



Fibre-optic temperature and pressure sensor based on a deformable concave micro-mirror



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ABSTRACT

This article presents a fibre-optic sensor that measures temperature and pressure. Its operating principle is based on the amplitude modulation caused by the variation in the radius of a concave micro-mirror crafted into the end of an SMF optical fibre. In fact, a micro-cavity engraved into the end of the fibre by selective chemical etching is filled with a PDMS (Polydimethylsiloxane)-type polymer. Due to surface tension, the polymer micro-drop takes on a hemispheric shape characterised by a certain radius. After polymerisation in an oven at 100 °C for one hour, the hemispheric micro-drop is coated with a thin layer of gold using the vacuum evaporation technique. Typically, concave micro-mirrors can be obtained with bend radii of between 10 μm and 30 μm. Under the action of a temperature gradient or a variation in pressure, the thickness of the PDMS changes and causes a variation in the bend radius of the micro-mirror. As a result, the light intensity guided by the optical fibre and reflected by the micro-mirror is modulated by the variation in its bend radius. In this configuration, the sensor has a thermo-sensitivity of $-0.08 \text{ dB}/^\circ\text{C}$ with a resolution of $0.13 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ in a range of between $20 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ and $100 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$. It also has a pressure sensitivity of $0.11 \text{ dB}/\text{bar}$ between 10 and 20 bars. The measurements are taken by a reflectometer (OTDR). In addition, the experimental results have been validated by theoretical modelling. This sensor is relatively simple to make and can be used in a wide range of applications, in particular biomedical and industrial ones.

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1. Introduction

Fibre optic sensors are widely used in many fields due to their advantages with respect to miniaturisation, sensitivity, thermal stability, immunity to electromagnetic interference and ergonomics [1,2]. Their scope of application includes the fields of biomedicine [3,4], biochemistry [5,6], industry [7,8] aerospace [9] and security [10].

In metrology, the sensors are used to measure physical parameters such as temperature [11–18], pressure [19–24], stress [25–30], refraction index [31–37], vibrations [38–40], micro-movements [41–44], water salinity [45] and other parameters. The simul-

taneous measurement of two physical parameters, in this case temperature and pressure, are somewhat difficult as they are coupled [46]. These parameters are often determined by phase modulation fibre-optic sensors, notably interferometers such as Michelson [47,48], Mach-Zehnder [49,50], FBG (Fibre Bragg Grating) [51,52] and Fabry-Pérot (FPI) [53–56]. Their use is relatively complex because they generally require coherent sources [57]. On the other hand, amplitude-modulation fibre-optic sensors [58–63] are somewhat less expensive and easier to use [64].

With respect to the temperature and pressure measurements, interferometric sensors have the best performance and have undergone wide-scale prospecting and development studies. Xuan-Yu Zhang et al [65] have proposed an FPI configuration in which they obtained a sensitivity of $0.385 \text{ nm}/^\circ\text{C}$ between $25 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ and $60 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ with a resolution of $0.01 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$. The latter's results are consistent with those of Min Li et al [66], who obtained a sensitivity of $0.38052 \text{ nm}/^\circ\text{C}$ in a range of from $25 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ to $55 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ with a resolution of $0.05 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$. X. L. Tan et al [67] designed another variant with improved sensitivity, namely $0.19 \text{ nm}/^\circ\text{C}$ at a temperature interval of from $25 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ to $65 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$. Jing Kong

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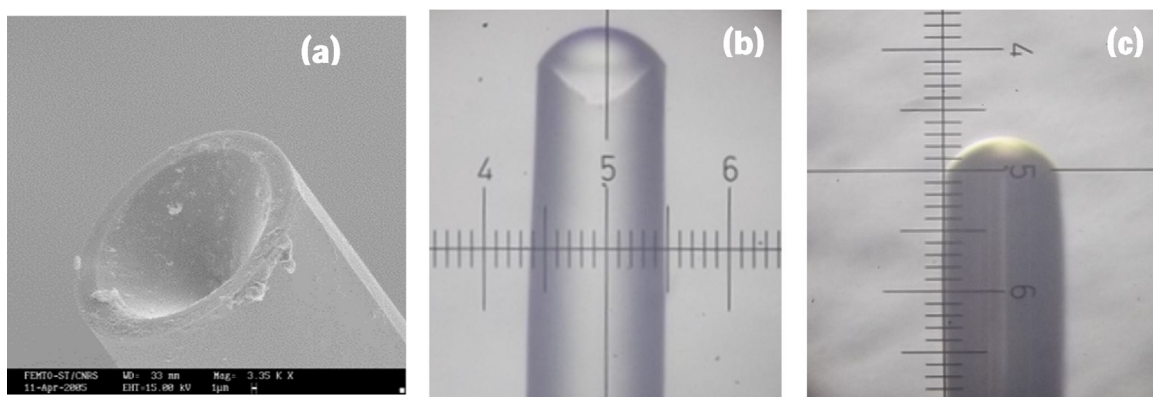


