

Enhanced response time of electrowetting lenses with shaped input voltage functions

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ABSTRACT: Adaptive optical lenses, based on the electrowetting principle, are being rapidly implemented in many applications such as microscopy, remote sensing, displays, and optical communication. To characterize the response of these electrowetting lenses, the dependence on DC driving voltage functions was investigated in a low viscosity liquid system. Cylindrical lenses with inner diameter 2.45 and 3.95-mm were used to characterize the dynamic behavior of the liquids under DC voltage electrowetting actuation. By increasing the rise time of the input exponential driving voltage, the originally under-damped system response can be damped, enabling a smooth response from the lens. We experimentally determined the optimal rise times for the fastest response from the lenses. We have also performed numerical simulations of the lens actuation with input exponential driving voltage to understand the variation in the dynamics of the liquid-liquid interface with various input rise times. We further enhanced the response time of the devices by shaping the input voltage function with multiple exponential rise times. For the 3.95-mm inner diameter lens, we achieved a response time improvement of 29% when compared with the fastest response obtained using single exponential driving voltage. The technique shows great promise for applications that require fast response times.

INTRODUCTION

The electrowetting on dielectric (EWOD)¹ principle enables the control of the shape of a liquid droplet or liquid-liquid interface on a dielectric surface through an applied voltage. The result is an ultra-

smooth, tunable liquid interface that is an ideal platform for tunable lenses and prisms¹⁻³. Devices based on the EWOD principle are appealing due to their low power consumption, large range of tunability, and no mechanical moving parts. Recently, an optical switch with a high rejection ratio has been demonstrated with this technology⁴. Other applications include flexible lenses⁵ and lens arrays⁶, multifunctional lenses for miniature cameras^{7,8}, optical displays^{9,10}, lab-on-a-chip systems¹¹, and micro-total analysis systems for biological applications such as polymerase chain reactions^{12,13}, Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) enrichment, and cell-assays.

Understanding the temporal dynamics of EWOD devices, especially the response time, is important for many applications. Recently, microscopes incorporating EWOD lenses have been demonstrated, enabling nonmechanical depth scanning^{14,15}. EWOD prisms have also been used for nonmechanical beam steering³ and show promise for Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) and remote sensing applications. The technology also shows promise for consumer market applications such as optical switches^{4,16,17} for communications, and display^{9,10} technologies. However, achieving fast response times from these devices is one of the main challenges. For instance, a typical confocal microscope uses a pair of galvanometer mirrors for 2D lateral scans at kHz frequencies. Using a liquid lens in such a microscope would allow for a large depth scan, however, the response time of such an element needs to be comparable to the lateral scanning speed^{15,18}. Another example of a different technology is an optical switch, based on a digital micromirror device (DMD). These optical switches have been developed and used for wavelength division multiplexing with a switching time of 15 μ s¹⁹. To replace conventional adaptive optical elements, EWOD devices need a path to comparable response time.

In order to optimize the response of EWOD devices, it is imperative to study the dynamics of the liquid motion upon actuation. This dynamic behavior of EWOD actuation was studied for droplet spreading²⁰⁻²², capillary rise^{23,24}, and lenses²⁵⁻²⁷, with particular emphasis on numerical modeling along with understanding the material properties and dimensional dependence of the actuation dynamics. For example, Hong²¹ *et. al* investigated the effect of droplet size and viscosity on the droplet spreading dynamics un-

der DC voltage actuation. This study showed that the droplet response time (aqueous 1 mM NaCl solution) with droplet sizes below the capillary length of the solutions under EWOD actuation, has a $r^{1.5}$ dependence, where r is the effective base radius of the droplet. Additionally, by increasing the viscosity of the droplet, the response time can be tuned from underdamped to overdamped. Alternatively, for EWOD systems with viscous fluids, an overdrive voltage technique has been demonstrated to enhance the response in droplet spreading²², capillary rise²³, and lenses²⁵. Kuiper and Hedriks²⁷, in their study, have reported systems with both underdamped and overdamped characteristics, and based on a damped spring-mass system model, derived dimensionless parameters to calculate the necessary liquid viscosity for a given lens dimension for critically damped lens operation. Recently, studies were published on the response and the aperture size of EWOD lenses^{25,26}.

Here, we focus on a systematic study of the response time of a cylindrical geometry EWOD lens, rather than a droplet, and the device dependence on DC input voltage shape. This systematic approach enables us to determine the optimal driving voltage shape for the fastest response from an EWOD lens, without changing the physical properties of the lens (such as viscosity and density of the liquids). For this purpose, an exponential voltage function with variable input rise time is used to study the dynamic behavior of our devices. The response time is further enhanced using a shaped voltage consisting of a combination of two exponential input voltage functions. In addition, we have also performed 2D axisymmetric finite element simulations to study the interface dynamics upon actuation and compared with our experimental results.

