Kinetic Modelling for Tar Evolution and Formation in a Downdraft Gasifier

A. M. Salem, U. Kumar, and M. C. Paul*

Abstract—Biomass gasification modeling is a powerful tool used to optimize the design of a gasifier. A detailed kinetic model was built by the current authors [1] to predict the behavior of air blown downdraft gasifier for a wide range of materials within the range of (38≤C≤52) %, (5.2≤H≤7) %, and (21.7≤O≤45) %. The model was verified and showed good stability for a wide range of working parameters like equivalence ratio and moisture content. In the current research, 4 main tar species are added to the model to represent tar formation using detailed kinetic reactions. The yield of tar species is discussed for different zones of a gasifier based on temperature of each zone. Mass and energy balance are calculated. 18 different kinetic reactions are implemented in the kinetic code to predict the optimum working conditions that lead to the production of higher value producer gas. Results conclude that using ER of 0.3 with moisture content levels lower than 10% will lead to the production of higher yields of syngas with lower amounts of tar.

Index Terms—Downdraft Gasifier, Kinetic modeling, Tar formation

I. INTRODUCTION

Biomass is one of the promising alternatives to fossil fuels. It is also considered to be a clean and renewable source of energy, and environmentally friendly. Biomass gasification is one of the forms to convert biomass materials to useful gases (e.g. CO, H2, and CH4), but the process is affected by the production of undesired gases (N2, and CO2), and also with a considerable amount of tar [2], [3], [4]. Tar particularly causes serious problems in any downstream application of producer gases from gasification. For example, it can cause fouling and erosion for equipment, and the tar formation wastes about 5-15% of the effective energy from biomass gasification [5].

Kinetic and equilibrium models were built to simulate gasifier behavior at different working conditions. Several researchers [6], [7], and [8] used equilibrium models based on one global reaction mechanism and succeed to predict product gas composition and gasification temperature at some extent. While other researchers who used multi-step equilibrium models [9], where the output of each zone is fed to the next zone of a downdraft gasifier. However, the equilibrium models are less effective and give an over prediction for the higher heating value and H2 output with lower amounts of CO [10]. Thermodynamic equilibrium models also fail to take into account the physical and multistep chemical phenomena inside a gasifier, thus originate error in some species estimation [11].

Kinetic models, on the other hand, were built to overcome those problems and proved to be able to simulate a wider range of working parameters of a gasifier e.g. (producer gas composition, temperature profile, heating value and gasifier dimensions) ([1], and [12]). Some other models were used to predict the tar formation during biomass gasification (e.g. see Ref. [13-20]), and tar can be defined as all hydrocarbons that have a molecular weight higher than benzene C6H6 [13]. However, tars could form in hundreds of different chemical compounds, but in most cases, about 20 species are considered having significant amounts [14].

While some previous works focused on tar evolution only, other kinetic models presented gas composition and the effect of working parameters on the change of gasifier behavior and gasification efficiency.

The current work is an extension of an existing model developed recently by the authors [1] – a four-zone integrated kinetic model allowing prediction of the optimum working parameters of a downdraft gasifier. The model was tested and verified over a wide range of biomass materials. Tar was assumed to be having one compound represented by formula (C6H6.C6O2). This paper presents an extension of the model through implementation of the four main tar species instead of one general formula. Tar species evolution will be tracked through from pyrolysis to oxidation and reduction zones. A well understanding of the evolution of different gas species and tar, and their relationship to temperature at each zone and other working parameters will be of a high importance when designing a gasifier and also to reduce tar content in producer gas. The results will discuss the optimum working parameters that lead to the production of higher value syngas. To the best of our knowledge, there is no other kinetic model that includes tar formation tracked from each zone, and how they influence on the production of different gas species along the gasifier height at different zones.

