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A Continuous Lumping Model for Hydrocracking on a Zeolite Catalysts: Model Development and Parameter Identification

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1. Introduction

The rapid decline in conventional light crude oil resources [1], combined with the increasing demand for middle distillates (i.e. Kerosene and Gasoil cuts) [2,3] have made Hydrocracking an increasingly attractive option for upgrading of Vacuum Gas Oil (VGO) residue. The VGO cut is characterized by a high True Boiling Point (i.e. high percentage of >370°C cut) [4]. It frequently contains relatively high amounts of organic nitrogen and sulfur, which are undesirable in the final products (ie.g. diesel, fuel oil). The purpose of hydrocracking units is the transformation of VGO to valuable middle distillate fractions, conforming to ever more stringent product quality specifications[5].

The hydrocracking (HCK) process involves the breaking up of large hydrocarbons by β -scission, hydrogenation of aromatic rings, as well as PCP-isomerization. The removal of organic nitrogen and sulfur by hydrodenitrogenation (HDN) and hydrodesulfurization (HDS) reactions are another important function of a HCK unit [5]. A hydrocracking unit often uses a zeolite catalyst with an acid and a metallic site [6]. A good general description of the mechanism is given by Weitkamp [7].

The reaction mechanism of such bifunctional catalysts has been the object of a number of past [8,9] and recent studies [10–16]. Many of these studies are focused on model feeds, such as Fisher-Tropsch wax [14] or n-alkane mixtures [15]. Maya residue [17] and Athabasca bitumen derived VGO [16] are among the industrial feedstocks used for model development..

Hydrocracking is considered to be an extremely versatile process [1,7]. A large number of different feedstocks can be converted into a broad range of products by carefully choosing the catalyst and adjusting operating conditions[1,18–20].

Hydrocracking of non-conventional and non-crude feedstocks is becoming an increasingly active area of research. This study is focused on the development of a hydrocracking model based on traditional VGO residues.

Even if HCK is a well-established tool in the petroleum refining industry [5], the continuing improvement in analytic techniques and computational capabilities have led to a number of recent developments in this field [5,21,22]. Process modeling, in particular, has been a major factor in advancing the understanding the operation of hydrocracking units [23]. There are two main motivations for developing hydrocracking models: 1) obtaining robust predictions of the performance of HCK units, which can be used to guide process design and optimization, and 2) obtaining a more nuanced understanding of the underlying physico-chemical processes to guide basic research and development of new catalysts and/or process designs.

Accurate and robust simulation of residue (i.e. $>370^{\circ}\text{C}$ cut) conversion, yield structure in terms of standard cuts, and simulated distillation (SIMDIS) is required by a hydrocracking model. The hydrogen consumption, generation of gases (C_3 & C_4), as well as a number of product qualities should also be well predicted. An advanced HCK model should be validated for a wide range of operating conditions and for different feeds in order to have the explanatory capabilities. When the tuning parameters for a complex model, including mechanistic considerations as well as empirical aspects, are adjusted for a very restrained database, they are only valid within this limited range. In this case little or no additional information regarding the underlying physic-chemical processes of the system can be gained, regardless of the level of detail of the model. Simple empirical correlations can often give equivalent results than a continuous lumping model within the restrained range of applicability. This work aims to show that a continuous lumping model can be validated for a large range of operating conditions (temperature, contact time, H_2/HC), and feedstocks (residue content, nitrogen content).

Comprehensive reviews of the recent development in hydrocracking models have been compiled by Ancheyta and Elizade [21,24]. A number of different approaches are used, depending on the available data and intended application of the model. Discrete lumping models, which use dedicated correlations for the reactivity of each lump, are among the simplest option. First developed by Qader and Hill [25], these models have been widely used [21,22]. The lumps can represent specific cuts or pseudo components [26]. Continuous lumping models offer a much finer resolution of the feed. They consider the hydrocarbon mixture to be a continuous distribution along an internal coordinate (most commonly True Boiling Point, TBP) [21,22,24,27,28]. A more detailed description of the reaction network can be achieved by decomposition of the feed into a number of lumps, each distributed along TBP [22]. Other modeling approaches include the use of neural networks [29] and microkinetic modeling [30-33]. Using neural networks is an entirely empirical black-box

approach, which is not based on an understanding of the underlying chemical kinetics. These powerful models can be used when large amounts of data are available. Microkinetic modeling, such as the single events approach, is based on the reconstruction of the feed into its individual molecules. A large reaction network with thousands of possible reaction pathways is then constructed. These models require a detailed understanding of the chemical kinetics and feed composition. A large amount of computational resources is also required.

