OPTIMUM THERMAL EFFICIENCY IN COUNTERCURRENT HEAT EXCHANGERS

By R. C. L. Bosworth* and C. M. Groden†

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Summary

When a heat exchanger operates on fixed hot and cold fluid streams and is adjusted to give optimum efficiency, the measure of irreversibility produced by the exchange process is a sum of two terms, one of which is proportional to the pivotal temperature difference and the other to the terminal temperature difference.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the preceding paper, the authors (Bosworth and Groden 1964, hereafter referred to as paper I) discussed the value of Keenan's (1951) availability in considering the Kelvin efficiency of countercurrent heat exchangers and have derived a number of thermodynamical properties of such interacting systems measured at the so-called pivotal temperature of the exchanger or at the point at which the temperature difference becomes stationary. It is the aim of the present paper to devise an expression for the optimum attainable efficiency, subject to the fixed properties of the interacting fluids, and, for that purpose, it will first be necessary to find conditions for the stationary value of a quantity closely related to the efficiency and which may be expressed as a function of stream variables, which in this case are the stream flow rates.

II. THE IRREVERSIBILITY

The quantity most suitable for this purpose is the irreversibility, which has been given a definite metrical significance by Keenan (1932) and used extensively by Bruges (1959). The irreversibility $\Delta I$, measured in units of energy, is the product of the sink temperature by the entropy increment due to irreversible change ($\Delta S_{irr}$). In the system considered above, $\Delta S_{irr} = \Delta S_2 - \Delta S_1$, where $\Delta S_1$ is the entropy decrease of the donor system and $\Delta S_2$ the corresponding entropy increase of the acceptor system, so that the net irreversibility $\Delta I$ becomes

$$\Delta I = T_0 \Delta S_{irr}$$

$$= T_0 (\Delta S_2 - \Delta S_1),$$

with $T_0$ the sink temperature assumed constant while the irreversibility entropy is passed to it. The total irreversibility $I$ is then

$$I = \int T_0 \, dS$$

taken over the adiabatic path so that $dS$ refers only to the internal entropy equation.

* School of Chemistry, The University of New South Wales, Kensington, N.S.W.
† School of Mathematics, The University of New South Wales, Kensington, N.S.W.
If the entropies in equation (1) are total entropies, the quantity \( \Delta I \) is the measure of the net irreversibility. If, as is usual in engineering practice, the \( \Delta S \)'s are specific entropies, \( \Delta I \) becomes a specific irreversibility measured in units of energy per unit mass, but if the \( \Delta S \)'s, as it is the common practice in chemical applications, are molar entropies, \( \Delta I \) becomes a molar irreversibility measured in units of energy per mole.

For an inexhaustible sink at a temperature \( T_0 \), the admission at pressure \( p \) and temperature \( T \) of an element of enthalpy \( dH \) gives rise to the development of irreversibility \( dI \),

\[
dI = T_0 \, dS,
\]

and if \( dB = dH - T_0 \, dS \), where \( B \) is "availability" (see paper I), then

\[
dI = dH - dB,
\]

and on integration

\[
\Delta I = \Delta H - \Delta B
\]

for a finite temperature change of the source.

For an exhaustible source, the admission of enthalpy \( dH \) takes place at a temperature \( T \) and a sink temperature \( T_0 + aT \), a linear function of \( T \), where \( a \) is the ratio of the water equivalents of the source and the sink and may be either positive or negative. The increment of irreversibility then becomes

\[
\Delta I = \int (T_0 + aT) \, \frac{dH}{T},
\]

\[
\Delta I = (1 + a) \Delta H - \Delta B,
\]

There are equivalent expressions for the measured irreversibility in flow and no-flow systems given in Bruges (Chapter 4, loc. cit.).

In each case, however, minimum values of the irreversibility change at constant enthalpy change are associated with maximum values in the availability change. The performance of heat exchangers, treated largely qualitatively by Bruges (Chapter 6, loc. cit.), is considered in terms of what is called the "effectiveness" of the exchange process. Effectiveness in this content is defined by

\[
\text{Effectiveness} = \frac{\Delta B_2}{\Delta B_1},
\]

and approaches unity when the availability ratio of the donor stream tends to that of the acceptor stream. Effectiveness thus takes a maximum value when irreversibility takes a minimum value.