II. MODELING PROCEDURE

The kinetic model was described in details at [1]. The current work will discuss how the tar formation model is implemented in it. Primary tars formed during pyrolysis are composed of more than one hundred species, and their formation yields are not well known. The kinetics thus will try to simplify the tar species to be formed during pyrolysis using four main tar species representing major species.
During thermal conversion of biomass, tar is released and can be classified as primary, secondary, and tertiary tars [15]. Primary tars are generally oxygenated, primary organic and condensable molecules. They come mostly from the breakdown of cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin under 500°C, such as Phenol, acetal (having biggest portion [16]), acetic acid, Guaiacol, and Furfural. As the temperatures rise above 500°C, primary tars rearrange to form gases and secondary tars (phenol, cresol, indene, and olefins). While tertiary tars like aromatics, toluene and indene are formed at higher temperatures. Condensed tertiary tars make up the PAHs (Benzen, naphthalene (most important [19]), acenaphthylene and pyrene). All primary tars are converted to secondary and tertiary tars as the temperature of gasifiers rises.

Toluene was reported as the best representative for secondary tars while naphthalene as a PAH representing tertiary class tars and benzene as a model for primary tars secondary tars while naphthalene as a PAH representing tertiary class tars and benzene as a model for primary tars. Toluene was reported as the best representative for secondary tars while naphthalene as a PAH representing tertiary class tars and benzene as a model for primary tars. After calculating the mass yield of the four main tar species reported parameters for the empirical correlations of decomposition based on pyrolysis temperature will be addressed and discussed in the present work. Ref. [18] used a non-woody biomass material (corn stalks) with different zones based on the equations and kinetic relations stated in Table 1 and 2. The reactions start based on the given initial conditions of every species and the temperature of the gasifier zones. Initially the model assumes tar release with volatiles at the pyrolysis zone based on the pyrolysis temperature.

III. PYROLYSIS TAR FORMATION

Biomass first decomposes to volatiles, char and tar. Volatiles decomposition was shown in details in [1]. Tar decomposition based on pyrolysis temperature will be addressed and discussed in the present work. Ref. [18] reported parameters for the empirical correlations of pyrolysis products as shown in Table 1 based on experimental data taken from [19] which gives the mass yield of tar evolution during pyrolysis process in (g tar/kg biomass).

| TABLE 1  
CORRELATIONS FOR PYROLYSIS PRODUCTS [18] |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C H₅</td>
<td>a (-6E-5)</td>
<td>b (0.01701)</td>
<td>c (-48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C₂H₅</td>
<td>a (-0.0001)</td>
<td>b (0.218)</td>
<td>c (-115.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C₃H₆</td>
<td>a (-0.0003)</td>
<td>b (0.7017)</td>
<td>c (-387.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C₅H₈O</td>
<td>a (2E-5)</td>
<td>b (-0.068)</td>
<td>c (46.42)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mass yield of different tar species \(Y\), in (g/kg biomass), can be derived by using equation (1)

\[
Y = aT^2 + bT + c
\]  

(1)

After calculating the mass yield of the four main tar species at the pyrolysis zone, they are added to the pyrolysis products and an energy balance is made to calculate the pyrolysis temperature through equation (2).

\[
\sum X_i \cdot (h_f + C_p \Delta T)_{\text{pyrolysis products}} = \sum X_i \cdot (h_f + C_p \Delta T)_{\text{combustion products}} + Q_{\text{loss}}
\]  

(2)

The heat loss is mentioned in the oxidation zone only as it is higher in temperature than other zones, and the overall heat loss is assumed to be 10% of the product of the equivalence ratio (ER) and HHV [20]. The same energy balance principle is made for every zone to get the corresponding temperature.

After calculating the temperature, a backward calculation is made to predict the gas composition for the pyrolysis products including the tar species.

IV. TAR SPECIES IN COMBUSTION AND REDUCTION ZONES

The products of pyrolysis are used as feed to the oxidation zone. The reactions stated in Table 2 are implemented in the kinetic model for both the combustion and reduction zones. Those reactions are taken from the references mentioned in the table. Other reactions for the combustion and gasification were already discussed in [1] and will not be repeated here. Again, after calculating the gas composition, energy balance is made to get the oxidation and gasification temperature and backward calculations are made to get the correct gas composition coming out of combustion. The model uses 18 different kinetic reactions in the combustion and reduction zone for the calculation of different gas and tar species.