Fig. 1. Fabrication of a micro-mirror at the end of an SMF fibre: (a) Magnified view of the conical micro-cavity; (b) Fulfilled micro-cavity with PDMS; (c) Achieved deformable micro-mirror.

et al [68] have built a sensor that operates in a larger temperature interval of from 20 °C to 100 °C with a sensitivity of 0.079 nm/m⁻¹. With the same FPI configuration but for the pressure measurement, Shen Lieu et al [69] obtained a sensitivity of 43.4 nm/MPa for an interval of 0 to 2.0 MPa. W. P. Chen et al [70], optimised the sensitivity to -40.94 nm/MPa but in a relatively shorter interval of 0 to 0.92 MPa with a gradient of 0.04 MPa. Ben Xu et al [71] have also proposed an FPI configuration operating between 0 and 1.52 MPa with a sensitivity of 4.147 nm/MPa.

Where temperature and pressure are measured simultaneously, Bing Sun et al [72] presented a sensor operating in a temperature range of from 40 °C to 90 °C, and a pressure range of 0.1 to 2.5 MPa. The sensor sensitivity obtained is from 0.249 nm/°C for temperature and 1.130 nm/MPa for pressure.

In the category of amplitude modulation sensors, Husna Abdul Rahman et al [73] have made an active temperature sensor in a range of 42 °C to 90 °C with a sensitivity of 0.0044 mV/°C and a resolution of 2.4 °C. To measure displacement, S. W. Harun et al [74] presented a configuration enabling measurement at an interval of 0–4 mm with a sensitivity of 0.299 mV/μm. Regarding micro-displacements, Chen Yang et al [63] obtained a sensitivity of 0.36 mV/μm for a 50 nm displacement.

The sensor proposed in this work is based on the modulation of the reflected light intensity produced by the deformation of a concave micro-mirror crafted at the end of a single-mode SMF optical fibre. It can be used as a temperature sensor or a pressure sensor.

A calculation based on coupling efficiency η has been developed to study the performance of the sensor. In addition, we show that the results obtained through modelling are consistent with the experimental results.

2. Sensors fabrication

The sensor is composed of a single-mode SMF fibre (9/125 μm) equipped on the end with a flexible micro-mirror. Its manufacture takes place in three steps as shown in Fig. 1. First, a conical micro-cavity is engraved into the end of this fibre using the selective chemical etching technique with hydrofluoric acid HF (40%) [75]. The dimensions of this microstructure are checked in real time using a system of image acquisition and processing in association with a microscope. Depending on the immersion time, we typically obtain micro-cavities with depths of up to ~38 μm and base widths of ~40 μm. The micro-cavity is then filled with a micro-drop of PDMS polymer (Silgar 134 polydimethylsiloxane) using an automated micro-syringe with controlled flow (Graseby 3100 Syringe Pump). Because of the superficial tension forces [4], a hemispheric surface Fig. 1(b) with a bend radius that depends on the amount of polymer injected and the width of the conical micro-cavity [76]

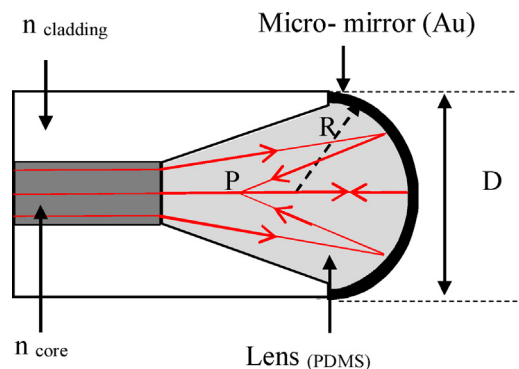


Fig. 2. Illustration of the sensor's operating principle.

is formed. This end component is then polymerised in an oven at 100 °C for one hour.

