate the satellite images one must use an increased scan range. Since the retina is relatively thin (~1 mm), a minor sacrifice in resolution could be made to gain the necessary scan range. Although this technique has been demonstrated for two dimensions, we believe it to be sufficient to obtain absolute velocity measurements when used for vessels in the retina since, with the use of a camera to visualize the vasculature, one dimension can be eliminated by orienting the plane containing the beamlets parallel to the axis of the vessel. It also follows that, with the implementation of a more complex optical delay element, three dimensions could be probed.

Table 1. RMS Errors for Estimation of Doppler Angle

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Angle of Incidence</th>
<th>RMS error (°)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>82°</td>
<td>0.72°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84°</td>
<td>0.38°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90°</td>
<td>0.21°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94°</td>
<td>0.47°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98°</td>
<td>0.84°</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. RMS Errors for Estimation of Velocity for Each Angle of Incidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Angle of Incidence</th>
<th>RMS error (nm/s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>82°</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84°</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90°</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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<td>94°</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98°</td>
<td>0.45</td>
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To conclude, we have described a Doppler OCT imaging technique that is capable of measuring absolute velocity of moving scatterers. By introducing a glass plate into the sample beam of an existing OCT system, this method can be used to estimate Doppler angle and absolute velocity. Although this demonstration was performed using a time-domain OCT system, we believe this technique is as easily implemented in a spectral-domain system. However, it should be mentioned that to sufficiently separate the satellite images one must use an increased scan range. Since the retina is relatively thin (~1 mm), a minor sacrifice in resolution could be made to gain the necessary scan range. Although this technique has been demonstrated for two dimensions, we believe it to be sufficient to obtain absolute velocity measurements when used for vessels in the retina since, with the use of a camera to visualize the vasculature, one dimension can be eliminated by orienting the plane containing the beamlets parallel to the axis of the vessel. It also follows that, with the implementation of a more complex optical delay element, three dimensions could be probed.

The authors acknowledge the contributions of Roger Lin and Michael Jenkins. This work was supported by the Whitaker Foundation (RG-02-0376) as well as the National Eye Institute (RO1 EY013516). This work was conducted in a facility constructed with support from Research Facilities Improvement Program Grant Number C06 RR12463-01 from the National Center for Research Resources, National Institutes of Health. A. M. Rollins’ e-mail address is andrew.rollins@case.edu.

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