III. Properties of a Countercurrent Exchanger

Paper I discussed the thermodynamical properties of two systems, one, the donor stream, entering at a temperature \( T_{\infty} \) and leaving at a temperature \( T_a + \theta_0 \) at a rate \( g_1 \) units of mass per unit time and having a specific heat \( c_1 \) which was a
function of stream temperature \((T + \theta)\). The second, or acceptor stream entered at a lower temperature \(T_0\) and left at a temperature \(T_\infty - \theta_\infty\). The flow rate of this stream was \(g_2\) units of mass per unit time and had a specific heat \(c_2\) which was a function of the stream temperature \(T\). The temperature difference \(\theta\) (greater than zero) between the streams could pass one or more stationary values \(\theta^*\) at a lower stream temperature \(T^*\), the so-called pivotal temperature. Paper I showed that

\[
g_2 = \frac{c_1^*}{c_2^*} \frac{\Delta H_1}{\Delta H_2^*} = \frac{\Delta H_1}{\Delta H_2^*}, \tag{4}
\]

where

\[
c_1^* = \text{specific heat of the upper stream at temperature } (T^* + \theta^*) ;
\]

\[
c_2^* = \text{specific heat of the lower stream at temperature } T^* ;
\]

\[
\Delta H_1 = \int_{T + \theta}^{T_\infty} c_1 d(T + \theta) = \text{total specific enthalpy change of the upper stream ;}
\]

\[
\Delta H_2^* = \int_{T^* + \theta^*}^{T_\infty + \theta^*} c_1 d(T + \theta) = \text{specific enthalpy change of upper stream in passing from the sink temperature to the pivotal temperature.}
\]

\(\Delta H_2\) and \(\Delta H_2^*\) were the corresponding enthalpy changes for the lower stream.

It was also found that

\[
\theta = \frac{g_2}{g_1} \int_{T^*}^{T} \frac{c_2}{c_1} dT - T + Y^* > 0, \tag{5}
\]

and

\[
\theta = Y - T^* - \frac{g_2}{g_1} \int_{Y^*}^{Y} \frac{c_1}{c_2} dY > 0, \tag{6}
\]

with \(Y (= T + \theta)\) and \(Y^* (= T^* + \theta^*)\) representing temperatures in the upper stream.

Now, if we set the upper limits at the sink temperature, equations (5) and (6) yield respectively

\[
\theta_0 = \frac{g_2}{g_1} \int_{T^*}^{T_0} \frac{c_2}{c_1} dT - T_0 + Y^* , \tag{7}
\]

and

\[
0 = T_0 - T^* - \frac{g_2}{g_1} \int_{Y^*}^{Y} \frac{c_1}{c_2} dY . \tag{8}
\]

If a total enthalpy element \(g_1 dH_1\) is lost in unit time from the upper stream at a temperature \(Y(= T + \theta)\), then the total enthalpy gain per unit time by the cooler stream at a temperature \(T\) amounts to \(g_2 dH_2\); the irreversibility element \(dJ\) produced in unit time is therefore

\[
dJ = T \left( \frac{g_2 dH_2}{T} - \frac{g_1 dH_1}{T + \theta} \right),
\]

where the \(g_1\) and \(g_2\) are the mass velocities of the stream.
The total irreversibility per unit mass of the upper stream then becomes

\[ I = \frac{1}{g_1} \int dJ = \frac{g_2}{g_1} \int_{T_o}^{T^\infty - \theta_o} \frac{dH_2}{dT} dT - \int_{T_o + \theta_o}^{T^\infty} \frac{T}{\bar{Y}} dH_1 dY \]

\[ = \frac{g_2}{g_1} \Delta H_2 - \Delta H_1 + \int_{T_o + \theta_o}^{T^\infty} \frac{\theta}{\bar{Y}} dH_1 dY. \]

In view of (4), the first two terms are equal and

\[ I = \int_{T_o + \theta_o}^{T^\infty} \frac{\theta}{\bar{Y}} c_1 dY. \]  

(9)

