Effect of lubricating oil on the flow and heat transfer characteristics of supercritical carbon dioxide

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ABSTRACT

Effects of lubricating oil on heat transfer performance of supercritical CO₂ were studied by applying three lubricants: PAG, PVE, and ECP. Heat transfer coefficient measurements and flow-pattern visualization were conducted in a horizontal tube of 2 mm I.D. at CO₂ pressures from 8 to 10 MPa and mass fluxes from 800 to 1200 kg m⁻²s⁻¹. The solubility of lubricants with CO₂ was found having remarkable influence on both the flow pattern and heat transfer coefficient. For PVE, which has the highest CO₂ solubility, oil droplets can only be observed occasionally and the oil film can hardly be identified at temperatures lower than T_{pc} , and the heat transfer coefficient does not greatly change with oil concentration. At higher temperatures, a decrease in the heat transfer coefficient with increasing oil concentration was observed for all three lubricants due to the formation of oil film. The experiments show that while ECP is inferior to PVE, it provides better heat transfer performance than PVG.

Keywords: CO₂, Lubricat, heat transfer, Polyalkylene glycol, Polyvinyl ether, ECP

NOMENCLATURE

A	surface area	(m^2)	Subscrip	ts
α	heat transfer coefficient	$(W m^{-2}K^{-1})$	CO_2	CO_2
G	mass flux	$(\text{kg m}^2\text{s}^{-1})$	in	inlet
Р	pressure	(MPa)	oil	oil
Q	heat exchange rate	(W)	рс	pseudocritical
x	oil concentration	(wt%)	out	outlet
Т	temperature	(°C)	W	wall
ΔT	average temperature difference	(°C)	water	water
ϕ	deterioration factor			

1. INTRODUCTION

Carbon dioxide, CO_2 , is being reintroduced as an environmentally benign working fluid for refrigeration and air conditioning systems because of increasing concerns regarding the contribution of conventional refrigerants to ozone depletion and global warming. Owing to its low critical point, a transcritical cycle is proposed for CO_2 systems. A great deal of research has been carried out on transcritical heat pump cycles and heat transfer characteristics of CO_2 at both supercritical and subcritical pressure. Previous studies such as those by Tanaka *et al.* (1967), Fang *et al.* (2001), and Dang *et al.* (2004) showed that the heat transfer characteristics of CO_2 at

supercritical pressure differ from those of fluids with constant properties. CO_2 has a better heat transfer performance owing to its low viscosity and high specific heat, especially within the pseudocritical temperature region. However, because of the entrainment of lubricating oils, both the heat transfer performance of CO_2 and the system performance in an actual heat pump system may be markedly worse than the predicted value for pure CO_2 . Therefore, it is essential to clarify the effects of lubricating oils on the heat transfer characteristics of CO_2 .

Hwang et al. (2007) experimentally investigated the distribution of PAG (polyalkylene glycol) oil in a CO₂ transcritical system by measuring the amount of oil retained in the suction line, evaporator, and gas cooler at various refrigerant mass flow rates and oil concentrations. They reported that about 50% of the oil was retained within the heat exchangers and suction line; this resulted in a large pressure drop, a decrease in the heat transfer performance, and concern regarding the reliability of the system. Zingerli and Groll (2000) measured the heat transfer coefficient and pressure drop of a CO₂-POE (polyol ester) mixture at three oil concentrations— 0%, 2%, and 5.0%—in a tube with a 2.85-mm I.D. Their results showed a 15% decrease in the heat transfer coefficient at an oil concentration of 2% and a 25% decrease at a concentration of 5%, within the near-pseudocritical temperature region. However, they also reported that the heat transfer was promoted at high temperatures. Gao and Honda (2002) investigated the heat transfer characteristics of supercritical CO₂ with PAG oil and reported a maximum decrease of 40% at an oil concentration of 1%. Dang et al. (2007, 2008) investigated the flow pattern and heat transfer characteristics of a CO₂-PAG oil mixture in horizontal tubes with I.D. ranging from 1 mm to 6 mm. A significant influence of the oil on the heat transfer was confirmed for a small-diameter tube at a large oil concentration. The decrease in the heat transfer was due to the formation of an oil-rich layer along the walls of the test tube. In addition, Yun et al. (2006) investigated the effects of oil on the heat transfer characteristics of supercritical CO₂ within a microchannel with a hydraulic diameter of 1.0 mm. They measured the cooling heat transfer coefficient and pressure drop of the oil-PAG mixture at oil concentrations of 0%-4% and pressures of 8.4 MPa and 10.4 MPa. The results showed that the average heat transfer coefficient decreased by 9.6% at an oil concentration of 2% and by 20.4% at a concentration of 4% as compared with that of pure CO₂.