The data fitting procedure and statistical analysis of model parameters for a continuous lumping model is presented in this work. The paper is structured as follows: The experimental setup of the pilot plant and the databases is presented in section 2. Details of the continuous lumping model used here are given in section 3. This is followed by a description of the parameter fitting procedure, as well as a model evaluation in sections 4 and 5. A statistical analysis of the model parameters is given in section 6.

2. Materials & Methods

2.1 Process Description

Industrial hydrocracking operations are generally a two-step process ($R_1 + R_2$). The second step (R_2) is considered separately in this study. The main HCK reactor, with a zeolite catalyst follows an hydrotreatment reactor. The first reactor (R_1) uses a catalyst designed to remove organic nitrogen and sulfur, hydrogenate aromatic compounds, and remove metallic impurities. These catalysts are much less susceptible to poisoning than the zeolite-based HCK catalysts. Nitrogen- and sulfur-containing compounds, as well as metals are known to inhibit zeolite catalysts [5]. This allows the more fragile zeolite catalyst in the second reactor (R_2) to perform the main hydrocracking reaction. The main purpose of the HCK catalyst (R_2) is the breaking up of large hydrocarbon atoms contained in the VGO residue, in order to obtain the more valuable middle distillate cuts. Two types of tests were used in the calibration and evaluation databases: 1) pretreatment (R_1) and hydrocracking (R_2) in a single step, and; 2) separate pretreatment (R_1). These two cases are illustrated in Figure 1

In the first case, the gases produced in R_1 (H_2S , NH_3 , hydrocarbon gasses) are carried over in the feed entering R_2 . The total mass entering R_2 , with respect to the feed of R_1 , is equal to the sum of the mass entering two-step process and the hydrogen consumption in R_1 . The total yield of the two reactors is then equal to the mass of the feed (R_1) and the hydrogen consumption in the two reactors (R_1 and R_2).

In the second case, the gases are separated from the effluent of the pretreatment reactor, which is analyzed and stored for subsequent use in a hydrocracking test. The feed entering R2 is therefore 100% liquid. Aniline and dimethyldisulfide (DMDS) additives are added in order to include the effect of NH_3 and H_2S on the zeolite catalyst. This mass is subsequently subtracted from the effluent, giving a total yield of sum of the mass of the feed (R2) and the hydrogen consumption (excluding H_2 used up in the generation of H_2S from DMDS and NH_3 from Aniline). This setup allows the influence of feed nitrogen content to be studied independent of other feed characteristics.

The sulfur and nitrogen contents in the liquid stream entering R2 are subsequently referred to as S_{R_2} and N_{R_2} , respectively. The nitrogen and sulfur content entering R1 are referred to as N_{R_1} and S_{R_1} . In the case of a pre-treated feed, the equivalent nitrogen content due to aniline additive is used instead.

2.2 The Pilot Plant

The experimental runs presented in this study were performed in a pilot unit at IFP Energies Nouvelles, Solaize, France. The hydrocracking step was performed on a commercial NiMoP-zeolite catalyst. Various commercial HDT catalysts were used for the pretreatment step. Total catalyst volume in both reactors is 50 cm^3 . The plant consists of a number of fixed beds, down-flow reactors, designed to mirror the operating conditions in industrial hydrocracking units. Unlike industrial units, which operate in adiabatic mode, the pilot plant operates in isothermal conditions. Temperature is controlled along the reactor. The units were run in continuous operation. Individual mass balances were taken for up to 12 hours, after temperatures, pressures, flow rates, and effluent properties were stabilized. A series of mass balances with different operating conditions were thus taken from each experimental run. Each mass balance corresponds to a single experimental point.

Analyses were performed on the feedstocks, the liquid and gaseous effluents, as well as a sample taken on the effluent of the pretreatment reactor (where applicable, see Figure 1 and Figure 2). The most relevant measurements to this study were the analysis of the feed sulfur and nitrogen contents, the partial pressures of NH_3 , H_2S , and H_2 gasses, as well as the simulated distillation.