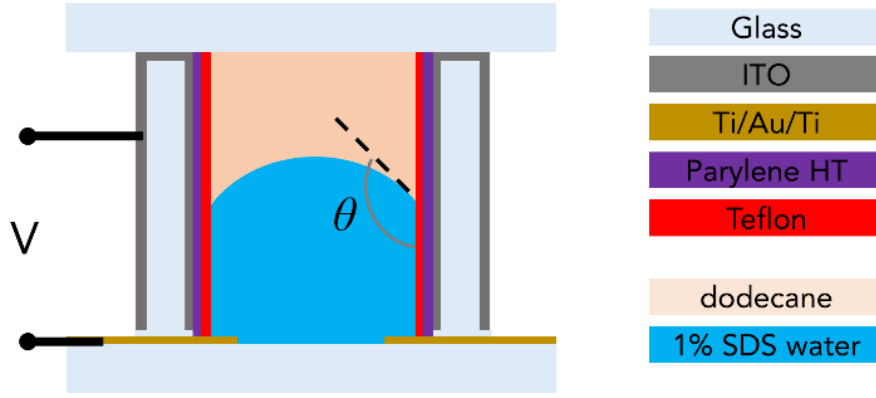


Figure 1. Schematic of an oil-water EWOD liquid lens with an electrode on the base and a hydrophobic coating, dielectric layer, and an electrode along the sidewalls. A cylindrical glass tube is coated with ITO electrode, Parylene HT dielectric, and Teflon hydrophobic coating. The glass tube is epoxy bonded to an optical window with annular electrode pattern, and a cover glass slip seals the device after filling the device with the liquids. Voltage, V , denotes the applied voltage on the sidewall electrodes. The lens is filled with 1 wt% SDS water solution ($n = 1.33$) and dodecane ($n = 1.421$).

The static response of an EWOD lens before the onset of contact angle saturation can be described by the Lippmann-Young equation^{1,28}, $\cos\theta = \cos\theta_0 + \frac{\epsilon\epsilon_0}{2\gamma d} V^2$, where θ is the contact angle upon applying a voltage V , θ_0 is the initial contact angle without any applied voltage, ϵ and d are the effective dielectric constant and thickness of the dielectric layers, and γ is the surface tension of the liquid-liquid interface. The schematic of an oil-water EWOD lens is shown in Figure 1. The dielectric layer is coated with a hydrophobic surface to first enhance the initial contact angle so as to provide high tunable range and second to reduce contact angle hysteresis. The motion of the contact line on this hydrophobic surface has a strong influence over the response characteristics of EWOD lenses and can be modeled as a fluid slip boundary condition with an applied friction force proportional to the fluid velocity²⁰. In this work, the fluid slip is modeled using a Navier-slip boundary condition. The response time of the EWOD lenses also depends on the physical properties of the fluids, such as density and viscosity, and surface tension between the liquids. In our study, the physical properties of the liquids and the dielectric properties of the insulating layer are kept fixed. The polar liquid used is a 1 wt % sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS) aqueous solution and the non-polar liquid used is dodecane. Water has a viscosity of 0.89 mPa s and do-

decane, 1.36 mPa s. The interfacial surface tension of between the liquids is 5.7 mN/m²⁹, resulting in an underdamped system.

EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS

Our EWOD lens design is simple, compatible with standard microfabrication techniques, and is based on the process flow described in Kuiper and Hendriks²⁷. Cylindrical glass tubes (inner diameters of 2.45 and 3.95-mm, corresponding to heights of 3 and 5-mm, respectively), are used to construct our electro-wetting lenses. A schematic of the EWOD liquid lens device studied is shown in Figure 1. The cylindrical glass tube is coated with Indium Tin Oxide (ITO) as the electrode layer, using a DC sputter system. The chamber was first pumped down to a base pressure of 1 μ Torr, followed by the introduction of Argon gas into the chamber. The deposition was performed at a pressure of 8 mTorr and a power of 120 W. A 300-nm layer of ITO was deposited at an average rate of 3.33 $\text{\AA}/\text{s}$, as measured by a quartz crystal microbalance. These deposition parameters were experimentally determined to ensure continuous electrode deposition on the vertical sidewalls of the glass tube. Before the dielectric layers are deposited, the exterior of the glass tubes is masked with Kapton tape. Next, the inner sidewalls of the tubes are coated with a 1- μm Parylene HT layer using vapor phase deposition (Specialty Coating Systems). The devices are then dip-coated in a 1 wt% solution of Teflon (DuPont AF1600) in Fluorinert FC-40 and cured at 170 $^{\circ}\text{C}$ for 20 min. The Kapton tape used for masking is removed, and the glass tube is epoxy bonded to an optical window that is patterned with an annular Titanium/Gold/Titanium (Ti/Au/Ti) electrode, which serves as the ground electrode for the lens. The annular patterned optical windows are fabricated using the lift-off technique. A negative of the pattern is first generated on the optical window with negative photoresist NR7-1500 PY (Futurrex, Inc.) followed by evaporating Ti/Au/Ti (10-nm/500-nm/10-nm) on the optical window. The optical window is then dipped in acetone to dissolve the underlying photoresist, leading to an annular electrode pattern on the optical window. Finally, the lenses are filled with the polar liquid (1 wt % SDS solution), followed by the non-polar liquid (dodecane).

