Nonlinear Simulation of Energetic Particle Modes in High-Beta Tokamak Plasma

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(Received 2 December 2011 / Accepted 1 May 2012)

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Keywords: high beta tokamak, shear Alfvén wave, energetic particle mode, nonlinear simulation, transport

DOI: 10.1585/pfr.7.2403081

1. Introduction

Burning tokamak plasmas will be characterized by high bulk plasma pressure and regions with steep pressure gradients. This raises the question how such a high-pressure state affects the interaction between the bulk plasma and energetic ions; which includes the excitation of Alfvénic modes and resulting transport of energetic ions. The purpose of this short paper is to summarize first non-linear numerical simulation results obtained under such conditions.

This study considers shear Alfvén waves in the frequency range \( \omega_{BAE} \lesssim \omega \lesssim \omega_{TAE} \), between the accumulation points of the beta-induced [1, 2] and toroidicity-induced gaps [3]. Simulations are carried out for cases based on the neutral-beam-driven JT-60U discharge E039672, where so-called abrupt large events (ALE) are observed [4, 5]. These modes have frequencies in the range 40 kHz \( \lesssim f \lesssim 60 \) kHz and toroidal mode number \( n = 1 \), and cause significant energetic ion transport [4]. They are thought to be manifestations of \( n = 1 \) energetic particle modes (EPM [6]). Many features of such modes may be simulated by treating the bulk plasma as an MHD fluid that interacts with drift-kinetic energetic ions [7].

The three cases in Table 1 are compared, where \( \beta_{bulk} \) is the on-axis toroidal beta and \( \Gamma \) the specific heat ratio. The latter is used to control whether (“compressible”, \( \Gamma > 1 \)) or not (“incompressible”, \( \Gamma = 1 \)) work is done to keep the plasma volume constant while increasing \( \beta_{bulk} \) from zero to a finite value. Larger \( \Gamma \) means lower internal energy. Thus, in the following, the term “incompressible” is used in the thermodynamic sense (\( \Gamma = 1 \)), which is different from incompressible flow (\( \Gamma \rightarrow \infty \)) and from the case where linear stability is independent of compressibility (\( \Gamma = 0 \)). The results are used to verify high-beta effects in the code used (MEGA [8, 9]) and obtain directions for further research.

2. Model

The equations describing the bulk plasma dynamics are

\[
\rho_m \partial_t V = -\rho_m \mathbf{Ω} \times V + (J - J_{\text{eff}}) \times \mathbf{B} - \nabla P
\]

\[
-\rho_m \left[ \frac{1}{2} \nabla V^2 + \nabla \mathbf{Ω} \times \mathbf{V} - \frac{1}{2} \nabla (\nabla \cdot V) \right],
\]

\[
\partial_t B = -\nabla \times E,
\]

\[
\partial_t P = -\nabla \cdot (PV) - (\Gamma - 1) P \nabla \cdot V
\]

\[
+ (\Gamma - 1) \left( j^2 + \nu \rho_m (\mathbf{Ω}^2 + \frac{1}{2} (\nabla \cdot V)^2) \right),
\]