2.3 The Calibration & Validation Databases

A calibration database, consisting of 52 mass balances, was compiled. Feed characteristics and operating condition were chosen to correspond to the ones encountered in industrial hydrocracking units. This database was used for the identification of the empirical parameters in the continuous lumping model. A validation database, consisting of an additional 22

109 mass balances was used to validate the model performance. The feed nitrogen and sulfur content of the two databases is
110 shown in Figure 3. Different feeds of Iranian or Arabian origin were used at varying levels of pretreatment (R1). For about
111 half (n=31) of the experimental runs, pretreatment and hydrocracking were performed in a single step, corresponding to
112 Figure 1. The remaining runs (n=43) were performed in separate steps, corresponding to Figure 2.

113 The range of the main operating conditions, temperature (°C), hydrogen to hydrocarbon ratio (H₂/HC, StdL/L), and
114 Liquid Hourly Space Velocity (LHSV, h⁻¹) is given in Figure 4. The residue (>370°C) cut in the feed of the zeolite catalytic
115 bed (R2) and its conversion, $X_{370+} = 100 * (1 - Y_{370+,out} / Y_{370+,in})$ are given in Figure 5 to give an overview of the performance of
116 the experimental runs.

117 The range of the residual organic nitrogen in the feed is 0 – 154 ppm. Four runs in the calibration database had con-
118 tained no detectable organic nitrogen; these are not shown in Figure 3 because of the log scale. The sulfur content is not
119 used in the modeling because it has been found to have negligible influence on hydrocracking reactions on a zeolite cata-
120 lyst. The NH₃ entering R2, due to the feed nitrogen content of the pretreatment reactor or the aniline additive was varied
121 between 570 and 2800 ppm, with one run performed at a very high value of 5000 ppm. The nitrogen and sulfur content in
122 the R1 and R2 feeds of the validation database are within the range of the validation database. The variations in the feeds
123 must be taken into account by the model. Using a continuous rather than a discrete lumping approach allows the full
124 distribution (SIMDIS) of the feed rather than a limited number of lumps to be used as the model input.

125 Most tests were performed at a standard ratio of H₂ gas to hydrocarbon flowrates (H₂/HC) of 1000 L/L (std) and a total
126 pressure of 140 bar. Four runs in the calibration database were performed at 100 bar, while four runs in the validation
127 database were performed at 160 bar. The temperature and LHSV were varied between 370 – 401°C and 1.3 – 4.2 h⁻¹ in the
128 calibration database. The validation tests generally fall within the same range, with the exception of four runs with a
129 LHSV of 0.9 h⁻¹, and one test at a very low temperature of 362°C.

130 The residue (>370°C cut) of the feed of R2 falls in a relatively narrow range of between 67 – 84 %, with two validation
131 tests at around 50 %, corresponding to very high levels of pretreatment. The conversion (X₃₇₀₊), on the other hand, covers
132 the complete range that can be achieved in a hydrocracking reactor, i.e. up to 100 %.

133 Measurements for the composition of the residue (>370°C) cut of the calibration feeds (R2), in terms of paraffin (P),
134 naphthene (N) and aromatic (A) compounds are available for the pretreated feeds (see Figure 2). This shows that the com-
135 position of the feeds used in this study does not vary very much. The residue cut of the feeds have an aromatics content of
136 10 to 37 %, with most feeds close to 30%.

138

139 **3. Model Development**140 **3.1 The Continuous Lumping Framework**

141 The modeling framework considered the hydrocarbon mixture to be a continuous distribution of true boiling point
 142 (TBP). The reactivity of the components follows a curve described as a function of normalized TBP θ . Hydrocarbons be-
 143 low 8 carbon atoms (TBP $\approx 124^\circ\text{C}$) are assumed to undergo no further cracking, while cracking of very heavy hydrocarbons
 144 ($>700^\circ\text{C}$) is considered to be constant and thus independent of TBP. The normalized TBP is defined as:

145

146

$$\theta = \frac{TBP - T_{min}}{T_{max} - T_{min}} \quad (1)$$

147 **Where:**

TBP True Boiling Point ($^\circ\text{C}$)

T_{min} -7.6°C (TBP of C_4H_{10})