To make the reflecting mirror, the hemispheric surface is covered with a thin layer of gold 100 nm thick, deposited using the vacuum evaporation technique. The gold layer acts as a protective coating and as the flexible reflecting mirror Fig. 1(c).

3. Principle of operating

The principle of the sensor is shown in Fig. 2. The light guided into the core of the SMF fibre through the micro-cavity containing the PDMS is projected onto the concave micro-mirror. The latter reflects the incident light and focuses it on a point P on the axis of the fibre. The part of the beam contained in the angle of acceptance of the fibre is reflected and carried by the fibre to the sensor.

The sensor's operation is based on the deformation of the micro-mirror under the effect of the local variations in temperature and pressure. When the physical conditions vary, the polymer in the micro-cavity dilates and contracts, which varies the bend radius R of the micro-mirror. Consequently, the focal point P is displaced on axis z. The deformation can still be reversed in the elastic part of the material in accordance with the PDMS characteristics shown in Table 1.

3.1. Thermal effect on the micro-mirror

The thermal effect on the sensor is shown in the pictures in Fig. 3. When the sensor is subjected to a rise in temperature, a decrease in the radius of curvature can be seen. Fig. 3(a) and (b) show the bend in the micro-mirror indicated by dotted circular arcs. The bend radius obtained is 75 μm at 20 °C and increases by 27 μm to 85 °C.

Table 1
Properties of the PDMS [77–81].

| Properties of the PDMS (10:1) | Values |
|---|---|
| Lineal thermal expansion coefficient α . | $4.71 \times 10^{-4} \text{ K}^{-1}$ |
| Thermo-optic expansion ratio ξ . | $-4.66 \times 10^{-4} \text{ K}^{-1}$ |
| Refraction index n . | 1.418 |
| Temperature range. | $-50^\circ\text{C} + 200^\circ\text{C}$ |
| Young E. modulus | 750 kPa |
| Poisson's ratio | 0.5 |
| Density | 920 Kg/m ³ |
| Yield strength (σ) | 20kPa |

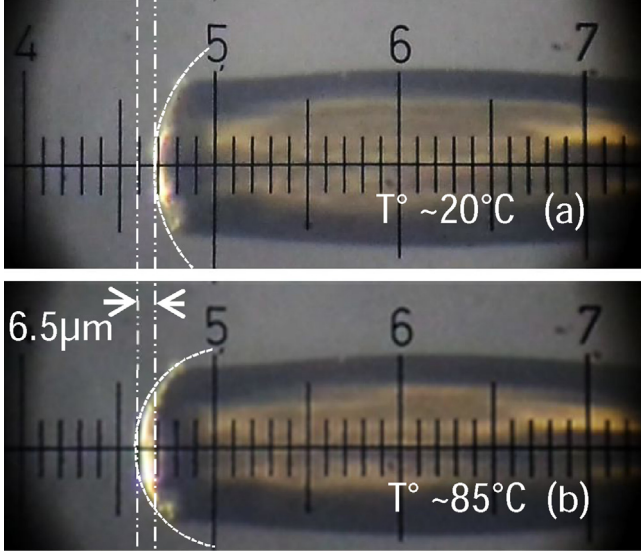


Fig. 3. Side views showing the bend in the micro-mirror at 20°C and 85°C.

Thermal dilatation has caused a 6.5 μm axial deformation of the micro-mirror.

4. Analysis

4.1. Calculation of the coupling parameters

The Thermal action and pressure on the PDMS can be analysed in terms of the efficiency of the given coupling by the coupling coefficient η . The latter represents the ratio of the light intensity reflected on the incident intensity. The coupling efficiency [82] is written as the following formula,

$$\eta = \frac{\left| \iint \psi_r \psi_r^* dx dy \right|^2}{\iint |\psi_r|^2 dx dy \iint |\psi_f|^2 dx dy} \quad (1)$$

In which ψ_r indicates the electrical field of the beam reflected by the mirror and ψ_f the field of the essential mode of the SMF optical fibre.

