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COMPOSITE COMPUTED TORQUE CONTROL OF
ROBOTS WITH ELASTIC MOTOR TRANSMISSIONS

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Abstract. The main problem in the control of robots with elastic transmissions between the actuators and the rigid links is caused by the number of control inputs being less than the number of degrees of freedom. This problem has been faced by a composite control law consisting of the conventional 'rigid' computed torque controller for link-based trajectory tracking and a 'flexible' computed torque part multiplied with the inverse of the stiffness matrix for stabilization of the elastic deflections. The resultant control system resembles the so-called 'two-time scale sliding control' technique of Slotine and Hong (1987), but in our approach the stniffnesses of the elastic motor transmissions do not have to be relatively large neither is there the restriction that there have to be as many motor inputs as elastic transmissions. The goal of the composite controller is that the individual link trajectories will follow the desired trajectories while the elastic-transmission forces/torques, which are not directly constrained by the output specifications, remain on a certain 'manifold' due to the natural flexibility behavior of the system. The key concept is illustrated with simulation results of a translation-rotation robot with one torsional-elastic motor transmission.

Keywords. Control theory; industrial robots; flexible robots; computed torque control; Lyapunov methods; nonlinear systems; control system design.

INTRODUCTION

Flexible Manipulator Control

Today, industrial robots are used for various purposes. Because of hardware limitations in on-line applications, until now, robot control has been studied extensively under the assumption that the actuator transmissions are stiff and that the links can be modeled as rigid bodies. Therefore, most of today's robots have a very stiff (and thus heavy) construction in order to avoid deformations and vibrations. For higher operating speeds, industrial robots should be lightweight constructions to reduce the driving force/torque requirements and to enable the robot arm to respond faster. However, a lightweight manipulator may have flexibility in the link structure and elasticity in the transmissions between actuators and links. For most manipulators, elasticity of the motor transmissions has a greater significance for the design of the controller than the deformation of the flexible links. Furthermore, link flexibility can be approximately modeled by a chain of rigid sublinks interconnected by elastic joints. Hence, more accurate models involving elastic transmissions should be taken into account to pursue better dynamic performance of industrial robots. The application of more complex control algorithms is possible now due to the availability of advanced multi-processor equipment for real-time manipulator control.

Computed Torque Control

A well known approach to improve the behavior of manipulators is the computed torque control method, sometimes called inverse dynamics control or static nonlinear state feedback control. Here, the control law is designed explicitly on the basis of a model, in order to compensate for robot nonlinearities and to guarantee a desired closed-loop behavior. In its original version, this control method appears to be applicable only to rigid manipulators. If flexibilities play an important role, it often results in an unstable system behavior. Therefore, the control system must deal with control of the elastic vibrations as well as trajectory tracking. However, it is not possible to find a control input for a flexible manipulator which will accomplish perfect tracking of any desired trajectory in space while totally damping the undesired elastic deflections. It is more realistic to search for a control law achieving both a reasonable trajectory tracking and a certain stabilization of acceptable vibrations. A composite control technique shall be developed to extend the familiar computed torque control scheme for rigid manipulators to a control scheme for manipulators with elastic motor transmissions.
Each joint has its own actuator and its own transmission between the actuator and the driven link. The motor torques (used in a generalized sense, i.e. denoting both torques and forces) acting on the transmissions are the robot control inputs. In this paper, we consider the case in which some or all transmissions are elastically deformable. Then, for each elastic deformation it is necessary to introduce an extra coordinate to describe the rotation of the rotor of the motor. These extra coordinates are the components of a vector $q_e \in \mathbb{R}^q$ with $q \leq n$.

For the sequel it is advantageous to regroup the coordinates $q$ of the links in two vectors $q \in \mathbb{R}^{n-q}$ and $q_e \in \mathbb{R}^q$, where $q$ and $q_e$ contain the coordinates of the direct driven links (i.e. driven by the stiff transmissions), respectively the coordinates of the elastically driven links (i.e. driven by the elastic transmissions). See Fig. 1.