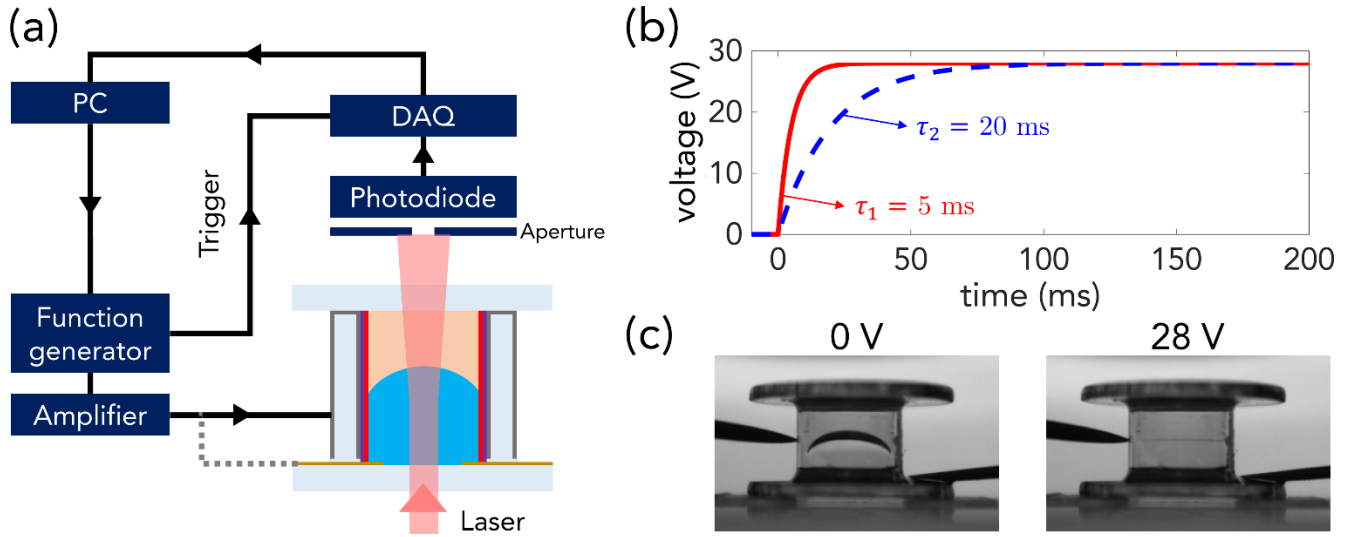


Figure 2. DAQ - Data acquisition card. (a) A schematic diagram of the experimental setup. Arbitrary shaped voltage inputs are generated using an Agilent 33250A function generator and amplified to drive the EWOD lens. A laser beam is passed through the axis of the lens and is collected on a photodiode, after an aperture. (b) Exponential input voltages, $V = V_0(1 - e^{-t/\tau})$, generated using an arbitrary waveform generator with rise times of 5 and 20 ms. (c) An electrowetting lens device with unshaped applied DC voltages of 0 and 28 V.

A laser beam from a 780-nm cw laser diode is spatially filtered and collimated to 0.5-mm diameter. The beam is passed through the axis of the electrowetting lens, as shown in Figure 2(a). A 400- μ m aperture and a photodiode (Thorlabs – DET10A) are placed after the lens and the resulting electrical signal is recorded using a data acquisition card (DAQ). This technique allows for the characterization of EWOD lenses without a high speed camera, generating a time-dependent signal that can be related to the dynamics of the liquid-liquid interface itself. At the liquid-liquid interface of the 1 wt % SDS water solution ($n = 1.33$) and dodecane ($n = 1.421$), a concave spherical lens is generated. This results in a divergent output beam from the lens. The focal length of the lens can be tuned upon actuation, and for this purpose, a signal from an arbitrary waveform generator (Agilent 33250A) is amplified (Thorlabs – MDT694) to generate the input shaped drive voltages and applied to the electrodes of the lens. An example of exponential input voltages, $V = V_0(1 - e^{-t/\tau})$, is shown in Figure 2(b) for input rise times of 5 and 20 ms. A typical DC power supply can generate outputs with rise times of few ms to 100s of ms.