T_{max} 700°C

148

149

150 It is important to note that the main cracking mechanism is β -scission of saturated hydrocarbon chains or cycles. β -
 151 scissions on a straight chain result in two smaller molecules with lower boiling points. For endo-cyclic β -scissions of cy-
 152 cloalkanes (i.e. ring opening), a single, saturated alkane chain is formed. This results in a change in TBP, but no reduction
 153 in size of the molecule. However, a number of different reaction types occur during the hydrocracking process. Isomeriza-
 154 tion reactions change the branching degree of a hydrocarbon, which can increase or decrease the TBP of the reaction
 155 product. Aromatic compounds are hydrogenated, forming saturated cycloalkanes (naphthenes). Hydrogenation of aro-
 156 matic rings is also accompanied by a decrease in boiling point.

157 These reactions are not explicitly modeled in the continuous lumping model presented here. The set of reactions, caus-
 158 ing a decrease in the TBP of the mixture are lumped together to give an apparent reaction rate. A more detailed, multi-
 159 family approach, which treats the reaction pathways between aromatic, naphthene, and paraffins explicitly, has been pre-
 160 sented by Becker et al. [22]. Fitting the parameters of this model requires detailed knowledge of the feed and effluent

161 composition.. Such analyses are rarely available in an industrial context. A model capable of predicting the composition of
162 the effluent is therefore of limited usefulness for the hydrocracking units design and optimization. However, they are
163 useful in a research and development context. They allow the characterization of the chemical reaction pathways and
164 activity of a catalyst. This can lead to a better understanding of the underlying phenomena which can consequently be
165 used to guide future developments.

166 The model presented here has been developed to capture the effect of the main operating parameters and feed condi-
167 tions in order to predict the yield structure of the hydrocracker.

168

170 3.2 The Model Equations

171 The feed simulated distillation (SIMDIS) is a cumulative mass distribution. The associated continuous distribution, $c(\theta, t)$,
 172 can be split up into a number of intervals i , with $\Delta\theta_i = [\theta_{i-}, \theta_{i+}]$, with $\theta_{i-} < \theta_{i+}$. The discrete concentration in each inter-
 173 val, C_i , is given by:

$$C_i = \int_{\theta_{i-}}^{\theta_{i+}} c(\theta, t) d\theta \quad (2)$$

174 Each interval is represented by θ_i . The mass balance for each interval i is:

$$\frac{\Delta C_i}{\Delta t} = -R_{i,out} + R_{i,in} \quad (3)$$

175 The mass being eliminated from the interval i , $R_{i,out}$ is due to molecules being cracked. This results in a lower TBP. The
 176 mass $R_{i,in}$ being added to the interval i , is due to the cracking of heavier hydrocarbons (i.e. in classes with $\theta_j > \theta_i$). The mass
 177 of hydrocarbons resulting from a cracking reaction, which fall in the $\Delta\theta_i$ interval, i.e. the $R_{i,out}$ term, is added to the mass
 178 C_i .

179 A set of partial differential equations for the hydrocracking reaction can be constructed for the continuous mass distri-
 180 bution $c(\theta, t)$, given in equation (2). Here, the continuous elimination and creation terms are denoted r_{out} and r_{in} respec-
 181 tively.

$$\frac{\partial c(\theta, t)}{\partial t} = -r_{out}(\theta, t) + r_{in}(\theta, t) \quad (4)$$

182 An expansion of the elimination (r_{out}) and generation (r_{in}) terms leads to:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial c(\theta, t)}{\partial t} &= -k_{\mathbf{T}} f_X(\theta) I_N(t) C(\theta, t) \\ &+ \int_{\theta}^{\infty} k_{\mathbf{T}} f_X(\theta) I_N(t) C(\theta, t) g(\theta, \theta^*) d\theta^* \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

183 Where:

$c(\theta, t)$ Mass fraction at TBP θ , and time t

$f_X(\theta)$ Reactivity function

I_N	Nitrogen inhibition term
k_T	Pre-factor at temperature T
$g(\theta, \theta^*)$	Yield distribution function

184

185 The yield distribution, $g(\theta, \theta^*)$, and reactivity function, $f_X(\theta)$, do not change along the reactor (for isothermal operation)
 186 and are therefore calculated *a priori*.

187 A gamma function was chosen for the reactivity function and a beta distribution was chosen for the yield distribution.