where \( \mathbf{B} \) is the magnetic field, \( E = -V \times B + \eta J \) the

Table 1 Cases studied and results of linear stability analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>case</th>
<th>parameters</th>
<th>( \beta_{\text{bulk}} )</th>
<th>( \Gamma )</th>
<th>linear eigenmode label</th>
<th>( \gamma )</th>
<th>( \omega )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. cold, comp.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(A)</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. warm, comp.</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>5/3</td>
<td>(G)</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) This article is based on the presentation at the 21st International Toki Conference (ITC21).
The electric field, \( \mathbf{E} = \nabla \times \mathbf{V} \) the vorticity, \( \mathbf{J} = \nabla \times \mathbf{B} / \mu_0 \) the total current density. The energetic ion current density \( \mathbf{J}_{Heff} \) (excluding electric drift) is computed from the perturbed distribution function represented by phase space marker particles. The simulation setup is the same as the “shaped” case studied in Ref. [10]; except that the bulk density \( \rho_b = m_b n_b \) and bulk pressure \( P_b \) are now evolved in time. The profiles of the safety factor \( q(r) \) and toroidal bulk beta \( \beta_b(r) = \beta_b(r) / \mu_0 P_b / \rho_b \) are plotted in Fig. 1; where \( r/a < 1 \) is the volume-averaged minor radius and \( \rho_0 = B_0 / (\mu_0 m_i v_i) \) the on-axis Alfvén velocity. The number of mesh points is \( N_r \times N_z \times N_x = 152 \times 16 \times 128 \), the number of markers is \( 2.1 \times 10^6 \), resistivity and viscosity are \( \eta = 3 \times 10^{-6} \), \( \nu = 10^{-5} \), and \( \beta_0 = B_0 / (\mu_0 m_i v_i) \). In the following, the time is normalized by \( \omega_{A0} = v_{A0} / R_0 \). For further details about the model and code used, see Refs. [8, 9].

The energetic ions are set up as described in Ref. [10]. Note that \( \beta_{0b} = 0.5 \% \), so energetic and bulk ion pressures are comparable. For simplicity, an isotropic slowing-down model is used for the energetic ion equilibrium distribution function \( F_{ib0} \). This means that the total energetic particle energy is distributed over all pitch angles. Thus, for a given resonance, the drive is different (here, most likely weaker) than with an anisotropic distribution, which would represent conditions in beam-driven experiments more closely.

Only the perturbed \( n = 1 \) component of \( \mathbf{J}_{Heff} \) is included since the dominant fluctuations observed in the experiments have \( n = 1 \). Thus, only MHD nonlinearities transfer energy to \( n = 0 \) and \( n > 1 \) perturbations in the present simulations.

The choice to filter out \( n \neq 1 \) components of the energetic particle coupling term is justified as follows. The \( n = 0 \) equilibrium component is excluded since we are not yet capable of constructing a self-consistent equilibrium that takes into account the currents and pressures of bulk and energetic particles on equal footing. The evolution of the \( n = 0 \) perturbed component is excluded since it is known to be sensitive to kinetic effects of bulk particles, which are not captured by the MHD model. The exclusion of the \( n > 1 \) components avoids their resonant excitation, which may be caused by the present use of an isotropic model for \( F_{ib0} \) instead of a more realistic anisotropic beam distribution. Similar arguments were previously put forward in Ref. [11]. It is expected that the main conclusions concerning energetic particle transport are not affected by the simplifications made. Research with more complex models will show whether this is indeed the case.

3. Results

In each case, three snapshots are taken to characterize the dynamics. They are labeled (A)-(C) in case 1, (D)-(F) in case 2 and (G)-(I) in case 3. Snapshots (A), (D) and (G) are taken during linear phase of each case, and the remaining snapshots characterize the nonlinear evolution. The linear growth rates and frequencies from Fig. 2 (a) and Fig. 3 (A,D,G) are summarized in Table 1.

Figure 2 shows the evolution of the \( n = 1 \) mode amplitude (square root of kinetic energy, \( W = m_b n_b \int |V|^2 \)). The incompressible finite-beta case (2.) has the highest growth rate and saturation amplitude. With zero beta (1.) the growth rate is about 20% lower and the saturation amplitude about 10% lower than in case 2. With compressibility included (3) the growth rate and saturation amplitude are both reduced by about 20%. Qualitatively, these results are as expected from theory: in the first ideal MHD ballooning stable domain increasing bulk pressure is destabilizing, and compressibility is always stabilizing.

The power spectra in Fig. 3 show the frequency and radial location of the fluctuations. The linear mode structures (A,D,G) peak near \( \omega \approx 0.45 \ldots 0.5 \), where the energetic ion pressure gradient is steepest. The mode frequencies lie in the range \( \omega = 0.18 \ldots 0.2 \) and match the local frequency of the \( m = 2 \) continuum. The small differences between the three cases may be attributed to the differences in the continuous spectra, \( \omega_{Ac}(r) \). The slope of \( \omega_{Ac}(r) \) at the mode locations suggests significant continuum damping, so these modes have the character of a typical EPM.