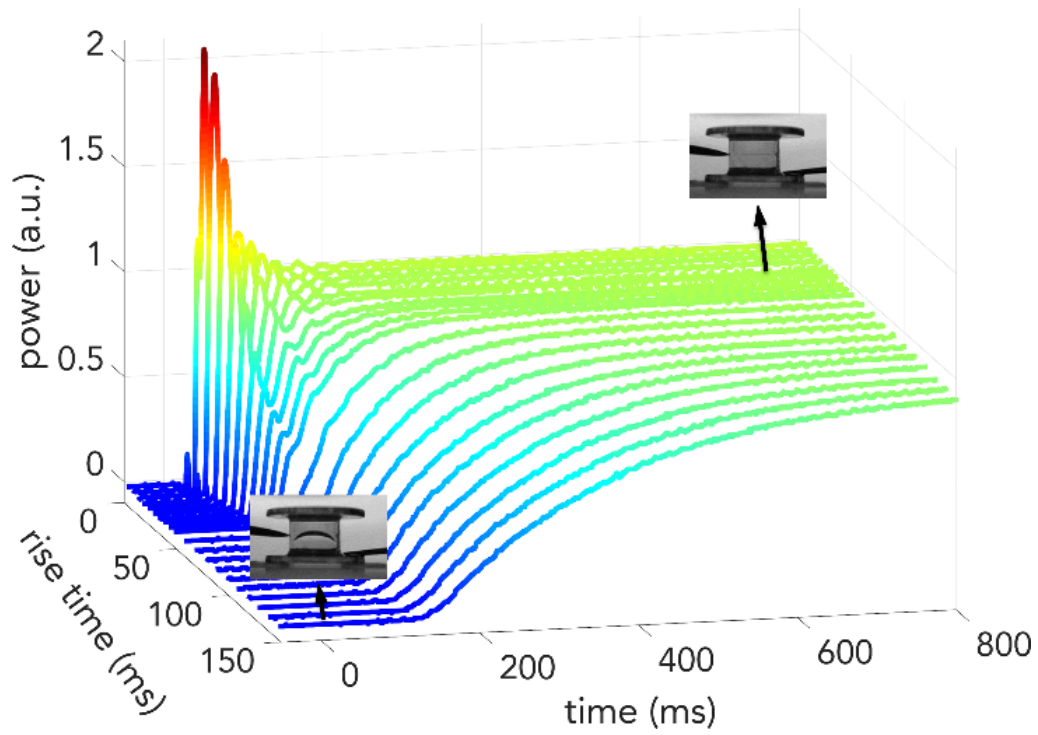


Figure 3. Normalized photodiode signal as function of time for various input exponential rise times. The input rise times of the exponential voltages are swept from 5 to 150 ms with voltage amplitude changes from 0 to 28 V. The color represents the signal strength on the photodiode.

The steady state contact angles with applied voltage were experimentally determined to be 155° at 0 V and 90° at 28 V DC (see Figure 2(c)). The lenses were actuated from an initial contact angle of 155° to 90° . This contact angle variation covers the full range of operation as a diverging lens, and ensures repeatable and consistent experiments. The change in the curvature of the liquid-liquid interface with the input voltage function changes the intensity of the beam through the aperture as a function of time. This intensity variation with time is captured by the photodiode. For example, the photodiode signal for a 3.95-mm inner diameter device as a function of time for various input exponential rise times is shown in Figure 3. It is evident from the figure that for an input rise time of 5 to 20 ms the photodiode signal has under damped oscillation characteristics, however, these oscillations are suppressed and transition to over damped characteristics for larger input exponential rise times of 50 to 150 ms.

SIMULATION DETAILS

To study the dynamics of the liquid-liquid interface in the EWOD lens, COMSOL Multiphysics 5.2a is used. We have modeled our devices using the 2D axisymmetric, two-phase laminar flow module. A moving mesh boundary is employed to simulate the liquid-liquid interface motion. The response characteristics of EWOD devices are simulated for various applied input rise times. The experimentally measured initial contact angle was used as an initial geometric condition in the simulation. Figure 4 shows a detailed schematic of the boundary conditions and the simulation setup. The experimentally determined contact angle variation as a function of voltage was provided as the boundary condition at the contact line in the form of Lippmann-Young's equation^{1,28}. One outcome of our simulation is the time-dependent evolution of the liquid-liquid interface.

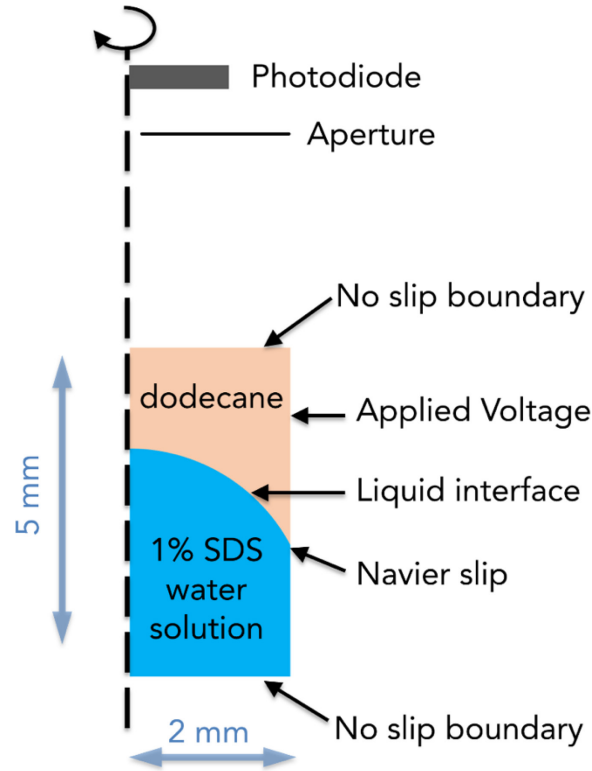


Figure 4. SDS - sodium dodecyl sulfate. Schematic of the COMSOL 5.2a model geometry. A 2D axisymmetric condition is used and a Navier slip boundary condition is applied to the wall at the contact line. Starting with an initial contact angle of 155° (experimentally measured), the response of the system for an applied exponential voltage, $V = V_0(1 - e^{-t/\tau})$, is simulated using various input rise times.