Most of the above studies concentrated on the effect of PAG oil because it is the most widely used lubricant in CO_2 heat-pump water heaters. PAG oil shows excellent compatibility with CO_2 , but the solubility of CO_2 in PAG oil is poor, leading to difficulties in oil return and deterioration of the heat transfer performance. Several new lubricating oils have been developed for CO_2 heat pumps (e.g., Sawada 2008, Kaneko et al. 2008), but their effects on the heat transfer performance are unclear. In this study, we investigated three lubricants for CO_2 systems—PAG, polyvinyl ether (PVE), and a newly proposed PAG-PVE copolymer (ECP)—to clarify the flow patterns of CO_2 -oil mixtures and their influence on the heat transfer characteristics of supercritical CO_2 .

2. COMPARISON OF LUBRICATING OILS

Lubricating oil is commonly used in compressors for lubrication, cooling, and sealing. PAGtype oil is commonly used for CO_2 heat pumps, although its viscosity changes with the compressor design of the manufacturer. Kaneko *et al.* (2006) compared PAG oil with POE oil and considered the following five aspects: -40 °C starting torque, oil return, shue/plate lubricity, bearing fatigue life, and stability. They reported that, with the exception of oil return, PAG oil is superior to POE oil in all these five aspects. With the widespread use of CO_2 heat-pump water heaters in Japan, the development of new lubricating oils is underway. Sawada (2008) reported a new POE oil showing better lubricity and stability with CO_2 under supercritical conditions. Kaneko *et al.* (2008) developed ECP oil, which is a PAG-PVE-type copolymer oil. It has been reported that ECP oil retains not only the good stability and lubricity of PAG oil but also has better viscosity.

Three lubricating oils—PAG, PVE, and ECP—were tested in this research in order to verify the effects of oil on the flow pattern and heat transfer performance of supercritical CO₂. The ECP oil is a copolymer of PAG and PVE oils and has a solubility and viscosity between those of PAG and PVE. Table 1 shows the molecular structure, viscosity and thermal conductivity of the three lubricants. For both lubricants, the viscosity decreases dramatically with temperature whereas the thermal conductivity decreases slightly with temperature. PAG has the largest viscosity while PVE has the smallest value. The viscosity of ECP lies between those two values. In addition, there is no significant difference in thermal conductivity among the three oils as shown in Table 1. Figure 1 shows the two-phase separation temperature of these three oils with CO₂ under subcritical conditions. Among the three oils, PVE has the smallest separation region and PAG has the largest. Although the temperature for two-phase separation under supercritical conditions is yet to be determined, it is easy to deduce that PVE has the best miscibility with supercritical CO_2 whereas PAG has the worst. When the oil separates from supercritical CO_2 , some CO_2 may dissolve in the oil, leading to a decrease in oil viscosity and surface tension. Both the thermophysical properties of CO_2 and its solubility in oil change with temperature inside the gas cooler, resulting in difficulties in predicting the flow pattern and heat transfer characteristics of the CO₂-oil mixture.