V. MODEL VALIDATION

The initial kinetic code was validated in [1] over a wide range of biomass materials for the gas composition, temperature profile and gasifier dimensions. The validation in this paper will only focus on the tar species formation before discussing other results.

| TABLE 2  
REATIONS OF TAR SPECIES IMPLEMENTED IN THE MODEL. |
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reaction and rate expression</td>
<td>(A, s^{-1})</td>
<td>(E, kJ/mol)</td>
<td>Ref</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C_3H_8 \rightarrow 0.17C_2H_2 + 0.89C_2H_6 + 0.67H_2)</td>
<td>2.23E13</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>[21]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C_4H_8 \rightarrow 10C + 4H_2)</td>
<td>5.56E15</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>[22]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C_3H_8 + 4H_2O \rightarrow C_7H_6 + 4CO + 5H_2)</td>
<td>1.58E12</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>[22]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C_4H_8 + C_2H_4 \rightarrow C_7H_6 + 8H_2)</td>
<td>1.04E12</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>[22]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C_5H_8 + 5H_2O \rightarrow 5CO + 2CH_4 + 6H_2)</td>
<td>4.4E8</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>[22]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C_5H_8 \rightarrow 7.5O_2 + 6CO_2 + 4H_2O)</td>
<td>17.83</td>
<td>125.5</td>
<td>[22]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C_4H_8 \rightarrow 3O_2 + 6CO + 3H_2)</td>
<td>1.58E15</td>
<td>202.6</td>
<td>[22]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C_3H_8 \rightarrow 9O_2 + 7CO_2 + 4H_2O)</td>
<td>14.26</td>
<td>125.5</td>
<td>[22]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C_5H_8 \rightarrow CO + 0.4C_2H_2)</td>
<td>1.0E7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>[18], [16]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The comparison shown in Fig. 1 between the results obtained by the present model and the other experimental data [23], shows a good agreement for the total tar amount. Maximum tar produced by the model shows values around 5 g/Nm², the fact that also has an agreement with [24], where they stated that tar produced in downdraft gasifiers is in the range of 0.01-6 g/Nm². In the experimental work of [23], they used a non-woody biomass material (corn stalks) with a range of 0.01-6 g/Nm². They also showed that tar produced in downdraft gasifiers is in the range of 0.01-6 g/Nm².
moisture content level of 6.17%, and the comparison is made for the different values of the air equivalence ratio to measure the stability of the current model for a normal range of working conditions.

Fig. 1. Total tar formation comparison between the present model and experimental results.

VI. TAR SPECIES EVOLUTION AND FORMATION ALONG THE GASIFIER

Tar evolution during pyrolysis and its relation with temperature is illustrated and first implemented in the current kinetic code. Tar destruction, formation and converting to other species based on the reactions stated in Table 2 is shown and was first implemented in the kinetic code. Tar formation results are illustrated in (Fig. 2, and Fig. 4). Different tar species used in the model are traced from its formation in pyrolysis then the combustion and reduction zones along the gasifier height, and they depend on the temperature of each zone. The effect of the varying moisture content and equivalence ratio will be discussed and presented. Initial investigations are carried out at a fixed ER of 0.326, and with varying moisture content to study its effect on the tar formation and subsequently, predict the optimum conditions that lead to less amount of tar in the producer gases. Other simulations are carried out at a fixed moisture content of 10% but with a varying equivalence ratio.