The sliding of the contact line on the sidewall of the lens is modeled using a Navier-slip condition. This boundary condition applies a friction force opposing the sliding of the liquid-liquid interface on the side wall. The associated Navier-slip length parameter governs the magnitude of this friction force and has a strong influence on the dynamics of the contact line motion, and successively the dynamics of the liquid-liquid interface upon a time dependent voltage actuation. In order to determine this slip length parameter, the simulation was compared to the experimental results using the COMSOL Ray optics module.

In our simulation, a 785-nm laser beam with Gaussian profile was passed through the axis of the device. We use the previously simulated dynamic response of the liquid-liquid interface surface to predict the time-dependent photodiode response. By comparing the simulation to experimental results, the slip

length parameter was determined to be 1000-nm. The slip length parameter is in agreement with theoretical prediction, as the slip length increases as the hydrophobicity of the surface increases and slip lengths of the order of microns can be obtained for super-hydrophobic surfaces³⁰.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Effect of exponential rise time:

The EWOD lens response was first characterized, using an exponential input voltage, $V = V_0(1 - e^{-t/\tau})$, with varying rise times. The lenses were actuated from an initial contact angle of 155° at 0V to 90° at 28 V. Upon actuation, the resulting variation of contact angle with applied voltage leads to significant contact line motion, which generates a standing wave in the lens that, over time, propagates to the axis of the lens. The settling time for the generated standing wave is strongly dependent on the interfacial surface tension, viscosity of the liquids, and the shape of the driving voltage. For a given viscosity and surface tension, the standing wave generated at the liquid-liquid interface, strongly depends on the driving input voltage. As a result, the lens response can be characterized as underdamped or overdamped based on the driving input voltage. The liquids used in the lenses have a low viscosity (< 2 mPa s), leading to a significant settling time (approximately 150 ms) for the generated standing wave from a short rise time input exponential voltage. The standing wave oscillations can be suppressed by reducing the contact line velocity through applied input voltage function. The experimental response of the 3.95-mm and 2.45-mm inner diameter lenses is characterized in Figure 5. Figure 5(a) shows the 3.95-mm diameter lens with exponential input rise times of 10, 20 and 50 ms. The input rise times of 10 and 20 ms result in multiple oscillations at the liquid-liquid interface, showing the characteristics of an underdamped system. For a longer input rise time of 50 ms the liquid-liquid interface follows the input voltage shape. The oscillations in the lens response are suppressed, however the response time of the lens is increased when compared to the response from 10 and 20 ms input rise time. Figure 5(b) depicts similar behavior for a 2.45 mm diameter lens using input rise times of 1, 10 and 15 ms.

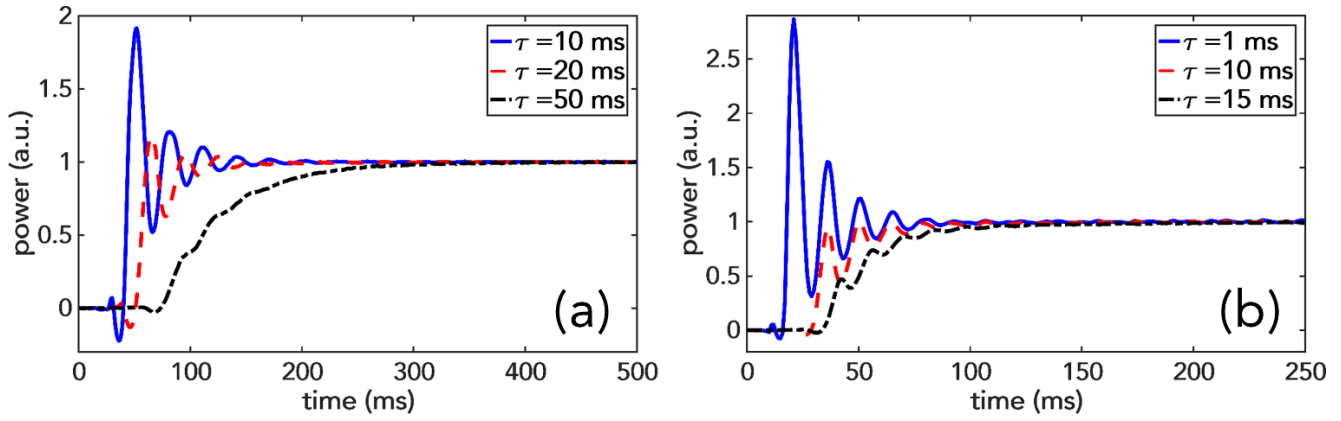


Figure 5. Experimental response characteristics of (a) 3.95 mm and (b) 2.45 mm lenses for different input exponential rise times. The oscillations suppress with increasing the input exponential rise time.

Figure 6 shows the variation of the response time in the 3.95-mm inner diameter lens as a function of the input voltage rise time. The response time (settling time) of the lens was calculated as the time taken for the photodiode signal to settle within 2.5% (above the noise floor of the measurement) of its steady state signal. The response time curve for the 3.95-mm lens has a local minimum, showing an optimal input voltage rise time for fast response from the lens. The fastest response for the 3.95-mm lens was 138 ms, for an input rise time of 15 ms. For the 2.45-mm lens no such local minima was observed, and a response time of 88 ms for an input rise time of 1 ms was the best result. Even though rise time did not have any effect on enhancing the response time of the 2.45-mm lens, the oscillations at the interface are suppressed with increasing rise time, enabling a smoother response from the lens. The degree of contact line motion depends on the diameter of the cylindrical glass tube. For smaller diameter glass tube, the contact line motion will be smaller, resulting in a lens with a faster response time.