3. EXPERIMENTAL APPARATUS AND DATA REDUCTION

3.1 Experimental Loop

The experimental loop shown in Fig. 2 is composed of three parts: a main loop, a test loop, and an oil-adjustment loop. The main loop is a CO₂ heat-pump cycle that supplies supercritical CO₂ to the test section at the desired temperature and pressure. The test loop includes a heattransfer test section, a visual section, and an oil-sampling section. The heat-transfer test section is a tube-in-tube-type heat exchanger with a length of 0.5 m, as shown in Fig. 3. Supercritical CO₂ flows through the inner section of the smooth horizontal tube having an inner diameter of 2 mm and is cooled by the water flowing inside the annular passage. The inner and outer tubes are made of smooth copper and acrylic resin, respectively. The external tube of the acrylic resin was covered with polystyrene insulation layer having a thickness of 25 mm to minimize heat loss to the environment. Pt100 sensors were used to measure the temperatures of CO₂ and water at the inlet and outlet of the test section. The wall temperature was measured at ten locations using type-T thermocouples placed evenly along the tube. The inner wall temperatures at the ten locations were calculated from the corresponding outer wall temperatures by solving onedimensional heat conduction equations. The thermocouples and Pt100 sensors were calibrated to an accuracy of ± 0.1 °C and ± 0.03 °C, respectively. The CO₂ pressures at the inlet and outlet of the test section were measured using a pressure transducer with a measurement uncertainty of ± 0.001 MPa. The mass flow rate of the refrigerant was measured using a Coriolis-type mass flow meter with an accuracy of 0.1% F.S. The accuracy of the water-side mass-flow rate was 0.5% F.S.

The visualization section was located behind the test section. The visualization images were

recorded through a sight glass using a high-speed CCD camera with a maximum speed of 70,000 fps. The assembled sight glass, shown in Fig. 4, is made of sapphire and can withstand a pressure of up to 20 MPa. The inner diameter of the sapphire tube is 2 mm with a glass thickness of 14 mm. Because the refractive index of the sapphire glass is 1.76, which is much higher than the refractive index of air, the sight glass was placed in a water box to reduce the refraction of the incoming light while passing through the glass.

The concentration of oil was controlled by adjusting the amount flowing into the test section using an oil flow meter and a needle valve. The oil-sampling section was placed behind the test section, and the temperature of CO₂ was maintained at 25 °C using a sub-cooler. Inside the oil-sampling section, the refrigerant-oil mixture was sampled, and the concentration of the lubricating oil in the refrigerant was weighed by releasing the refrigerant carefully using a needle valve. It should be noted that the measured oil concentration is actually the oil retention ratio, not the oil circulation ratio. Although the oil circulation ratio is simultaneously recorded using an oil flow meter, the amount of oil retained is used to define the oil concentration, to maintain consistency with our previous research (e.g., Dang *et al.* (2007, 2008)).

3.2 Experimental Conditions and Data Reduction

The experimental parameters considered in this study were mass flux, pressure, oil type, and oil concentration, as shown in Table 2. Under each experimental condition, the CO_2 inlet temperature was varied from 30 °C to 70 °C. The concentration of the PAG, PVE, and ECP lubricating oils were varied from 0.5–5.0 wt%.

The heat transfer coefficient was calculated from the heat flux and average temperature difference between the refrigerant and wall:

$$\alpha = \frac{Q_{\text{water}}}{A \cdot \Delta T_{\text{LMTD}_{\text{Water}}}},\tag{1}$$

(2)

where Q_{water} is calculated from the heat exchange rate of the waterside, as shown in equation (2).

$$Q_{water} = M_{water} \cdot C_{pwater} \left(T_{water,out} - T_{water,in} \right)$$

The mean temperature difference ΔT is defined as follows:

$$\Delta T_{\rm LMTD_{w}} = \frac{\left(T_{\rm CO_{2}in} - T_{\rm w,in}\right) - \left(T_{\rm CO_{2}out} - T_{\rm w,out}\right)}{\ln\left(\frac{T_{\rm CO_{2}in} - T_{\rm w,in}}{T_{\rm CO_{2}out} - T_{\rm w,out}}\right)}$$
(3)

To evaluate the deterioration in the heat transfer coefficient by the entrainment of the different oils, a deterioration factor, ϕ , is defined as follows:

$$\phi = \frac{\alpha_{co_2} - \alpha_{co_2 - oil}}{\alpha_{co_2}} \tag{4}$$

where α_{CO_2} denotes the heat transfer coefficient of pure CO₂ and α_{CO_2-oil} denotes the heat transfer coefficient of the CO₂-oil mixture under the same experimental conditions. According to the above definition, a large ϕ value corresponds to a large deterioration in the heat transfer coefficient of the fluid as compared to that of pure CO₂.

4. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Flow Visualization

Because of the different solubility of CO₂ in the three oils tested, the flow patterns of the CO₂oil mixtures were different even at the same oil concentration, resulting in differences in the heat transfer coefficient. Fig. 5 shows a comparison of the flow pattern of CO₂ with PVE, ECP, and PAG. Note that the flow pattern of the CO₂-PAG mixture is obtained from our previous research (Dang et al. 2008), and the bright strip in the middle is due to the refraction of the incoming light because the refractive index of sapphire glass is much higher than that of air. The comparison was conducted at three temperatures—30°C, 35°C, and 40°C—to study the change in the flow pattern at temperatures higher or lower than the pseudocritical temperature, i.e., 34.5 °C at a pressure of 8 MPa. Fig. 5(a) shows the flow pattern of the CO₂-PVE mixture. When the bulk temperature is lower than the pseudocritical temperature, PVE becomes miscible with CO₂, i.e., the oil film can hardly be identified, and oil droplets are only occasionally observed. In contrast, Fig. 5(b) shows that a thin oil film can be observed, together with a number of oil droplets scattered inside the bulk CO₂, indicating that the ECP oil is partially miscible with CO₂. From Fig. 5(c), it can be seen that most of the PAG oil adheres to the inner surface of the tube and forms a thick oil film in comparison to that of Fig. 5(b) because of the poor miscibility of PAG oil with CO_2 . The tiny strip of oil-rich layer is visible and moves at a slow velocity.

When the inlet temperature of CO_2 approaches the pseudocritical temperature, it can be seen from Figs. 5(a) and 5(b) that the number of droplets of both PVE and ECP increases because of the decrease in the solubility of CO_2 in the oil. For PVE, the oil film is not easy to identify, whereas for ECP, the number of oil droplets increases with temperature, and the oil film thickens and can be identified as a narrow strip flowing along the inner surface. For PAG, the oil film is clearly observed at 35 °C as shown in Fig. 5(c), but the number of oil droplets decreases, implying that part of the separated oil flowing with the bulk CO_2 adheres to the inner wall, forming a thicker layer. The main reason for the change in the flow pattern is the drastic changes in the properties of CO_2 within the pseudocritical region, including changes in the CO_2 density, solubility of CO_2 in the oil, and viscosity of the oil layer.

When the temperature increases above the pseudocritical temperature, the oil film thickens for all three lubricants because of the increase in the density ratio of CO_2 to oil. In addition, the reduction in the solubility of CO_2 leads to an increase in the viscosity and surface tension, both of which are positive effects for the stabilization of the oil layer. For PVE, both the number of oil droplets flowing with CO_2 and the thickness of the oil layer increase with temperature, implying a decrease in the miscibility of PVE oil with CO_2 . In contrast, the number of ECP oil droplets decreases, showing that more oil droplets attach to the wall surface. For PAG, only an oil film with a wavy surface and a few oil droplets can be observed. The differences in the flow patterns are mainly a result of the different miscibility between the oils and CO_2 .

The flow visualization of CO_2 within the entrained oil and the classification of flow patterns by Dang *et al.* (2008) suggest that the dominating flow pattern of CO_2 -PVE and CO_2 -ECP is an annular-dispersed flow from a bulk temperature of 30 °C to 40 °C. For PAG, the flow pattern changes from an annular-dispersed flow to a wavy flow as the bulk temperature increases.