188 These two functions are very flexible regarding the shapes they can take [22]. They were chosen over the mode common

189 Gaussian and exponential distribution to give additional degrees of freedom to the model. The functions are given in

190 equations (4) and (5) respectively Both functions take two tuning parameters.

$$f(\theta) = \theta^A e^{-B\theta} \quad (6)$$

$$g(n, n^*) = \left(\frac{n}{n^*}\right)^{\alpha_y - 1} \left(1 - \frac{n}{n^*}\right)^{\beta_y - 1} \quad (7)$$

191 Where:

n	Number of carbon atoms in compound undergoing cracking
n^*	Number of carbon atoms in cracking product
α_y, β_y	Model parameters for yield distribution
A, B	Model parameters for reactivity

192 The yield distribution is defined in terms of carbon numbers (n), rather than TBP (θ) in order to ensure mass conserva-
 193 tion without an additional normalization term. The model equation (3), however, is defined in terms of TBP (θ). The
 194 transformation of carbon number to TBP, $n = f(\theta)$, is performed according to the TBP of normal paraffins.

195 An Arrhenius term was included in the pre-factor (k_T) to account for the effect of temperature variations.

$$k_T = k_0 \exp \left[-\frac{E_a}{R_g} \left(\frac{1}{T} - \frac{1}{T_{ref}} \right) \right] \quad (8)$$

196 With:

k_0	Pre-factor,model parameter
E_a	Activation energy,model parameter (in kJ mol ⁻¹)
T	Reaction temperature (in K)
T_{ref}	Reference temperature (in K)

The continuous expression (equation 3) is discretized at equally spaced TBP intervals of 5°C. The resulting set of ODEs is solved by the well-known LSODE solver. The model was implemented in object-oriented FORTRAN.

3.3 Hydrogen Consumption

The total mass flowrate of the effluent is higher than the mass flowrate of the (HCK) feed because of the hydrogen added in process. Estimation of the hydrogen consumption is necessary in order to determine the total yield of the hydrocracking reaction. Two hydrogen atoms (i.e. one H₂) are added in each β -scission reaction. The total number of cracking reactions is estimated via a correlation of the feed and effluent densities, i.e. $H_{2,\beta} = f(d_{154,feed}, d_{154,eff})$. This correlation is based on the n-d-m method (ASTM D-3238 [34]) is used.

Furthermore, three H₂ molecules are added for each full hydrogenation of an aromatic ring: $H_{2,A} = 3 * (C_{A,feed} - C_{A,eff})$. Measurements of the total amount of aromatic carbon atoms in the feed are available, and the extent of the hydrodearomatisation reaction is estimated by a dedicated model not detailed here. The hydrogen added by the hydrodenitrogenation and hydrodesulfurization reactions is also taken into account.

3.4 Inhibition Terms

Zeolite catalysts are known to be inhibited by the presence of NH₃ gas[6]. An inhibition term (I_N), based on the nitrogen content in the feed of R₁ (N_{R1}) was therefore introduced in the model. The nitrogen in the feed of R₁ is mostly transformed to NH₃, which is carried over to R₂. The inhibition term is therefore derived from an estimation of the partial pressure of NH₃ gas in the reactor, given in equation (9).

$$\frac{1}{ppNH_3} \propto \left(\frac{H_2 H_C}{P_{tot} N_{R1}} \right) \quad (9)$$

The residual nitrogen content in the feed of R₂ (N_{R2}) does also exhibit an inhibition effect on the zeolite catalyst. The nitrogen containing organic compounds adsorb on the acidic sites of the catalyst. These sites are therefore no longer available to perform hydrocracking reactions, until the nitrogen has been converted into NH₃ gas. The nitrogen containing compounds remaining after a hydrotreatment step are generally very difficult to break down. The complete inhibition term used in this model is given in equation (10). A total of four tuning parameters allow the adjustment of this term to experimental data.

$$I_N = \left[\frac{1}{(1 + \alpha_{NR2} N_{R2}^{\beta_{NR2}})} \right] \left[\frac{1}{1 + \alpha_{NR1} \left(\frac{H_2 H_C}{P_{tot} N_{R1}} \right)^{\beta_{NR1}}} \right] \quad (10)$$

With:

$H_2 H_C$	Volumetric ratio of H ₂ to hydrocarbon feed (in std L/L)
P_{tot}	Total pressure in R ₂ (in bar)
N_{R1}	Organic nitrogen in feed of R ₁ (in ppm)
$\alpha_{NR2}, \beta_{NR2}$	Model parameters
N_{R2}	Organic nitrogen in feed of R ₂ (in ppm)
$\alpha_{NR2}, \beta_{NR2}$	Model parameters

3.5 Generation of Hydrocarbon Gas

The generation of hydrocarbons smaller than C₅ is treated separately in this model. It has been observed that the process of generating these light gases is rather different and cannot be modeled by the same continuous yield distribution used for the simulation of the cracking of heavier hydrocarbons. A separate term, $g(\theta, GAS)$, was therefore introduced in the yield distribution.

$$g(\theta, GAS) = \alpha_{gas} \theta^{\beta_{gas}} e^{-\theta} \quad (11)$$

This term, shown in equation (11), uses a separate gamma function to estimate the total yield of C₁-C₄ gas by cracking of a hydrocarbon with TBP θ . The additional model parameters (α_{gas} and β_{gas}) give further flexibility to the model.

The redistribution between C₃ and C₄ gasses are calculated using a dedicated correlation, which has been fitted separately using a separate calibration database. Zeolite catalysts, such as the one used in this study, generate negligible amounts of C₁ and C₂ gas. This is because the β -scission reaction mechanism cannot crack a hydrocarbon chain at the ends.

4. Parameter Identification

The continuous lumping model presented in section 2.1 contains 12 tuning parameters. These parameters were identified using the calibration database presented in section 3.3. An objective function for a set of parameters (β) was constructed, defined in equation (9), from the square difference between the experimental measurements (y) and the simulation results $f(x, \beta)$. Weights (w) were applied different components of the objective function.

$$J = \frac{1}{2} \sum (y - f(x, \beta))^2 w (y - f(x, \beta)) \quad (12)$$

237 With:

J	Objective function
y	Experimental observations (vector)
$f(x, \beta)$	Organic nitrogen in feed of R1 (in ppm)
x	Model inputs (vector)
β	Model parameters
w	Weights (diagonal matrix)

238

239 The yield structure (standard cuts & gasses C1-C4), the SIMDIS, and the total yield (100% + conso H2), as well as the
240 SIMDIS (9 points), were used in the objective function, according to following weights (w):

241	• Naphtha (< 150°C cut)	3
242	• Kerosene (150-250°C cut)	6
243	• Gasoil (250-370°C cut)	6
244	• Middle distillates (150-370°C cut)	10
245	• Residue (> 370°C cut)	10
246	• SIMDIS (10 – 90%)	0.01
247	• Gas yield (C1-C4)	10
248	• Total yield	1

249 It is important to note that the error in SIMDIS is expressed in terms of °C, while the other errors are expressed in terms
250 of percentages. The former are an order of magnitude higher than the latter for a comparable fit of the model. A low
251 weight was therefore chosen in order to obtain the same order of magnitude for all observables.

252 The DN2FB FORTRAN optimization routine, part of the PORT library (Bell Labs) was used for parameter identification
253 [35]. This routine uses a Levenberg-Marquardt least squares algorithm to find the gradients of the objective function. The
254 target function is highly non-linear. The optimized set of parameters was found to be highly dependent on the initial
255 parameters, which implies convergence to local minima, rather than global ones in some cases. Optimizations were there-
256 fore performed for a set of 96 randomly chosen initial parameters. Optimizations were performed on the high-
257 performance cluster at IFP Energies Nouvelles, Solaize, France. The parameters of the case which converged to the lowest
258 value of the objective function was retained.

259 This procedure does not guarantee convergence to the global minimum, it does, however, at the very least provide a
260 good local minimum. The use of more advanced, global algorithms (i.e. genetic / global response surface algorithms) is far

more complex and time consuming than the gradient-based algorithm used in this study. This might be justified in a pure academic research context. The approach used in this study is better suited for practical applications, where a the model parameters for a new catalyst needs to be identified rapidly. The comparison of different optimization algorithms is performed at IPFEN and is the object of separate bodies of work.

5. Model Validation

The objective of the construction of a continuous lumping model for a hydrocracking process is the accurate estimation of yield structure and simulated distillation for a range of operating conditions. Estimation of the yield structure, in terms of standard cuts, is necessary in order to perform process design and optimization. It is common to design a hydrocracking process in order to maximize the conversion of the residue cut (X_{370+}) and the yield of the middle distillates (150 - 250°C cut). The production of hydrocarbon gases (C1-C4) is generally undesirable [5].