This completes the introduction of the total vector of generalized coordinates $q \in \mathbb{R}^{n+q}$:

$$ q = \begin{bmatrix} q \\ q_e \end{bmatrix}. $$

The components of the vector $\epsilon$ defined by

$$ \epsilon = q_m - q, $$

characterize the deformations of the elastic motor transmissions.

Hence, if these transmissions are modeled as massless linear springs, the elastic-transmission torques being the components of a vector $q_e \in \mathbb{R}^q$ are related to $\epsilon$ by

$$ \epsilon = K \epsilon, $$

where $K \in \mathbb{R}^{q \times q}$ is the positive definite diagonal stiffness matrix.

The Partitioned Dynamic Manipulator Model

Using a Lagrangian approach, the dynamic model of the manipulator can be written in the standard form

$$ M(q) \ddot{q} + H(q, \dot{q}, t) = \tau, $$

where $q \in \mathbb{R}^{n+q}$ is the vector of generalized coordinates, $\tau \in \mathbb{R}^q$ is the vector of actuator input torques, $M \in \mathbb{R}^{(n+q) \times (n+q)}$ is the symmetrical, positive definite inertia matrix, $H \in \mathbb{R}^{(n+q) \times (n+q)}$ is the distribution matrix.

The actuator torques, i.e. the components of $\tau$, are also regrouped in two subvectors $\tau_s \in \mathbb{R}^{n-q}$ and $\tau_e \in \mathbb{R}^q$ where $\tau_s$ and $\tau_e$ contain the torques of the actuators with a stiff, respectively an elastic transmission. If $M$ and $\tau$ are partitioned in accordance to the partitioning of $q$, the dynamic model can be given in partitioned form by:

$$ M_s \ddot{q}_s + M_e \ddot{q}_e + \tau_s = \tau_s, $$

$$ M_e \ddot{q}_e + M_e \ddot{q}_e + \tau_e = \tau_e, $$

$$ M_{se} \ddot{q}_s + \tau_e = \tau_e. \tag{7} $$

The equations of motion of the direct driven links and the motor rotors connected to the stiff transmissions are formulated in eq. (5), while eq. (6) represents the motions of the elastically driven links manipulated by the elastic-transmission torques $\tau_e$. The dynamics of the motor rotors connected to the same elastic transmissions are given in eq. (7).

With eq. (3) it is possible to eliminate $q_{me}$. Rearranging the equations of motion then yields a set in $q_s$ and $q_e$, which is more suitable for control design:

$$ M_s \ddot{q}_s + M_s \dot{q}_s + \tau_s = \tau_s, \tag{8} $$

$$ M_e \ddot{q}_e + M_e \dot{q}_e + \tau_e = \tau_e. \tag{9} $$

where $\tau_s = \begin{bmatrix} \tau_s \\ \tau_e \end{bmatrix}, \tau_e = \begin{bmatrix} \tau_s \\ \tau_e \end{bmatrix}, q = \begin{bmatrix} q_s \\ q_e \end{bmatrix}$.

$$ M_s = \begin{bmatrix} M_s & M_{se} \\ M_{es} & M_{ee} \end{bmatrix}, \quad M_e = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & M_{ee} \\ M_{ee} & M_{ee} \end{bmatrix}, \tag{10} $$

$F \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times n}$ is the positive definite diagonal flexibility matrix:

$$ F = K^{-1}. \tag{11} $$

If all actuator transmissions are very stiff (i.e., the largest flexibility element in $F$ is very small), eq. (8) simplifies to the equations of motion of the equivalent rigid-transmission manipulator:

$$ M(q) \ddot{q} + H(q, \dot{q}, t) = \tau, \tag{12} $$

COMPOSITE COMPUTED TORQUE CONTROL

Introduction

The first problem in controlling a rigid-link manipulator with elastic motor transmissions, is that only the desired link coordinates $q_d = q_d(t)$ can be determined directly from the known desired gripper path, while there is no indication for a certain desired trajectory of $q_e(t)$.