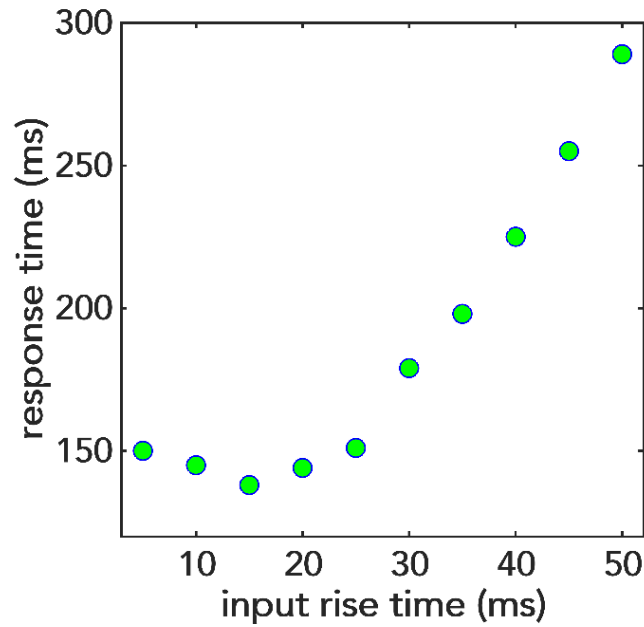


Figure 6. Response time variation of the 3.95-mm lens as a function of input exponential rise time. The response time is determined from the photodiode signal settling within 2.5% of its steady state signal.

As shown in Figure 5, there is a small delay between the input voltage (starting at the origin) and the lens response. Additionally, this delay increases for larger rise time input voltages. This delay in the response time of the lens can be explained as a combination of: (1) the propagation time for the standing wave to reach the center of the lens, and (2) the inherent RC (resistance and capacitance) time constant of the device. The former is governed by the fluid dynamics, while the latter is a result of the device electrode, dielectric material, and liquid properties.

The contact line motion is determined by the contact angle variation, which has a squared dependence on the applied voltage (Lippmann-Young equation^{1,28}). This means that noticeable contact line motion can only be observed above a certain threshold voltage. Hence, a slower rising voltage will result in a larger delay in the measured lens response. The time constant of the device further adds to the input voltage rise time-dependent delay.

Simulation results:

The response of the 3.95-mm lens for varying input voltage rise time is simulated using COMSOL Multiphysics 5.2a by solving the Navier-Stokes equation for two incompressible fluids using a moving mesh boundary. The simulation predicts the time evolution of the fluid velocity and pressure distribution. In addition, the simulations provide an insight into the evolution of the liquid-liquid interface profile as a function of time for a given input voltage rise time. The time lapse velocity magnitude of the liquid-liquid interface for a rise time of 10 ms input exponential voltage is shown in Figure 7.

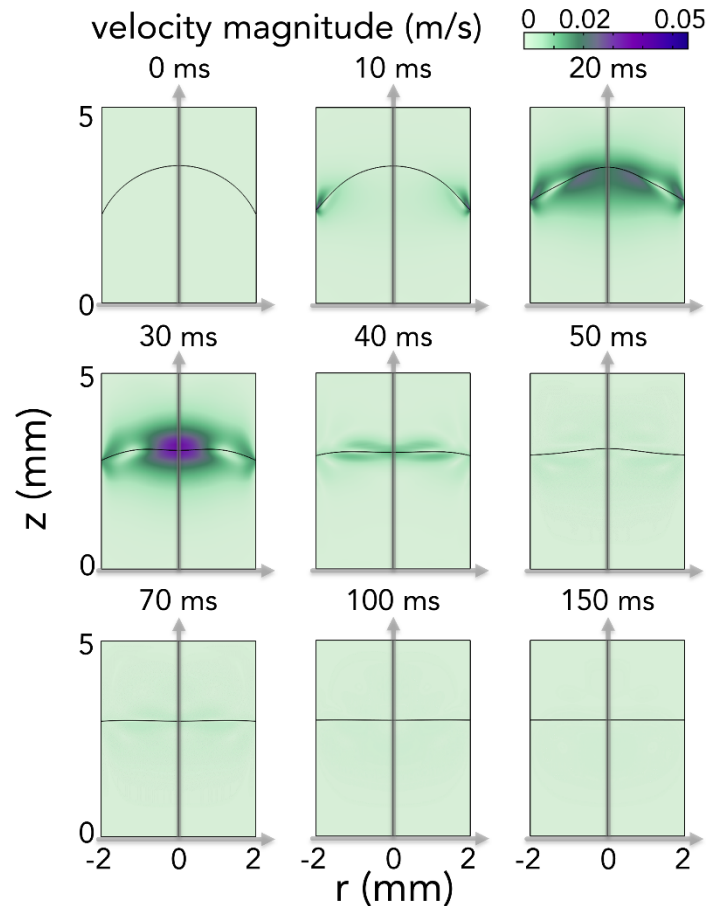


Figure 7. Time lapse of the velocity magnitude for a 3.95-mm diameter lens driven by a 10 ms input exponential voltage from 0 to 28 V. Evolution of the liquid-liquid interface (solid black line) represents the standing wave motion long after the input voltage is reached 28 V.