In the case under consideration (Fig. 4), the equation Eq. (1) can

$$\omega_{01} = \sqrt{\omega_0 \left(\frac{R^2 n^2 + 4n^2 z_w R + 4n^2 z_w^2 + a^2 d^2 R^2 + 4a^2 d^2 R z_w + 2a^2 d R^2 z_w + 4a^2 d^2 z_w^2 + 4a^2 d z_w^2 R + a^2 z_w^2 R^2}{n^2 R^2} \right)} \quad (10)$$

be written with respect to the beam waist object ω_0 and the beam waist image ω_{01} as the following formula [83],

$$\eta = \frac{2\omega_{01}\omega_0}{\sqrt{(\omega_{01}^2 + \omega_0^2)^2 + \frac{\lambda^2 z^2}{\pi^2}}} \quad (2)$$

in which ω_0 indicates the radius of fundamental mode of the SMF fibre which is determined using the Marcuse equation [84]. At the wavelength $\lambda = 1.55 \mu\text{m}$, $\omega_0 = 5.2 \mu\text{m}$. The radius of the waist image ω_{01} formed at distance z from the waist objet is determined by applying the ABCD law [85].

The ABCD law is based on the calculation of the transfer matrix M_T of the optical system. In the case under consideration, the matrix can be broken down into three matrices M_{12} , M_{23} et M_{34} designating, respectively, the progress of the beam through the medium (PDMS) from position 1 to position 2, from 2 to 3, and finally from 3 to 4. Thus, we obtain the formula,

$$M_T = M_{34} M_{23} M_{12} = \begin{bmatrix} A & B \\ C & D \end{bmatrix} \quad (3)$$

in which A, B, C, and D are the elements of the matrix to be defined.

In addition, the formulae for the elementary matrices are:

$$M_{12} = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & \frac{d}{n} \\ 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}, M_{23} = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ -\frac{2}{R} & 1 \end{bmatrix}, M_{34} = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & \frac{z_w}{n} \\ 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix} \quad (4)$$

in which $d = z + z_w$ is the distance between the end of the concave mirror and the surface of the core of the optical fibre and z_w is the working distance.

The radius of bend R of the PDMS is calculated with respect to the diameter D of the micro-mirror and thickness h . It is given by the following ratio,

$$R = \frac{1}{2h} \left(h^2 + \frac{D^2}{4} \right) \quad (5)$$

The calculation of the total transfer matrix is thus written as the following formula.

$$M_T = \begin{bmatrix} 1 - \frac{2}{nR} z_w & \frac{d \left(1 - \frac{2z_w}{nR} \right)}{n} + \frac{z_w}{n} \\ -\frac{2}{R} & 1 - \frac{2}{nR} d \end{bmatrix} \quad (6)$$

in which one deduces the four elements of the matrix which are written as follows:

$$A = 1 - \frac{2}{nR} z_w, B = \frac{d \left(1 - \frac{2z_w}{nR} \right)}{n} + \frac{z_w}{n}, C = -\frac{2}{R}, D = 1 - \frac{2}{nR} d.$$

The waist image $2\omega_{01}$ and the working distance z_w are calculated, respectively based on Eqs. (7) and (8) below [86].

$$\omega_{01} = \omega_0 \left[\frac{A^2 + a^2 B^2}{AD - BC} \right]^{1/2} \text{ where } a = \frac{\lambda}{n_{\text{PDMS}} \pi \omega_0^2} \quad (7)$$

$$AC + a^2 BD = 0 \quad (8)$$

We therefore obtain the following formulae:

$$z_w = \frac{2n^2 R^2 + 2a^2 d^2 nR - a^2 R d n R^2}{4R n^2 + 4a^2 d^2 R - 4a^2 d R^2 n + a^2 n R R^2} \quad (9)$$

The coupling efficiency η can be determined by introducing ω_0 and ω_{01} in Eq. (2). We obtain the formula

$$\eta = \frac{2\omega_{01}\omega_0}{\sqrt{(\omega_{01}^2 + \omega_0^2)^2}} \quad (11)$$