To obtain a smooth robot performance in space, we define a reference trajectory $q^*_s = q^*_s(t)$ for the link variables, which will converge to $q_d$ after progression in time. Further, the idea is to formulate a "reference manifold" $\mathcal{L}(t)$ on which the controller tries to keep the elastic-transmission torques $\tau_e(t)$, instead of trying to suppress them totally.

The second problem is that there are more degrees of freedom than control inputs. The goal of the composite controller developed in this paper is to track the reference trajectory of the links, while stabilizing the elastic vibrations around the specified reference manifold.

The Computed Torque Controller

As argued at the beginning of this paper, it is appealing to try to find the analogue for flexible manipulators of the so-called computed torque control method for rigid robots. However, an elastic-transmission robot does not allow a nonlinear feedback control as for rigid manipulators, since there are less control inputs than degrees of freedom. For the n-th order model (8) it is possible to choose the next computed torque control law:

$$ \tau = M(q) \ddot{q} + M(e) + \tau_s, + M(q) \dot{q} + K_e \epsilon, \tag{13} $$

$$ q^*_e = q^*_e + \lambda^*_e, \tag{14} $$

$$ q_e = M_e(q) \ddot{q}_e + K_e \epsilon, \tag{15} $$

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where \( q_0 \) is the chosen reference trajectory of the link positions; in this case she is a sliding surface for \( q \) according to Asada and Slotine (1986).

In this case is \( \varepsilon = q_0 \) a sliding surface for \( q \) according to Asada and Slotine (1986), \( s_0 \) is the chosen reference manifold, in this case the vector of elastic-transmission torques necessary to manipulate the links along the reference trajectory, \( q_0 = L_s - L \) is the tracking error, \( q_0 = \dot{L}_s - \dot{L} \) is the reference error, \( \varepsilon_0 = \dot{L}_s - \dot{L} \) is the reference manifold error, \( K_t \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times n} \) and \( K_e \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times n} \) are both diagonal, positive definite gain matrices.

According to definition (15), \( s_0 \) can be written as a function of \( q_0, \hat{q}_0, \) and \( t \). From the definition of the control input signals (13), we know that the synthesis of \( \mu \) involves the first and second time-derivatives of \( s_0 \). In the simulations of this paper this is achieved by simply differentiating twice the computed torques \( s_0 \). Since \( M \) and \( q_0 \) are smooth functions of their arguments, in future it seems to be better just to make use of the dynamic robot model. In this way, \( s_{\mu} \) and \( s_{\hat{\mu}} \) are explicit functions of \( q_0, \hat{q}_0, \dot{q}_0, \) and \( t \), which implies that the composite controller can be implemented if the generalized coordinates and velocities are measurable at all time \( t \). The second condition is that the desired trajectory \( q_0(t) \) and all its time-derivatives up to the fourth order are known and uniformly bounded.

**The Composite Controller**

In the adopted control strategy (13), we recognize the next composite control form:

\[
\mu = \mu_\mu + \mu_\mu_\sigma, \quad (16)
\]

where

- \( \mu_\mu \) is the computed torque controller designed as it would be done for the equivalent rigid-transmission manipulator (12) and meant directly for tracking the desired link-based trajectory in space, \( q_0(t) \),
- \( \mu_\mu_\sigma \) is the corrective control term to compensate the effects of transmission-flexibilities by stabilizing the elastic torque vector \( \sigma_\sigma(t) \) around its reference manifold \( \sigma_\sigma(t) \) (which obviously indirectly depends on the link-based trajectory of interest, \( q_0(t) \), too).

Notice, that if there are no elastic deformations in the actuator transmissions (i.e., \( \| F \|_{\infty} \approx 0 \)), from eq. (13) just remains the 'rigid' computed torque controller we all know. The addition of the 'flexible' computed torque part with the flexibility matrix \( F \) expresses the extra effort needed to stabilize the occurring elastic vibrations.