As seen in Fig. 2, toluene formation along the gasifier has the same trend of phenol: higher concentration in the pyrolysis zone, followed by destruction in the oxidation and reduction zone. Temperatures above 1173 K are enough to crack all the phenol and toluene and subsequently, convert them into benzene and other lighter species [14].
Naphthalene formation, however, takes a different trend than other species. It is formed and present in considerable amounts in producer gas. Small amounts are produced during pyrolysis, because it is a tertiary tar which requires higher temperatures to present and formed. Fig. 3 shows that higher temperatures in the oxidation zone (>1300K) are favorable for the naphthalene formation which starts conversion for temperatures greater than 1300K and achieves a total conversion at 1600 K [28]. Based on reactions 2 and 3 in Table 2, naphthalene is converted to char, \( \text{H}_2 \), CO and benzene. Those reactions are tend to take place in the combustion and reduction zone, however it is more likely to happen in the reduction zone because of the presence of water vapor. Higher concentration of naphthalene in the oxidation zone is mainly due to the conversion of lighter species (phenol and toluene) and also because of the oxidation temperature which is in the ideal range of naphthalene formation and never exceeds this to the destruction temperatures (>1600 K).

Overall, benzene has the highest portion of tar species, which is usually greater than 37% by weight of total tars produced [29]. Also the data collected from [19], [17], and [15] shows that the highest portion of tar compounds is for benzene which meets a good agreement with the model.

**VII. EFFECTS OF EQUIVALENCE RATIO ON THE TAR SPECIES**

The results shown in Fig. 4 illustrate the effects of the equivalence ratio on the tar evolution at the different zones of the downdraft gasifier. Rubber wood was used as feedstock with moisture content of 10%. The same trend shown with varying moisture content is also noticed with the equivalence ratio. All the tar species evolution starts from pyrolysis to oxidation and reduction. More attention will be focused on the benzene formation with varying equivalence ratio as it is the major of tar species formed during gasification and also because of the similar trend of all species with varying equivalence ratio.

Furthermore, as illustrated and discussed before, benzene has the biggest portion of tar produced during biomass gasification. The results of changing moisture content or equivalence ratio show the same trend and find good agreement with the other previous works like [28], [17], [18] and [21].

Generally, a higher equivalence ratio tends to increase the oxidation and reduction temperatures, Fig. 3. This is because it increases the air amount and circulation inside the gasifier and hence, increasing the oxidation process reactions. Oxidation reactions are normally exothermic which release heat and thus increase temperature inside the gasifier.

**VIII. OPTIMUM WORKING PARAMETERS**

After validating the current model, it is used to address the optimum working parameters that lead to higher quality syngas (high heating value with lower moisture content). Lower amount of water content in biomass leads to a significant increase in the heating value which has a good agreement with ([30], [31], and [32]). On the other hand higher levels of moisture content requires more heat for removal, this heat is not recovered again and reduces producer gas heating value. In contrast, lower moisture content is favorable for lower tar amount levels in the producer gas. The results reveal a decrease in tar amount produced from the gasifier by more than 40% when decreasing moisture content from 10 to 0%. On the other hand, increasing equivalence ratio from 0.2-0.35 leads to a decrease of tar produced by 6%.

Highest heating value of 5.96 MJ/Nm\(^3\) is found for the rubber wood gasification under ER=0.2, and MC of 10%. Higher tar levels (5.3 g/mol of biomass = 22.5% by weight) are also found for using rubber wood at 20% moisture content. While lower tar amounts is found at using 0% MC at ER= 0.326, which gives 0.1 g tar/mol biomass. In conclusion, biomass materials with moisture content levels lower than 10%, and using equivalence ratio of 0.3 will increase the yield of syngas, leading to an increase of heating value with a reasonable amount of tar content in producer gas.

**IX. CONCLUSION**

The current model is a four-zone kinetic model for air-blown downdraft gasifiers. The model is verified and found good agreement with other experimental data. The model can predict producer gas composition, four main tar species
formation, and gasifier dimensions design. The model is used to address the evolution of different gas species, char and tar species along gasifier, starting from devolatilization process to combustion and reduction. The results show the evolution and variation of different tar species with different working conditions of moisture content and equivalence ratio. Finally, the model is used to find the optimum working parameters for a downdraft gasifier that leads to the production of higher yield of syngas with lower tar amounts. Using equivalence ratio of 0.3, with lower values of moisture content < 10% will increase the yield of syngas, leading to an increase of heating value with a reasonable amounts of tar content in producer gas.

Future work on this model will try to address new ideas regarding tar destruction and converting it to useful compounds.

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REFERENCES