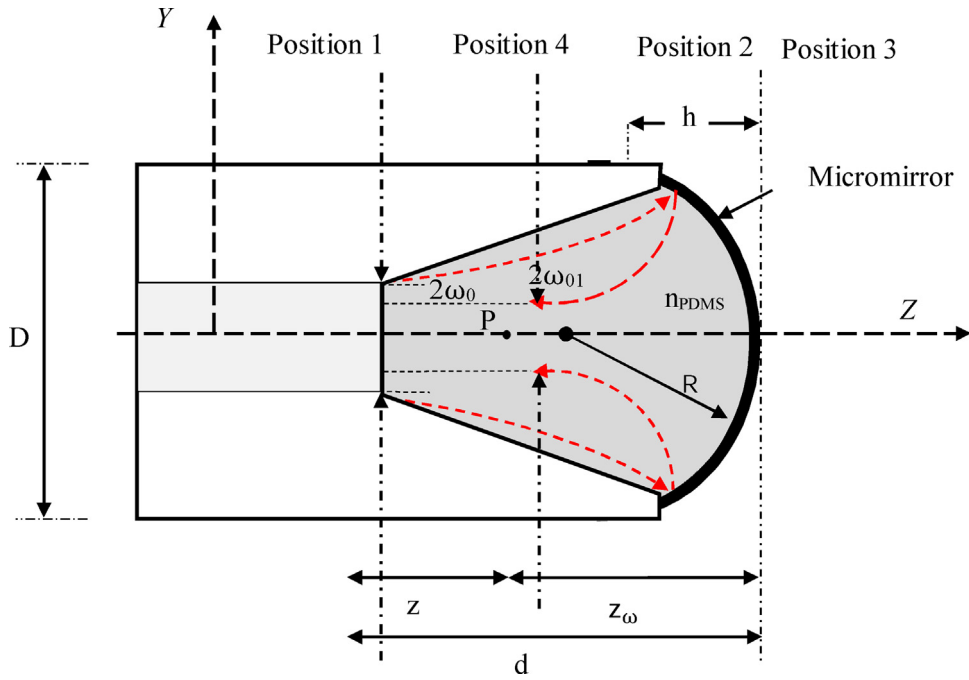


Fig. 4. Illustration of the operating principle of the micro-mirror.

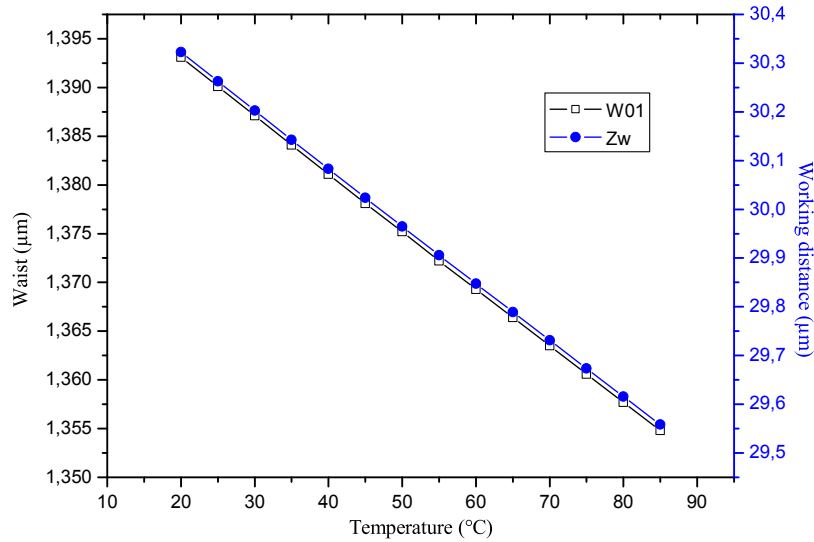


Fig. 5. Variation in the waist with respect to the bend radius.

4.2. Thermal effect on the coupling efficiency $\eta(T)$

The thermal effect, which causes a variation in the thickness h of the PDMS, can be formulated with respect to the linear thermal dilatation coefficient α shown in the following equation,

$$h(T) = h_0 (1 + \alpha T) \tag{12}$$

in which h_0 and $h(T)$ respectively represent the thickness of the PDMS of the micro-mirror at an initial temperature T_0 and at temperature T .

We can show that the thermal action can be explicitly expressed as the efficacy of the coupling $\eta(T)$ in Eq. (11) through the radius of curves bend R , by successively introducing Eq. (12) in Eq. (5), Eq. (5) in Eq. (10) and then Eq. (10) in Eq. (11).

Finally, the ratio of the reflected coupled light intensity is calculated taking into account the reflectance R_{refl} [87] as follows,

$$R_{\text{refl}}(T) = 10 \log_{10} \left(\frac{P_r(T)}{P_i} \right) = 10 \log_{10} (\eta(T)^2) \tag{13}$$

in which P_r is the reflected intensity and P_i the incident intensity. We then obtain

$$R_{\text{refl}}(T) = 20 \log_{10} \left(\frac{2\omega_{01}(T)\omega_0}{\omega_{01}^2(T) + \omega_0^2} \right) \tag{14}$$

It can be noted that the maximum coupling is obtained when the waist $\omega_{01}(T)$ moves by distance $z = d - z_\omega$, and coincides with ω_0 . These two parameters which modulate the efficacy of the coupling are calculated with respect to the temperature, and are represented in Fig. 5 below.