**Stability of the Closed-Loop System**

Stability is an extremely important factor for control design, especially for the kind of flexible robot systems as considered in this paper. Lyapunov's stability theorems make possible a method of synthesizing control laws which guarantee stability of the closed-loop system.

In the second stability approach of Lyapunov, the first step is the derivation of the equivalent error equations of the closed-loop system. The three individual parts of the model describing the closed-loop error dynamics of
- (5) all motor rotors with links inter-connected by the stiff transmissions,
- (6) the links manipulated by the elastic transmissions and
- (7) the motor rotors connected to the elastic transmissions are resp.:
The next system variables and parameters will be used:

$q_1$, $q_2$, $q_3$, $q_4$, $q_5$, $q_6$ are coordinates of the kinematic and the dynamic model of the robot, respectively.

$m_1 = 10kg$ is the mass of the carriage, $m_2 = 2kg$ is the mass of the payload at the end of the arm, $m_3 = 3kg$ is the mass of the motor rotor, $m^ = 5kgm^2$ is the inertia of the motor rotor, $l = 0.75m$ is the length of the arm, $k = 2Nm/rad$, $b = 0.5Nm/s$ is the friction constant of the motor rotor.

The dynamic model of this robot is described in the general form of equation (21):

$$M(q)\dot{q} + h(q, \dot{q}, t) = H\mu,$$

where

$$M = \begin{bmatrix} m^ & M_{12} & 0 \\ M_{21} & m_2 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & M_{mm} \end{bmatrix},$$

$$h = \begin{bmatrix} m_1 - m^ \\ m_2 + m^ \\ M_{mm} \end{bmatrix},$$

$$\mu = \begin{bmatrix} u_1 \\ u_2 \\ u_3 \end{bmatrix},$$

and

$$K(q_6 - q_5).$$

CONCLUSIONS

Using the idea of computed torque control, in this paper a control law is presented which incorporates the effects of motor-transmission flexibilities on the system. The goal of this composite controller is to follow a specified link-coordinate based trajectory in space while stabilizing the elastic deflections around a certain reference manifold due to the natural flexibility behavior of the system. Simulations of a translation-rotation robot with one elastic transmission between the motor and the rotating arm have shown the effectiveness of this proposed composite control approach.

One attractive feature of this composite strategy is that the control term $u_q(t)$ can be designed on the basis of well-established control schemes for rigid manipulators, such as the well-known computed torque method utilized in this controller design or such as the adaptive sliding control approach of Slotine and Li (1986).

Another advantage of this approach is that the mechanical stiffnesses of the linear-elastic transmissions do not have to be assumed large in formulating the dynamic model of the robot system. This, in contradiction to the 'singular perturbation' approach of Slotine and Hong (1987) for manipulators only with relatively stiff actuator transmissions. A crucial issue of their method is the assumption that the smallest stiffness is sufficiently large so as to preserve a certain time scale separation. In case the elastic transmissions are 'not stiff enough', they propose the use of so called integral manifolds to obtain a more accurate control system which accounts for the effect of flexibility up to a certain order of the largest flexibility parameter.

A third advantage of this control strategy is that not all motor transmissions have to be elastic; so the number of degrees of freedom is less than or equal to two times the number of motors: $(n + e) \leq 2n$. With this notation, we immediately obtain the particular system dynamics structure as depicted in equations (5)-(7).
The dynamic model of this robot is described in the general form

\[ M(q) \ddot{q} + n(q, \dot{q}, t) = H u, \]

where

\[ \ddot{q} = \begin{bmatrix} \dot{q}r \\ \dot{q}_y \end{bmatrix}, \quad u = \begin{bmatrix} u_x \\ u_y \end{bmatrix}, \quad H = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}, \]

\[ M = \begin{bmatrix} M_{xx} & M_{xy} & 0 \\ M_{yx} & M_{yy} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & M_{mm} \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} m_x + m_2 & -(m_1 + m_2) \sin(q_y) & 0 \\ -(m_1 + m_2) \sin(q_y) & (m_1 + m_2)^2 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & m_r \end{bmatrix}, \]

\[ z_r = h(q_y - g_y). \]

With this notation, we immediately obtain the particular system dynamics structure as depicted in equations (24)–(26)–(27).