A wave is generated at the side walls due to the contact line motion, and it takes ~ 30 ms to reach the center of the lens (see Figure 7). For a 10 ms input rise time voltage, the contact line moves along the side wall for approximately 70 ms. The contact line motion produces a radially inward wave, which in-

interferes with the reflected wave moving radially outward, resulting in a standing wave that is damped by the viscosity of the liquids. The liquid-liquid interface finally settles to its steady state at approximately 120 ms.

The simulations were compared to the experimental results by simulating the exact experimental conditions. Figure 8(a) shows the motion of the meniscus on the axis of the lens as a function of time for varying input voltage rise times, and Figure 8(b) shows the comparison between experimental and simulation results for 3.95-mm lenses using 10 ms input rise time exponential voltage. The simulation result is shifted by 15 ms to match the experimental data. The delay is introduced by the RC characteristics of the device, not modeled in COMSOL. The experimental results are in good agreement with the simulation. The simulated and measured photodetector signal oscillations are shown in Figure 8(b). Small amplitude variations are due to the uncertainty in the measured distances of the experimental setup.

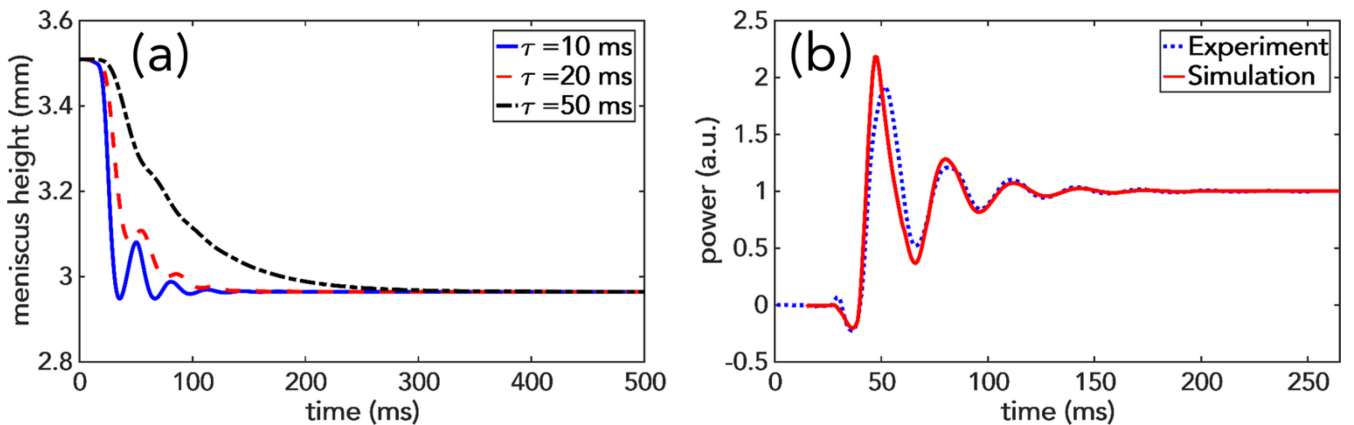


Figure 8. Simulation results for the 3.95-mm diameter lens. (a) motion of the meniscus on the axis of the lens as a function of time for varying input voltage rise times. (b) comparison between the simulations and the experimental results for an input voltage rise time of 10 ms.

Effect of two exponential input voltage drive:

Many input shaping techniques have been developed to optimize the response of nonlinear systems. For instance, input shaping techniques in the form of overdriven voltage have been used to reduce the response times of liquid-crystal displays³¹ and electrowetting devices^{22,23,25}. In our approach, we have studied multiple exponential driving voltages to enhance the response time of the EWOD lenses.