The temperature of an industrial hydrocracking reactor is often adjusted to give a desired conversion (X_{370+}). The relationship between X_{370+} and yield structure is therefore of particular interest. For a given feed and catalyst, this relationship is relatively independent of reactor temperature. Simulations are run in two different modes:

- 1) iso-T: the real (measured) reactor temperature is used;
- 2) iso-RS: the temperature is adjusted such that the simulated residue content equals the experimental measured value.

Good estimation of the SIMDIS of the effluent is necessary in order to calculate a number of product qualities for the individual cuts (e.g. d154, octane number, viscosity index, cetane index). This is done by dedicated correlations, based on the modeled SIMDIS.

Parity graphs, showing the agreement of simulation results and experimental measurements have been constructed for iso-T and iso-RS modes.

5.1 Iso-T mode

The results for residue conversion (X_{370+}) and middle distillate yield in iso-T mode are shown in Figures 8 and 9.

The residue conversion is well predicted for the entire range, i.e. 15 to 100%. Some data points, particularly for the validation database and/or for very high X_{370+} , tend to be somewhat under-predicted. The middle distillate yield (150-370°C) is very well predicted in iso-T mode. All points, with the exception of one point in the validation database, fall within an error band of ± 5 %. A summary of the mean absolute errors for a number of indicators is shown in Table 1.

288 The mean absolute errors for X_{370+} and yield structure for both, the calibration and validation database are very good for
289 experimental runs with $X_{370+} < 90\%$. The errors are slightly higher but remain acceptable for the validation points. The
290 points with very high residue conversion are less well predicted by the model. It is, however, important to note that in-
291 dustrial hydrocracking units rarely operate at conversions higher than 90%. These points are therefore of somewhat lim-
292 ited interest.

293 The possible reasons for this behavior are that the calibration database contained only two data points with $X_{370+} > 90\%$.
294 The shape of the reactivity function in this region is therefore not sufficiently sensitized. The other reason is related to the
295 fact that the SIMDIS becomes very steep around 370°C. This amplifies the error of residue ($> 370^\circ\text{C}$ cut) yield, i.e. the
296 point at which the SIMDIS and intersects the 370°C line. The mean absolute errors of hydrogen consumption and total
297 yield show that the model ensures mass conservation and predicts the correct mass flowrates.

298 5.2 Iso-RS mode

299 A more detailed analysis is provided for the simulation results in iso-T mode. The simulation results for residue ($>370^\circ\text{C}$
300 cut) yield and thus X_{370+} , are fitted to experimental measurements in this mode. The yield structure of the model is ex-
301 pected to improve with respect to iso-T mode. Figure 10 shows the middle distillate (150-370°C cut) yield. Kerosene (150-
302 250°C cut) and gasoil (250-370°C cut), which make up the middle distillate are shown in Figures 11 and 12 respectively.

303 The middle distillate (150-370°C cut) yield is better predicted than in iso-T mode for points with $X_{370+} < 90\%$. The major-
304 ity of points fall within the $\pm 2\%$ error band. The high conversion points, on the other hand, are less well predicted in iso-
305 RS mode than in iso-T mode. The parity graphs for the gasoil and kerosene yields show that the error in middle distillate
306 comes mainly from the 250-370°C cut. Kerosene (150-250°C cut) yield is well predicted, even for elevated residue conver-
307 sion. The gasoil (250-370°C cut) yield is poorly predicted for experimental runs with $X_{370+} > 90\%$, even though most points
308 fall within a very narrow range ($\sim 20\text{-}25\%$).

309 The parity graph for total hydrocarbon gas ($\text{C}_1\text{-C}_4$) shows that the continuous lumping model provides very good simu-
310 lation results, even for high conversion ($X_{370+} > 90\%$). Only three points of the validation database fall outside the error
311 band of $\pm 1\%$. A summary of the mean absolute errors for a number of indicators is shown in Table 2.

312 The ΔT values reported in Table 2 correspond to the mean temperature difference that had to be applied in order to ob-
313 tain the desired X_{370+} . As in iso-T mode, the results for the validation database are slightly degraded with respect to the
314 results obtained for the calibration points. A ΔT of 2.0°C and an error of the yield structure of slightly more than 1 % are
315 well within the accuracy that can be expected from a hydrocracking model.