IV. Optimum Conditions for Operation

To find the optimum conditions for operation, it is necessary to substitute for the \( \theta \) in equation (9) and to find the value of \( g_1/g_2 \) (the only independent variable left in the system) which makes the value of \( I \) a minimum. Two values of \( \theta \) may be used: that in equation (5) and that in (6). The former gives

\[ I = \frac{g_2}{g_1} \int_{T_o + \theta_o}^{T^\infty} \frac{c_1}{\bar{Y}} \left( \int_{T^*}^{T} \frac{c_2}{c_1} dT \right) dY - \int_{T_o + \theta_o}^{T^\infty} \frac{T}{\bar{Y}} c_1 dY + Y^\ast \int_{T_o + \theta_o}^{T^\infty} \frac{c_1}{\bar{Y}} dY; \]

the second term becomes the difference between the specific enthalpy and the irreversibility of the upper stream and the last integral becomes the specific entropy of the upper stream; hence

\[ 0 = \frac{g_2}{g_1} \int_{T_o + \theta_o}^{T^\infty} \frac{c_1}{\bar{Y}} \left( \int_{T^*}^{T} \frac{c_2}{c_1} dT \right) dY - \Delta H_1 + Y^\ast \Delta S_1, \]  

(10)

where

\[ \Delta S_1 = \int_{T_o + \theta_o}^{T^\infty} \frac{dH_1}{\bar{Y}}. \]

Substitution of equation (6) in equation (9) likewise gives

\[ I = \Delta H_1 - T^\ast \Delta S_1 - \frac{g_1}{g_2} \int_{T_o + \theta_o}^{T^\infty} \frac{c_1}{\bar{Y}} \left( \int_{Y^\ast}^{Y_1} \frac{c_1}{c_2} dY \right) dY^1. \]  

(11)

For the optimum conditions of heat exchange, the irreversibility \( I \) must be a minimum. To achieve this, we shall now differentiate equations (10) and (11) with respect to \( g_1 \), keeping \( g_2 \) constant. Putting \( \partial I/\partial g_1 \big|_{Y_o} = 0 \), and recalling the facts that \( \theta_o, T^\ast, \) and \( \theta \) but not \( \theta^\ast \) are functions of the \( g \)'s, we first obtain from (10)

\[ -Y^\ast \frac{\partial \Delta S_1}{\partial g_1} - \Delta S_1 \frac{\partial T^\ast}{\partial g_1} + \frac{\partial \Delta H_1}{\partial g_1} = \frac{g_2}{g_1} \int_{Y_o}^{T^\infty} \frac{c_1}{\bar{Y}} \left( \int_{Y^\ast}^{Y} \frac{c_2}{c_1} dY \right) dY \]

\[ + \frac{g_2}{g_1} \frac{\partial}{\partial g_1} \left[ \int_{T_o + \theta_o}^{T^\infty} \frac{c_1}{\bar{Y}} \left( \int_{T^\ast}^{T} \frac{c_2}{c_1} dT \right) dY \right], \]

where \( Y_o = T_o + \theta_o \).
or, using equations (7), (10), and the definitions of $\Delta H_1$ and $\Delta S_1$, we find that

$$\Delta H_1 = Y^* \Delta S_1,$$

which gives a measure of the pivotal temperature. Corresponding differentiation of equation (11) yields for $\partial I/\partial g_1 = 0$ the minimum value $I_{\text{min}}$ as

$$I_{\text{min}} = \Delta H_1 - T^* \Delta S_1 + g_1 c_{1.0} \frac{\theta_0}{Y_0} \left( \frac{\partial \theta_0}{\partial g_1} \right)_{sa},$$

or, in view of (12),

$$I_{\text{min}} = \theta^* \Delta S_1 + g_1 c_{1.0} \frac{\theta_0}{Y_0} \left( \frac{\partial \theta_0}{\partial g_1} \right)_{sa},$$

where $c_{1.0}$ is the specific heat of the upper stream at the temperature $Y_0$. A definite value can be given to equation (14) for the minimum irreversibility and thus for the maximum effectiveness of the exchange process once a definite value of $(\partial \theta_0/\partial g_1)_{sa}$ is assigned.

For this purpose, we use equation (4) and differentiate with respect to $g_1$, keeping $g_2$ constant. We have

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial g_1} (g_1 \Delta H_1^*) = \frac{\partial}{\partial g_1} (g_2 \Delta H_2^*),$$

giving

$$g_1 c_{1.0} \left( \frac{\partial \theta_0}{\partial g_1} \right)_{sa} = \Delta H_1^*.$$  

(15)

Substitution of equation (15) into (14) finally gives

$$I_{\text{min}} = \theta^* \Delta S_1 + \frac{\theta_0}{T_0 + \theta_0} \Delta H_1^*,$$

(16)

and the minimum irreversibility is the sum of two contributions, one coming from the pivotal temperature difference and one from the initial temperature difference.