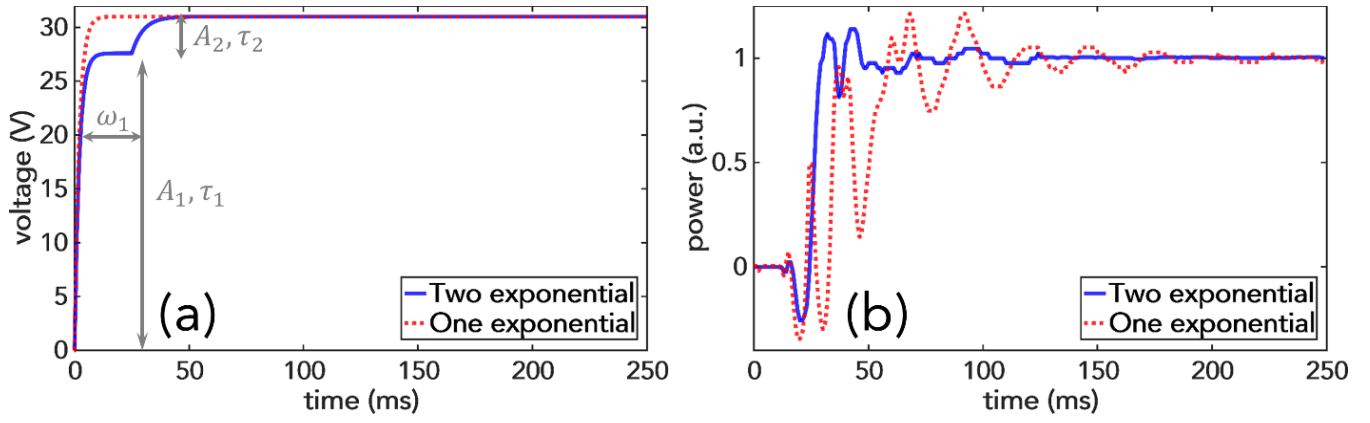


Figure 9. (a) One and two exponential driving voltages are plotted as a function of time with $ratio = A_1/A_2 = 27.6/3.4$, $\omega_1 = 25$ ms, $\tau_1 = 2$ ms, $\tau_2 = 5$ ms for the two-exponential driving voltage. The single exponential driving voltage has a rise time of 2 ms with an amplitude of 31 V. In the two-exponential case, we have fixed the two rise times and vary the ratio of the amplitudes and the width, ω_1 . (b) The experimental results for single and two exponential driving voltage. The solid line shows the fastest response time of 98 ms. Using a single 2 ms exponential drive voltage results in a response time of 167 ms (dashed line). Using two exponential driving voltages improves the response time by 41% in addition to suppressing the oscillations in the response.

Our method resembles the Posicast control method used in underdamped oscillatory systems^{32,33}. To improve the response time of our lenses, we have used a two-exponential driving voltage as depicted in Figure 9(a) as a solid line. A 3.95-mm inner diameter lens was actuated from 0 V to 31 V, with steady state contact angles with applied voltage experimentally determined as 155° at 0 V and 90° at 31 V DC. By using a combination of two exponentials as the drive voltage, one must determine the two amplitudes and two rise times in addition to the width of the first exponential voltage as labeled in Figure 9(a). Five unknown variables can be reduced to four by using the ratio of the amplitudes of the two exponential driving voltages. To find the optimum driving voltage, we fixed the rise times of the two exponentials to 2 and 5 ms, respectively. Shorter rise times (< 15 ms) were chosen in order to achieve a fast contact line motion upon actuation. The remaining two variables were determined by experimentally actuating the device with various ratios of the amplitudes and widths of the first exponential voltage to find the fastest response time. The response time for a single (dashed line) and two exponential (solid line) driving voltage is plotted in Figure 9(b). We experimentally determined that driving the lens with a

single exponential voltage, $\tau = 2$ ms, from 0 to 31 V results in response time of 167 ms, whereas actuating the same lens with two exponential voltages (ratio = $A_1/A_2 = 8.12$, $\omega_1 = 25$ ms, $\tau_1 = 2$ ms, $\tau_2 = 5$ ms) enhanced the response time to 98 ms. This is a 41% improvement compared to the 2 ms single exponential drive and a 29% improvement compared to the fastest response obtained for the 3.95-mm inner diameter lens driven using a single exponential input voltage with a rise time of 15 ms. The significant reduction in the response time can be explained through the destructive interference of two standing waves generated by the two exponential rise time functions. The first 2 ms input rise time function generates a rapid contact line motion which generates a standing wave moving from the sidewall towards the axis of the lens, which upon reflection starts propagating towards the sidewall. The second 5 ms input rise time function generated after a delay generates another standing wave that moves towards the axis of the lens and destructively interferes with the first wave, and dampens the oscillations at the liquid-liquid interface. In addition to this improvement in the response time, the oscillations are suppressed, making the lens behave more like a critically damped system.

Enhancing the response time of the electrowetting based devices using voltage shaping techniques is important for many applications. We have discussed a few applications in the introduction such as optical switches, depth scanning microscopy, and beam steering that can greatly benefit from faster response time EWOD devices. In addition, employing tools like genetic-algorithms can further enhance the optimization process for multiple exponential input voltages and it can be used for other arbitrary shaped input voltages.

CONCLUSION

The dynamics of EWOD lenses using one and two exponential input voltage is investigated followed by experimental and simulation results. We have studied 2.45 and 3.95-mm diameter lenses filled with 1 wt% SDS in water solution and dodecane. The response times of both lenses were characterized using single exponential voltage functions with various rise times. The response characteristics of the liquid-

liquid interface for the 3.95-mm diameter lens is simulated and compared to the experimental results for single exponential input voltage. We further improved the response time of a 3.95-mm lens by combining two exponential driving voltages, which shows the response time of 98 ms indicating a 29% enhancement when compared with the fastest response obtained using single exponential driving voltage. Our systematic study of carefully controlling the input voltage to drive the EWOD lens provides an insight into the importance of the actuation method of EWOD lenses for many applications.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to Robert Cormack and Dr. Joseph Brown for technical discussions. This work was supported by the Office of Naval Research (ONR) (W0014-14-1-2739), NSF IDBR grant DBI-1353757, NSF NSC-FO grant CBET 1631704, and DARPA/MTO W31P4Q-14-1-0006, under the CAMS program.

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