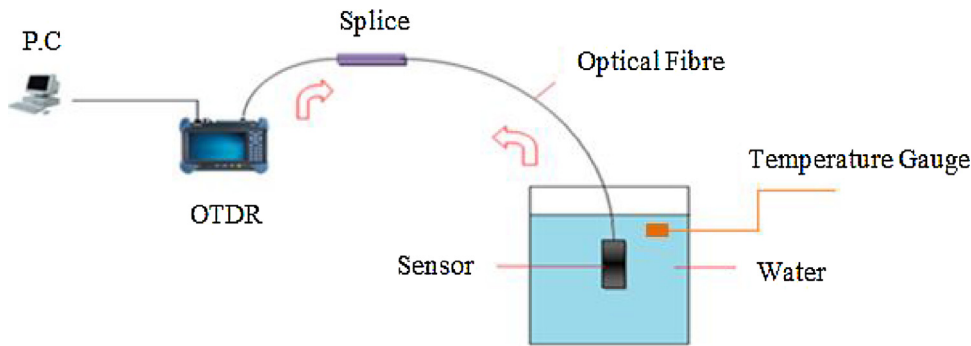


Fig. 6. Experimental setup of the sensor measurement and calibration with respect to the temperature.

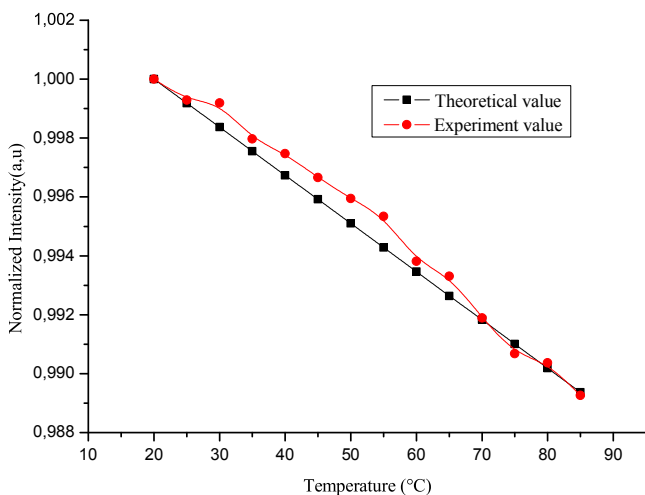


Fig. 7. Calculated and experimental curves showing the variation in light intensity with respect to the temperature.

These two curves show that when the temperature increases the waist image decreases and shifts away from the waist. Consequently, the optical coupling decreases, leading to a decrease in the reflected optical intensity to be measured.

4.2.1. Experimental results and discussions

The measurements of reflected light with respect to the thermal variation were obtained by the experimental setup shown in Fig. 6. The transmitter and receiver of the optical signal are built into the OTDR-type device, with a resolution of 0.01 dB, and operate at a wavelength of 1550 nm [88]. The 1.5 m long sensor is first spliced to the SMF fibre of the OTDR. It is then tested and calibrated in a temperature-controlled bath up to 100 °C.

The experimental results provided by the reflectometer (OTDR) with respect to the temperature are shown in Fig. 7. In addition, the theoretical calculation of the reflected luminous variation is obtained using Eq. 15. The corresponding curve is also shown in Fig. 7.

The theoretical curve and the experimental curve show a linear variation with respect to the given temperature of from 20 °C to 85 °C. They are defined by a correlation coefficient of $R=0.9937$. Within this temperature range, the sensor's sensitivity is about $-0.08\text{dB}/^\circ\text{C}$, with a resolution of 0.13° . The RMS error is around 0.01 dB.

4.3. Pressure effect on the coupling efficiency $\eta(P)$

This part is devoted to the study of the sensor's sensitivity with respect to pressure variation. To this end, the sensor was subjected to pressure stress in a device similar to that built by Paulo et al [20], and shown in Fig. 8. The device has an airtight chamber equipped with a manometer. The pressure chamber filled with distilled water is connected to a valve-controlled pressure pump. When the valve is opened the internal pressure varies and causes a deformation in the micro-mirror. Its bend radius increases when the pressure rises and decreases when the pressure falls. This variation acts on the coupling efficiency $\eta(P)$ of the reflected light intensity. The measurement of the reflected light is taken using the OTDR, in the same way as presented in the first part of this study.

