

RF pulse design for low SAR simultaneous multislice (SMS) excitation using optimal control

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INTRODUCTION

Simultaneous multislice (SMS) excitation is increasingly used to accelerate imaging experiments¹⁻³. Conventional design approaches result in a quadratic or linear increase in SAR⁴ and are sensitive to flip angle variations⁴. The slice dependent SAR increase can be addressed by the Power Independent of Number of Slices technique⁴, which was extended to the kT-PINS method⁵ to account for B_1 inhomogeneities; however, this method requires specialized gradient sequences. On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that optimal control is a powerful tool for the design of flexible and robust RF pulses. We therefore propose to apply an optimal control approach based on the full time-dependent Bloch equation, including relaxation and field inhomogeneity effects, for computing optimized SMS excitation pulses.

METHODS

Optimization: The optimal control approach consists in minimizing the discrepancy between the numerical solution of the full time-dependent Bloch equation corresponding to the RF pulse at read-out time and a prescribed, arbitrary, slice profile (in the form of a magnetization vector for each slice coordinate) together with a cost term modeling the SAR of the pulse. The minimizing pulse can be computed using a globally convergent trust-region Newton method⁶ with a matrix-free iterative solution of the Newton step involving adjoint consistent numerical simulation of the Bloch equation.

Implementation: This approach was applied to compute RF pulses for a simultaneous excitation of two and three rectangular slice profiles using a standard slice selective gradient, considering a z-range of 400mm with a spatial resolution of 0.08mm and a thickness of 4mm for each slice. The pulses were designed for a total excitation time $T=2,56$ ms and consisted of 256 samples every 10 μ s. For each slice, a flip angle of 45 $^\circ$ was specified.

Validation: The numerical results were verified by experimental measurements using the optimized RF pulses in a modified gradient echo sequence on a 3T MR scanner (Magnetom Skyra, Siemens Healthcare, Erlangen, Germany) with the readout gradient along the z-axis. The body coil was used to transmit the RF pulse and receive the MR signal of a homogeneous cylinder phantom with diameter of 140mm, a length of 400mm and relaxation times $T1 \cong 102$ ms, $T2 \cong 81$ ms and $T2^* \cong 70$ ms. The same parameters and slice selection gradient were used in the numerical optimization. For the imaging experiments, we used an echo time $TE=5$ ms, a repetition time $TR=20$ ms, a matrix size of 256x256 and a field of view of 300x300.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 shows the optimized RF pulses ($B_{1,x}$, $B_{1,y}$) for the two-slice (Figure 1a) and three-slice (Figure 1b) target profiles. The corresponding simulated slice profiles are given in Figure 2a and Figure 2b, respectively. It can be seen that the slices have a correct flip angle and a sharp transition profile, without requiring high SAR.

These results are validated by the implementation of the computed pulses in gradient echo sequence on the above mentioned 3T MR scanner for the imaging of a homogeneous phantom with frequency encoding in z-direction. The reconstructed images, given in Figure 3, demonstrate the ability to excite multiple homogeneous slices.

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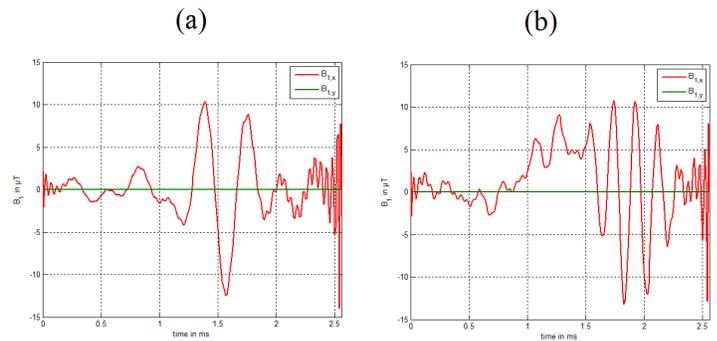


Figure 1: Optimized RF-pulse for two (a) and three (b) rectangular slice profiles

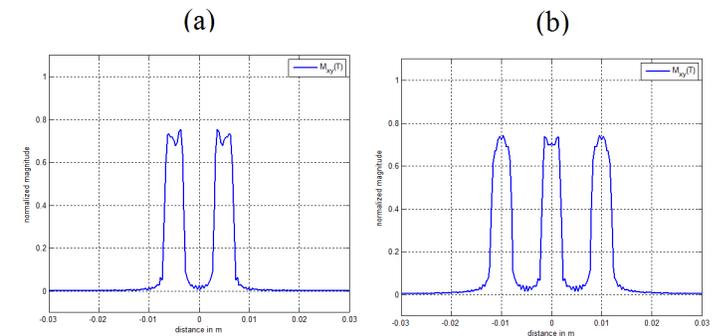


Figure 2: Simulated magnetization pattern of 1a and 1b.

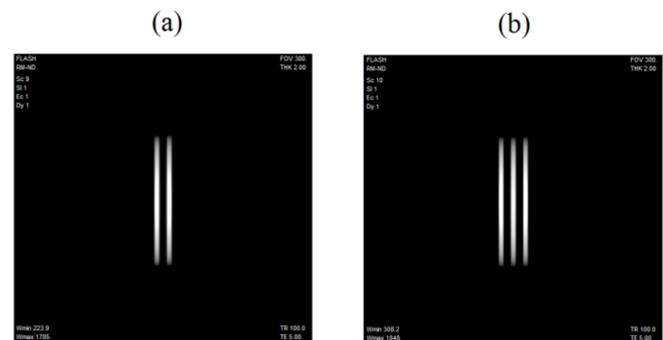


Figure 3: Reconstructed images of GRE experiment using the optimized pulses 1a and 1b respectively.