V. An Example without Any Phase Change

As a simple example, consider the case in which both streams have isopiestic heat capacities which are linear in temperature throughout the range of the exchanger:

$$c_1 = c_{10} \{1 + a(Y - Y_0)\},$$

$$c_2 = c_{20} \{1 + b(T - T_0)\},$$

where $a$ and $b$ are small in comparison with the reciprocal of $T$.

Omitting powers and products of the small temperature differences ($\theta_0, \theta^*, \theta_\infty$) and of the temperature coefficients $a$ and $b$ we get

$$\Delta H_1 = c_{10} (T_\infty - T_0 - \theta_0) + \frac{1}{2} a (T_\infty - T_0)^2,$$

$$\Delta H_2 = c_{20} (T_\infty - T_0 - \theta_\infty) + \frac{1}{2} b (T_\infty - T_0)^2,$$

$$\Delta H_1^* = c_{10} (T^* - T_0 + \theta^* - \theta_0) + \frac{1}{2} a (T^* - T_0)^2,$$
\[ \Delta H_2^* = c_{20} (T^* - T_0) + \frac{1}{2} b (T^* - T_0)^2, \]
\[ \Delta S_1 = c_{10} (1 - a T_0) \ln \{ T_\infty / (T + \theta_0) \} + a (T_\infty - T_0). \]

From \( \Delta H_1^* / \Delta H_2^* = c_1^* / c_2^* = \Delta H_1 / \Delta H_2 \) we get
\[ \theta^* - \theta_0 = \frac{1}{2} (a - b) (T^* - T_0)^2, \] (17)
and
\[ \theta_\infty - \theta_0 = \frac{1}{2} (b - a) (T_\infty - T_0) (T_\infty + T_0 - 2 T^*). \] (18)

The value of \( T^* \) for this system may be obtained from equation (12) as
\[ T^* + \theta^* = \frac{(T_\infty - T_0 - \theta_0) + \frac{1}{2} a (T_\infty - T_0)^2}{\ln(T_\infty / T_0) - \theta_0 / T_0 + a (T_\infty - T_0 - T_0 \ln(T_\infty / T_0))} \]
\[ \simeq \frac{T_\infty - T_0}{\ln(T_\infty / T_0)} \left( 1 + \frac{\theta_0}{2 T_0} \right), \] (19)
or the pivotal temperature is slightly greater than the logarithmic mean temperature of the system, provided \( \theta_0 \) has a finite value >0.

The attainable value of \( \theta^* \) depends on the relative values of \( a \) and \( b \). The value of \( \theta \) attains a minimum which may be allowed to vanish at \( T = T^* \) when the inequality \( b > a \) holds.

Equations (17)–(19) then become
\[ \theta_0 = \frac{1}{2} (b - a) (T^* - T_0)^2 \]
\[ \simeq \frac{1}{2} (b - a) (T_\infty - T_0)^2, \]
\[ \theta_\infty = \frac{1}{2} (b - a) (T_\infty - T^*)^2 \]
\[ \simeq \frac{1}{2} (b - a) (T_\infty - T_0)^2. \]

Therefore
\[ \theta_0 = \theta_\infty, \]
\[ T^* = \frac{(T_\infty - T_0)}{\ln(T_\infty / T_0)} \left[ 1 + \frac{\frac{1}{4} (b - a) (T_\infty - T_0)^2}{T_0} \right]. \]

The minimum obtainable irreversibility per unit mass then becomes
\[ I_{min.} = \frac{\theta_0}{T_0 + \theta_0} \Delta H_1^* \]
\[ \simeq \frac{1}{16} c_{10} (b - a) (T_\infty - T_0)^2 / T_0, \] (20)
which accordingly vanishes only when \( b = a \), i.e. when the two interacting streams have specific heats with the same logarithmic temperature coefficients, or alternatively, when the overall temperature difference across the exchanger \( (T_\infty - T_0) \) is vanishingly small.

Take now the opposite case in which
\[ a > b. \]
The $\theta$ versus $T$ curve then gives a maximum value $\theta^*$ at the pivotal temperature $T^*$. Optimum efficiency then demands that either $\theta_0$ or $\theta_\infty$ should vanish. Detailed working shows that, in all normal cases in which $a$ and $b$ are small in comparison with the reciprocal of the temperature, the maximum efficiency is obtained when $\theta_\infty$ vanishes. Under these conditions equations (17)–(19) give

$$\theta_0 = \frac{1}{3}(a-b)^2(T_\infty - T_0)^3;$$

$$\theta^* = \frac{1}{3}(a-b)(T_\infty - T_0)^2;$$

$$T^* = \frac{T_\infty - T_0}{\ln(T_\infty/T_0)} - \frac{1}{4}(a-b)(T_\infty - T_0)^2,$$

in which now $T^*$ is slightly less than the logarithmic mean of $T$ and $T_0$.