The composition of the mode structure from the poloidal harmonics \( m = 0 \ldots 4 \) is shown in Fig. 4. The \( m = 2 \) harmonic is dominant in the linear regime (A,D,G). The coupling to \( m = 1 \) and \( m = 3 \) harmonics is stronger with

![Fig. 1 Profiles of (a) safety factor, (b) bulk beta and its gradient.](image)

![Fig. 2 Evolution of the n = 1 mode energy W: (a) log-scale plot and (b,c,d) linear-scale plots of the nonlinear evolution in the three cases studied. The labels (A)-(I) indicate times at which snapshots are taken (cf. Figs. 3-5).](image)
Snapshots of the power spectrum contours of the electrostatic potential $\phi$ in the three cases studied. For the spectral analysis, a Hanning time window of width $100\omega_{\text{Ao}}^{-1}$ around $t_0$ is used. Superimposed on the contour plots are lines indicating the continuous spectra $\omega_{\text{AC}}(r)$ [12] in the slow-sound approximation due to $\beta_{\text{bulk}} \ll 1$ [13]. The times at which snapshots (A)-(I) were taken are indicated by the numbers in the bottom-left corners (cf. Fig. 2).

Fig. 4 Radial mode structure of the dominant poloidal harmonics $m = 0, 1, 2, 3, 4$ in the $n = 1$ component of the electrostatic potential $|\phi_m(r)|$ in the three cases studied. Three snapshots during the linear (A,D,G) and three during the nonlinear regime (B,F,H) are shown (cf. Figs. 2 and 3).

finite beta than with zero beta, which is as expected due to the effect of the pressure-curvature coupling term. Figure 5 shows the total mode structure in the poloidal plane.

Observations in the nonlinear phase are as follows. During the first and largest peak in the $n = 1$ mode amplitude plotted in Fig. 2 (b,c,d), the mode shifts downward in frequency and outward in minor radius. In doing so, the mode tends to follow the path prescribed by the continuous spectrum, $\omega_{\text{AC}}(r)$. Thus, in the finite-beta cases (2. and 3.), the frequency downward sweep terminates at the accumulation point of the $m = 2$ BAE gap, $\omega_{\text{BAE}}(r = 0.63) = 0.15$, as may be seen in Figs. 3 (E) and (H). The mode follows the continuum across the $q = 2$ rational surface, from $r \approx 0.5$ to $r \approx 0.7$, and approaches the lower accumulation point of the $\{m, m'\} = \{2, 3\}$ TAE. In the zero-beta case (1.) the radial excursion of the mode is smaller, from $r \approx 0.45$ to $r \approx 0.55$, and the frequency drops deeper to $\omega \approx 0.13$, as shown by the lower peak in Fig. 3 (B).

Subsequently the modes in all cases (now at about 1/2 of their peak amplitude) show a tendency to move radially inward, following the continuous spectrum upward. The frequency may rise as far as the $\{m, m'\} = \{1, 2\}$ TAE accumulation point, $\omega_{\text{TAE}}(r = 0.22) = 0.34$, as in Fig. 3 (F). The dynamics become increasingly complex. Cycles of inward and outward motion of the mode, with up- and down-shifts in frequency, may continue and overlap, at amplitudes of about 1/3 to 1/2 of the peak amplitude [Figs. 2 (b,c,d)].