6. Statistical Analysis of Model Parameters

Statistics were calculated by an in-house code to quantify the relative importance and correlations between the parameters. Standard non-linear optimization routines, such as DN2FB, attempt to determine the optimal set of parameters for the best local minimum of the least-squares objective function. This implies a zero gradient hat around the optimal set of parameters β_o :

$$\text{Grad}(J)(x, \beta_o) = 0 \quad (13)$$

The Taylor expansion of the objective function (J), around the optimal parameters (β_o), given the Hessian (H) gives:

$$J(x, \beta) = J(x, \beta_o) + \text{Grad}(J)(x, \beta_o)(\beta - \beta_o) + \frac{1}{2}(\beta - \beta_o)'H(\beta - \beta_o) \quad (14)$$

$$J(x, \beta) = J(x, \beta_o) + \frac{1}{2}(\beta - \beta_o)'H(\beta - \beta_o) \quad (15)$$

The Eigenvector (v), with the associated Eigenvalue (μ) of the Hessian (H) is defined as:

$$\exists \mu > 0 \text{ such that } Hv = \mu v \quad (16)$$

A perturbation of β in the direction of the Eigenvector (v) gives then, by definition:

$$\beta = \beta_o + \alpha v \quad (17)$$

$$J(x, \beta) = J(x, \beta_o) + \frac{1}{2}\alpha v'H\alpha v \quad (18)$$

$$J(x, \beta) = J(x, \beta_o) + \frac{1}{2}\mu\alpha^2||v||^2 \quad (19)$$

An analysis of the components of the Eigenvector and the magnitude of the associated eigenvalues allows the relative impact of variations of the individual parameters on the target function to be quantified. A small eigenvalue implies a small impact of a variation of the parameters in the direction of the associated Eigenvector; inversely, a large eigenvalue implies a large impact of a perturbation of the parameters in the direction of the associated eigenvector.

The Eigenvectors with their associated Eigenvalues are shown in Table 1. The dominant parameter in the first five Eigenvectors are highlighted to show the parameter with the largest impact on the objective function. This shows that the model is very sensitive to the exponents of the nitrogen inhibition term (β_{NR_1} and β_{NR_2} in equation 8). The parameters of the reactivity function (equation 4), the activation energy (E_a), and the yield distribution (Equation 7) also have a large

influence on the model behavior. The parameters of the gas distribution (equation 9) have the least influence on the objective function.

The correlation between the individual parameters can be determined from the symmetry in the Eigenvectors. This is shown in Table 4, higher values strong correlations. This table shows that the pre-exponential factor (k_0) is strongly correlated with the inhibition term for NR₁. The two parameters in the NR₂ inhibition term (α_{NR_2} and β_{NR_2}) are strongly correlated. The same can be said regarding the parameters governing the yield distribution for the gasses (Equation 11).

7. Conclusions

A continuous lumping model was successfully applied to hydrocracking of VGO feedstock on zeolite catalysts. The second reactor in a two-stage hydrocracking process was simulated. The model contains inhibition terms for NH₃ carried over from the pretreatment reactor (R₁), as well as the residual organic nitrogen in the feed of the hydrocracking reactor (R₂). A gamma function was used for the continuous reactivity function and a beta distribution was used for the yield distribution.

The 12 model parameters were identified using a calibration database with 52 data points. Parameter identification was performed using 96 sets of randomized initial parameters. The model was then used to simulate a validation database with 22 additional data points. Good simulation results, in terms of X_{370+} and yield structure were obtained. The model performed less reliably in the case of high conversion ($X_{370+} > 90\%$).

A statistical parameters analysis, based on the Eigenvectors of the Hessian around the optimum was presented. This allowed the parameters with the largest impact on the objective function to be identified. An analysis of the correlation between the parameters was also presented. The eigenvector analysis was used to show that the nitrogen inhibition terms have (NR₁ and NR₂) have a dominating effect on the target function. This makes it clear that the inclusion of these terms is absolutely necessary to correctly simulate hydrocracking of feeds with different nitrogen content and different levels of pre-treatment. Furthermore, a strong correlation between the nitrogen (NR₁) inhibit terms and the pre-exponential factor has been shown.

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