4.2 Comparison of heat transfer coefficient

The heat transfer coefficients of CO_2 with the different oils are compared with that of pure CO_2 in Figs. 6–8 using mass flux, pressure, inlet temperature, and oil concentration as parameters. The predicted values of pure CO_2 (Dang and Hihara, 2004) are indicated by solid lines, and the heat transfer coefficients measured at different oil concentrations are plotted using a horizontal error bar representing the temperature change inside the test section. The oil

concentration is determined by a sampling method. The value in parentheses indicates the oil concentration measured using a mass flow meter. In comparison to the oil-free condition, the heat transfer coefficient generally decreases with oil entrainment regardless of the oil type, which is attributed to the formation of an oil film. A high oil concentration normally corresponds to a significant deterioration in the heat transfer performance.

It can be seen from Fig. 6 that for PAG, the heat transfer coefficient decreases with an increase in the oil concentration at both low and high temperatures. This is caused by the poor miscibility of PAG oil and CO₂. For PVE, the increasing oil concentration does not lead to a remarkable decrease in the heat transfer coefficient at low temperatures, because the oil film is not present at low temperature. As the temperature approaches the pseudocritical temperature, the formation of an oil film leads to a decrease in the heat transfer coefficient, and this decrease becomes more significant with an increase in the oil concentration. For ECP, as shown in Fig. 8, the decrease in the heat transfer coefficient with the oil concentration at low temperatures is not significant, whereas at high temperatures, the decrease in the heat transfer coefficient is proportional to the oil concentration.

Figure 9 shows the deterioration factors for the three oils, the values of which range from 0.1to 0.62 according to the inlet temperature, mass flux, pressure, and oil type. PAG has the largest value, which indicates that it has the largest decrease in the heat transfer coefficient. The values for ECP and PVE are similar at low temperatures. From Fig. 9, it can be seen that the deterioration factor increases with temperature until the bulk temperature approaches the pseudocritical temperature. This is due to decreases in both the solubility of CO₂ within the oil and the CO₂ density. Above the pseudocritical temperature, the deterioration factor begins to decrease with temperature. When the inlet temperature of the bulk CO₂ is lower than the pseudocritical temperature, the heat transfer coefficient of the CO₂-ECP mixture is almost equal to that of the CO₂-PVE mixture, and both are larger than that of the CO₂-PAG mixture. The main reason for this is that it is difficult for the oil film to form given the relatively good miscibility of CO_2 and oil at this temperature, and therefore, the heat resistance of the oil film is small. However, the situation is slightly different when the inlet temperature of CO₂ approaches the pseudocritical temperature; the heat transfer coefficient of the CO₂-PVE mixture is the highest while that of the CO₂-PAG mixture is the lowest. When the inlet temperature continues to rise above the pseudocritical temperature, the heat transfer coefficient of the CO₂-ECP mixture is still lower than that of the CO₂-PVE mixture but close to that of the CO₂-PAG mixture.

Near the pseudocritical temperature, a drastic deterioration in the heat transfer coefficient caused by the oil can be observed. Table 3 shows the heat transfer coefficient of the mixture at different values of oil concentration, pressure, and mass flux. Oil with good CO_2 solubility has a higher heat transfer coefficient. The growth of the oil film with high solubility is retarded, and therefore, the heat resistance of this film is smaller than that of other oils. It is reasonable to conclude that high solubility of the oil can aid in improving the heat transfer performance.

5. CONCLUSIONS

1) The flow patterns of the two-phase fluid for the different oils indicate a remarkable difference in the heat transfer performance.

2) For oils with good solubility with CO_2 and an inlet temperature for bulk CO_2 lower than the pseudocritical temperature, a sharp deterioration in the heat transfer can be prevented owing to

the difficulty in oil-film formation. When the inlet temperature is above the critical temperature, oils with good solubility form a thin oil film, which slows the deterioration during heat transfer. 3) Visualization experiments indicated that PAG easily forms a thick oil film because of the poor miscibility of PAG and CO_2 . ECP is inferior to PVE, but shows better heat transfer performance than PVG.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors express their gratitude to Idemitsu Kosan Company for providing PAG, PVE and ECP oils. The first author received partial financial support by a Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology under Grant No. 18860021.