During this period, a second mode appears near the magnetic axis. The mode frequency is $\omega = 0.325$ in the zero-beta case, Fig. 3 (C), and $\omega = 0.375$ in the compressible finite-beta case, Fig. 3 (I). That is, $\omega$ is located about $\Delta \omega = 0.040$ above the local $m = 1$ continuum in both cases. Peaking in the region $0.16 \lesssim r \lesssim 0.21$, this mode is not radially aligned with the accumulation points of the toroidicity-induced gap, which are located at $r = 0.29$ in the zero-beta case (C) and $r = 0.26$ in the finite-beta case (I). Viewed in the poloidal plane, this centralized mode rotates in the opposite direction compared to the other modes, as indicated by arrows in Fig. 5 (B,I). During its nonlinear evolution in the zero-beta case, rapid (within 30 Alfvén times) up- and downward chirping of the mode frequency by $\pm (10...30\%)$ is observed. This mode and its
properties remain to be understood.

The spatial redistribution of energetic ions due to the collective action of the modes described above is shown in Fig. 6, where the relative change in the velocity-space-averaged energetic ion density field is plotted. Here, the change in the density $\Delta n_I$ is measured by subtracting the density field in the linear stage, $n_I(R,Z,t_1=150)$, from the density field computed at a later time, $n_I(R,Z,t_2)$, and dividing this difference by $n_I(R,Z,t_1)$. The division by the reference field $n_I(R,Z,t_1)$ (not done in Ref. [10]) amplifies fluctuations near the boundary, where $n_I$ is small. The change in the density field found after the major peak in $n = 1$ mode activity is shown in Fig. 6 (a,b,c). Figures 6 (d,e,f) show the situation another 160–250 Alfvén times later. During the major peak in mode activity, the values for $\Delta n_I$ in cases 1 and 2 lie around $\pm (10...15)\%$, while it is only $\pm (5...10)\%$ in the compressible finite-beta case 3. However, while cases 1 and 2 stagnate, particle transport in case 3 continues until $\Delta n_I$ also reaches $\pm (10...15)\%$. The transport processes as well as the structure of $\Delta n_I$ seen in Fig. 6 remains to be clarified and quantified by analyzing the wave-particle interactions, the orbits of the displaced particles, and the fraction of lost particles.

4. Conclusion

The effect of bulk pressure on the nonlinear dynamics of energetic particle modes (EPM) observed in JT-60U discharge E039672 is examined. This work is the continuation of a series of simulations with increasing physical detail, starting with circular magnetic geometry and zero pressure [14], considering realistic geometry [10] and now adding realistic bulk pressure in the fluid limit.

The results show clearly the effect of the shape of the continuous shear Alfvén spectrum (in particular, the BAE gap) on the evolution of the frequency and mode structure of the EPM. Enhanced poloidal mode coupling is also seen. Thus, these results serve as a verification of high-beta physics captured by MEGA.

In the nonlinear regime, only a time window of about 250 Alfvén times was examined. Beyond these first 250 Alfvén times, resistive ballooning instabilities (in particular, modes with $n \geq 10$) and possibly numerical instabilities may begin to obscure the results. The long-term evolution will be studied carefully in future work.

A question of practical concern is how much transport is caused and where the displaced particles are deposited. Taking also into account the results of Ref. [10], where the effect of realistic non-circular magnetic flux surface geometry was studied, one may summarize the results obtained so far as follows: magnetic geometry and bulk pressure effects affect the linear stability and nonlinear evolution of EPM, but little effect on the overall energetic particle transport was seen with the diagnostics currently implemented in MEGA. In particular, the reduction of the energetic ion density in the central region of the plasma $(r/a \lesssim 0.5)$ is similar in all cases studied. On the other hand, the radial distance over which particles are redistributed and the amount of particles that hit the wall may be more sensitive to the simulation setup. This will be examined after additional diagnostics are implemented in MEGA, allowing a detailed analysis of the particle transport. More accurate modeling of the boundary region may also be required.

The role of realistic modeling of the equilibrium distribution function will be examined next. The resonant nature of EPM [6] suggests that $F_{10}$ plays an important role.

Acknowledgments

This work was partly supported by Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Grant No. 22860081. One of the authors (W.D.) was supported by U.S. Department of Energy SciDAC GSEP center.