**Control Simulation Results**

Here, some simulation results obtained with the composite controller are presented. The tracking output errors of the payload \( e_x = x - z, \ e_y = y - z \) and their time-derivatives are relatively small, while the control input signals are quite normal for motors (see Fig. 4: \( k = 2[N/m/rad], K_1 = \text{diag}[10], K_2 = 10 \)). If the initial link coordinates \( q_y(0) \) and \( \dot{q}_y(0) \) and their time-derivatives are not according to the desired trajectory, the tests still show a very acceptable system performance, except that the absolute magnitudes of the force \( u_x \) and the torque \( u_y \) become very large just after \( t = 0 \).

In the simulation tests, indeed it appears that the elastic-transmission torque \( z_r \) plays an important role in the flexible control system, in that it depends from the system dynamics and from the actual trajectory of the links (eq. (6)), but not from the magnitude of the stiffness \( k \) of the torsional-elastic motor transmission (which is compensated by \( r \) in definition (2); see the same Fig. 4). This explains the remarkable effect that the magnitude of \( k \) does not influence the ranges in which the output errors \( e_x, \ e_y \) and their time-derivatives fluctuate: we have always \( k = 0.2, k = 2 \) or \( k = 20[N/m/rad] \), the output (velocity) errors remain always in between \( \pm 0.01[m/sec] \). Thus, there seems to be no restriction to the magnitude of the stiffness \( k \), this in contradiction to the control strategy of Slotine and Hong (1987), where \( k \) has to be very large. As can be expected, these output (velocity) error ranges change by alternating the control gain \( K_2 \); for example, they become \( \pm 0.001[m/sec] \) as \( K_2 \) is chosen to be \( K_2 = \text{diag}[100] \) instead of \( K_2 = \text{diag}[10] \).

**CONCLUSIONS**

Using the idea of computed torque control, in this paper a control law is presented which incorporates the effects of motor-transmission flexibilities on the system. The goal of this composite controller is to follow a specified link-coordinate based trajectory in space while stabilizing the elastic deflections around a certain reference manifold due to the natural flexibility behavior of the system. Simulations of a translation-rotation robot with one elastic transmission between the motor and the rotating arm have shown the effectiveness of this proposed composite control approach.

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A third advantage of this control strategy is that not all motor transmissions have to be elastic; so the number of degrees of freedom is less than or equal to two times the number of motors: \((n + e) \leq 2n\).
However, last but not least must be mentioned that all system state variables and their first time-derivatives have to be available by measurement or on-line estimation.

FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several interesting research issues that arise at this point:

- In this article are considered flexible manipulators with elasticity concentrated at the actuator transmissions. In future, this approach will be extended to the case of elasticity distributed along the manipulator's structure (i.e., consideration of flexible arms modeled as elastic joints).

- Further has to be addressed the problem if there is lack of full state availability (as for example the flexible variables cannot be measured) and if there have to be designed an output-trajectory controller to realize tracking of a pre-specified path in space of the gripper at the end of an redundant robot arm (i.e., we have to deal with end-effector control instead of link-based control).

- Unfortunately, the computed torque control method also relies heavily on an accurate prior knowledge of the robot system dynamics and, therefore, the approach presented in this paper has to be expanded further to an adaptive control technique in which the unknown or time-varying system parameters will be adjusted on-line (for example basically according to the method of Slotine and Li (1987)). The global asymptotic stability of the overall system shall then be guaranteed through the hyperstability theorem of Popov (1969).

- Finally, sliding control according to Asada and Slotine (1986) can be practiced in order to robustify the system against parametric uncertainties and (environmental) disturbances.

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Fig. 4: Composite CTC