5. Results and discussion

The action of the pressure on the micro-mirror is modelled using a study tool (COMSOL). Fig. 9 shows the deformation of the micro-mirror for a pressure variation of between 0 and 20 bars. The red and blue zones correspond, respectively, to the bend radius at 0 bars and at 20 bars as read on the manometer. The difference in pressure thus led to a displacement of the apex of the micro-mirror of $6\ \mu\text{m}$.

With respect to the previous analysis relative to the effect of the temperature on the coupling, pressure causes the reverse effect. Thus, if the pressure increases, the bend radius increases and the waist image $2\omega_{01}$ moves towards the front of the core of the fibre of the waist object $2\omega_0$. The maximum coupling is attained when these two waists coincide.

The dynamics of the sensor operation is shown in Fig. 10. The curve of the variation in the thickness of the micro-mirror, depending on the pressure applied, shows a linear variation. We can also see a linear variation in the reflected light intensity measured with respect to the pressure, on the one hand, and the consistency between the calculated curve and the experimental one, on the other hand.

The sensitivity of the sensor is around 0.11 dB/bar with a resolution of 0.09 bar. This value is consistent with the results obtained by other authors [71,72]. In addition, it is stable, with an RMS error of 0.009 dB. Linearity is relatively well characterised with a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.9979.

The error induced by the temperature on the pressure measurement is $1.38\text{bar}/^\circ\text{C}$ in cases in which there is no thermal compensation. And the error induced by the pressure on the temperature measurement is $0.72^\circ\text{C}/\text{bar}$ with no pressure compensation.

As mentioned above, the effect of temperature is opposite to that of pressure, these two quantities cannot be measured simultaneously. For a temperature less than or equal to 85 °C, the sensor

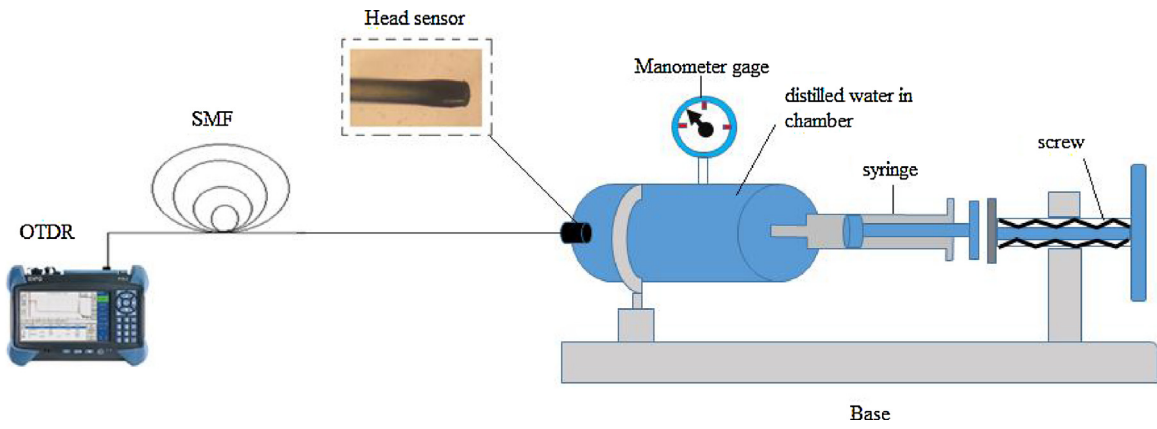


Fig. 8. Illustration of the principle showing the calibration of the sensor under pressure[20].