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Figure 1: Two-phase separation temperature



Figure 2: Schematic diagram of experimental apparatus



Figure 3: Heat transfer test section



Figure 4: Sight glass



Figure 5: Flow visualization of CO₂ with entrained oil; P = 8 MPa, G = 800 kg m⁻²s⁻¹, x = 1 wt%



(a) $G = 1200 \text{ kg m}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$, P = 8 MPa



(b) $G = 800 \text{ kg m}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$, P = 10 MPa

Figure 6: Heat transfer coefficient of CO₂-PAG mixture



(a) $G = 1200 \text{ kg m}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$, P = 8 MPa



(b) $G = 800 \text{ kg m}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$, P = 10 MPa

Figure 7: Heat transfer coefficient of CO₂-PVE mixture



(a) $G = 1200 \text{ kg m}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$, P = 8 MPa



(b) $G = 800 \text{ kg m}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$, P = 10 MPa

Figure 8: Heat transfer coefficient of CO₂-ECP mixture



Figure 9: Deterioration factor of heat transfer coefficient of CO₂ for three oils

Oil type	PAG 100	PVE 100	ECP 100	
Molecular structure	СН ₃ СН ₃ -O-(CH-CH ₂ -O) _m -(CH ₂ -CH ₂ -O) _n -CH ₃	H-(CH-CH ₂) _m -(CH-CH ₂) _n -H OEt OBu	СН ₃ Me-(O-CH-CH ₂) _n -Q R ₁ CH-CH ₂ -(CH-CH ₂) _m -R ₂ Q R ₂	
Viscosity at 40 °C	$106.5 \text{ mm}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$	99.2 mm ² s ⁻¹	100.5 mm ² s ⁻¹	
Viscosity at 100 °C	$20.47 \text{ mm}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$	$10.5 \text{ mm}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$	$12.63 \text{ mm}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$	
Viscosity index	218	86	120	
Thermal conductivity at 20 °C *	0.156 W m ⁻¹ K ⁻¹	0.159 W m ⁻¹ K ⁻¹	0.158 W m ⁻¹ K ⁻¹	
Thermal conductivity at 80 °C *	0.145 W m ⁻¹ K ⁻¹	$0.149 \text{ W m}^{-1} \text{ K}^{-1}$	0.148 W m ⁻¹ K ⁻¹	

Table 1: Lubricating oil properties

* Provided by Mr. M. Kaneko of Idemitsu Kosan Company through a private communication.

Table 2: Experimental	parameters
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Oil type	PAG, PVE, ECP	
Tube I.D. (mm)	2	
Pressure (MPa)	8–10	
Mass flux (kg $m^{-2}s^{-1}$)	800, 1200	
Heat flux (kW m ⁻²)	12	
Oil concentration (wt%)	0.5–5	

Table 3: Comparison of peak value of heat transfer coefficient of CO₂-oil mixtures under

different conditions

	$G = 800 \text{ kg m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1},$	$G = 1200 \text{ kg m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$,	$G = 800 \text{ kg m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$,	$G = 1200 \text{ kg m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1},$
	P = 8 MPa, $x = 1%$	P = 8 MPa, $x = 2%$	P = 10 MPa, $x = 1%$	P = 10 MPa, $x = 2%$
CO ₂ + PAG oil	9645 (W m ⁻² K ⁻¹)	$10739 (W m^{-2}K^{-1})$	4302 (W m ⁻² K ⁻¹)	5682 (W m ⁻² K ⁻¹)
$CO_2 + ECP$ oil	$10674 (W m^{-2}K^{-1})$	11944 (W m ⁻² K ⁻¹)	4469 (W m ⁻² K ⁻¹)	8129 (W m ⁻² K ⁻¹)
$CO_2 + PVE oil$	12152 (W m ⁻² K ⁻¹)	13287 (W m ⁻² K ⁻¹)	5138 (W $m^{-2}K^{-1}$)	8703 (W m ⁻² K ⁻¹)