From these figures, the minimum irreversibility per unit mass may be derived: from equation (16)

$$I_{\text{min.}} = \theta^* \Delta S_1 + \frac{\theta_0}{T_0 + \theta_\infty} \Delta H_1^*,$$

and, since the second term is negligible in comparison with the first one, we have

$$I_{\text{min.}} \simeq \frac{1}{3}c_{10}(a-b)(T_\infty - T_0)^2 \ln(T_\infty/T_0)$$

$$\simeq \frac{1}{3}c_{10}(a-b)(T_\infty - T_0)^2/(T_\infty + T_0),$$

which is always positive and tends to zero only when $a \rightarrow b$ or $T_0 \rightarrow T_\infty$, namely, when the temperature coefficients of the two streams take the same value or when the overall temperature difference $(T_\infty - T_0)$ is an infinitesimal quantity.

To gain perhaps a clearer interpretation of the meaning of the finite positive irreversibilities in heat exchange processes let us allow a gas $A$ (with logarithmic temperature coefficient of heat capacity as $a$) interact with a different gas $B$ with a corresponding property $b$. Later let the heater gas $B$ interact in another heat exchanger with a different sample of gas $A$. Then, no matter how efficient the exchange processes may be made, the second sample of gas $A$ will never be heated to the input temperature of the first sample of gas $A$ and will, in fact, always be cooler by at least $\frac{1}{8}(b-a)(T_\infty - T_0)^2$, while the maximum discharge temperature of the first sample must exceed the source temperature of the second sample by at least a like amount.

VI. EXAMPLES WITH PHASE CHANGES

In any examples in which first-order changes in phase occur, discontinuities appear in the specific heat curves. As discussed in paper I this means that the ratio $c_1^*/c_2^*$ passes through a wide range at a steady value of $T$ or $(T+\theta)$ depending on whether the upper or lower stream is subject to a phase change. Consequently, provided only the enthalpy change associated with the phase change is not trivial in comparison with the total enthalpy change in the exchanger, the pivotal temperature $T^*$ is equal to the temperature of the phase change, say $T_b$, and completely independent of the flow rate.

† A small quantity of a lower order than that of $\theta^*$.
The measure of the minimal irreversibility is accordingly given by

\[ I_{\text{min.}} = \frac{\theta_0}{T_0 + \theta_0} \Delta H_1^*, \]  

(21)

as, for reasons advanced in paper I, \( \theta^* \) in these examples can be made to vanish.

Suppose now we take a simple example in which the upper stream enters as a vapour at \( T_\infty \) having a constant specific heat \( c_1 \) and let the vapour condense at \( T_b \) and be discharged mainly as liquid at the temperature \( T_b \). Let \( L \) be the latent heat of condensation at \( T = T_b \).

Let the lower stream enter at \( T_0 < T_b \) and let this stream have a constant specific heat \( c_2 \). Then the appropriate functions for calculating the minimal irreversibility are as follows:

\[ \Delta H_1^* = L, \]
\[ \Delta H_1 = L + c_1(T_\infty - T_b), \]
\[ \Delta S_1 = L/T_b + c_1 \ln(T_\infty/T_b), \]
\[ \Delta H_2 = c_2(T_\infty - \theta_\infty - T_0), \]
\[ \Delta H_2^* = c_2(T_b - T_0), \]
\[ \theta_0 = T_b - T_0. \]

Equation (21) now reduces to

\[ I_{\text{min.}} = (1 - T_0/T_b) \Delta H_1^*, \]  

(22)

while the heat balance condition gives

\[ 1 + c_1(T_\infty - T_b)/L = (T_\infty - \theta_\infty - T_0)/(T_b - T_0), \]

or

\[ \theta_\infty = T_\infty - T_b - (c_1/L)(T_\infty - T_b)(T_b - T_0), \]  

(23)

which now may be used to express \( \theta_\infty \) in terms of the terminal temperature and the transition temperature. This means that, if we wish to remove, under optimum conditions, all the heat of transition, then there is a prescribed low temperature \( T_0 \) for any entrance high temperature \( T_\infty \), the relative flow rates of the stream being prescribed by the requirements for optimum thermal efficiency.

VII. References