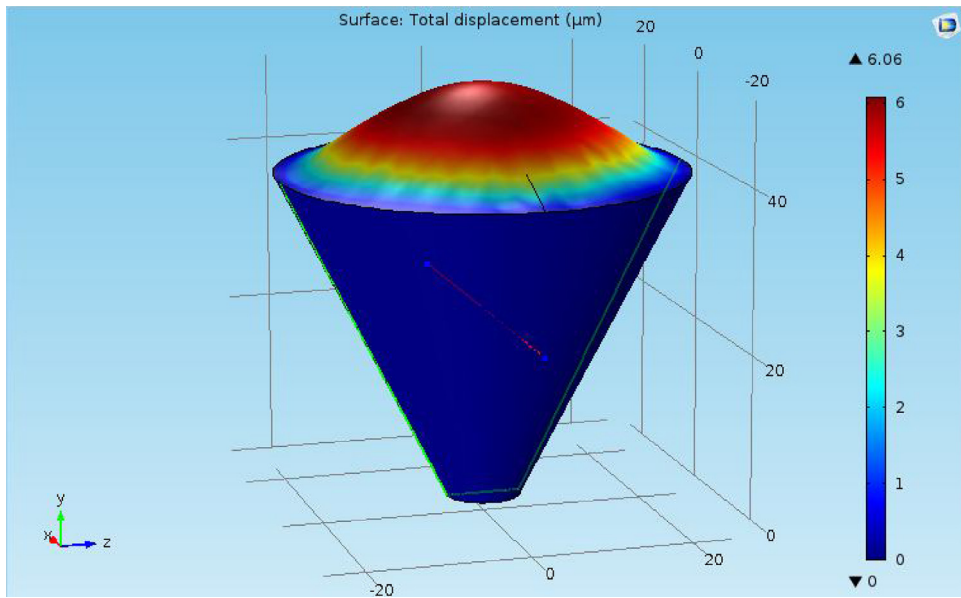


Fig. 9. 3D simulation by COMSOL illustrating the displacement of the apex of the micro-mirror. The maximum displacement at the centre is 6μm under pressure (20 bars).

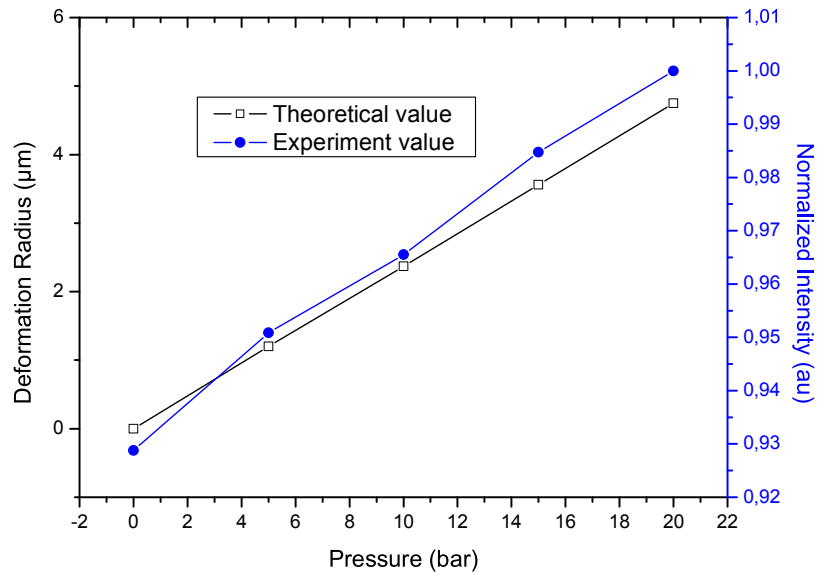


Fig. 10. Representation of the variation curve of the deformation of the micro-mirror with respect to the pressure, and the theoretical and experimental curves of the variation in the reflected light.

is only sensitive to temperature. Beyond this temperature it works only in pressure sensor mode.

6. Conclusion

This study proposed an amplitude modulation sensor based on the use of a micro-mirror at the end of an optical fibre. This sensor is intended to measure the temperature and the pressure. The combinations between the bend radius of the concave micro-mirror and the angle of the cone opening may enable several sensors to be developed for specific uses. The sensor was calibrated for a temperature interval of from 20 °C to 85 °C. Its sensitivity was -0.08 dB/°C with a resolution of 0.13 °C. In this case the RMS error induced comes to 0.01 dB. Also, the sensor can be used to detect pressure ranging from 0 to 20 bars, with a sensitivity of 0.11 dB/bar and a resolution of 0.09 bars. The RMS error induced is equal to 0.009dB. In addition, it has been shown that there is low interaction between the two operating modes. However, it should be noted that the sensor becomes saturated at temperatures greater than 85 °C and therefore above this value the sensor will only operate in pressure mode. This sensor may be used in various areas of industrial application.

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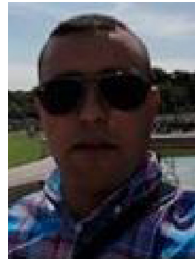
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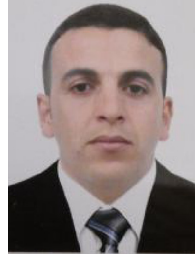
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