Compact vector twist sensor using a small period long period fiber grating inscribed with fs laser

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We propose and demonstrate a sensitive vector twist sensor based on a small period long period fiber grating (SP-LPFG) fabricated with femtosecond laser. The fabricated SP-LPFG is compact in size (2.8 mm), and shows strong polarization dependent peaks in its transmission spectrum due to the vectorial behavior of high order cladding modes. Twist sensing is realized by monitoring the polarization dependent peaks, since the polarization of input light changes with fiber twist. The proposed sensor can be interrogated by the peak intensity and wavelength, with high twist sensitivity that reaches 0.257 dB/deg and 0.115 nm/deg respectively.

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1. Introduction

Twist (torsion) is an important parameter that reflects the stress state and health condition of structures such as bridges. Recently, the application of optical fiber sensors (OFSs) in twist sensing has intensified, due to their advantages of flexibility, light weight, and resistance to electromagnetic interference. Though many different schemes have been proposed, optical fiber twist sensors (OFTSs) can be mainly classified into two types: one interrogated with wavelength (e.g., specially designed fiber gratings [1-8], Sagnac interferometer [9-11], helical fiber structure [12-14]), and the other with intensity (e.g., Solc filter [15], Lyot filter [16], Mach-Zehnder interferometers [17-19]), and fiber gratings [20-30]. Note that for the first type, the wavelength measurement involves the use of expensive and bulky optical spectrum analyzer (OSA) or tunable narrow-linewidth laser, whereas for the second type, intensity measurement only requires an optical power meter (or photodetector), which allows more compact and cost-effective interrogation than the first type. In this regard, OFTSs allowing intensity interrogation are more preferred.

The intensity-interrogated OFTSs can be further categorized into two main types: fiber interferometers and fiber gratings. The construction of fiber interferometers usually requires the use of special fiber [15-17] or modification of the fiber physical structure [18, 19], which decreases the fiber mechanical strength, and the length of fiber interferometers can be very long (e.g., 96 m length elliptical-core spun fiber is used in [15]). Fiber gratings can be directly introduced into the fiber without damaging the fiber physical structure, maintaining the mechanical strength and enabling more compact and stable twist sensing. To realize intensity-interrogated fiber grating twist sensors, one common principle is introducing a polarization dependent element (PDE) [20-29]. In this way, when the fiber is twisted, the input polarization entering the PDE will also change, resulting in a change of the output intensity of the PDE. Currently, fibergrating-based PDEs mainly include tilted fiber grating [20-26], phase shift fiber Bragg grating (FBG) [27], angularly cascaded long period fiber gratings (LPFGs) [28], and grating in special fiber, such as polarization maintaining fiber [29].

Recently, we found that polarization dependent coupling can be achieved in LPFG with much smaller grating period, i.e., the so-called small period LPFG (SP-LPFG) [31]. Thanks to the strong polarization dependence, SP-LPFGs are good candidates for the PDE in twist sensing application. In this work, we propose and demonstrate a sensitive OFTS based on SP-LPFG that is inscribed with femtosecond laser in normal single mode fiber (SMF). The adopted SP-LPFG is compact in size with a total length of only 2.8 mm, and is insensitive to strain and temperature change. Apart from intensity-based interrogation, the proposed sensor also exhibits sensitive wavelength shift to twist and thus can be interrogated by wavelength.

2. Principle and fabrication

As shown schematically in Fig. 1, LPFG is a kind of all in fiber device that consists of periodic modification along the fiber axis (usually the modification of refractive index). In LPFG, light of core mode is coupled to fiber cladding modes, which attenuates quickly, leaving serial attenuation peaks in the transmission spectrum of LPFG. The wavelengths of those attenuation peaks can be determined from the phase matching condition:

$$\lambda_{neak} = (neff_{co} - neff_{cl}^{i}) \cdot \Lambda \tag{1}$$

where $neff_{co}$ and $neff_{cl}^i$ are the effective index of core mode and cladding mode, with i denoting the cladding mode order, and Λ is the grating period. Standard LPFGs usually have a period of several hundred micrometers, and core mode light is coupled to low order cladding modes that satisfy the weakly-guiding approximation, whereas in SP-LPFGs, with a small grating period less than 50 μ m, coupling to high order cladding modes is enabled. These high order cladding modes are far away from weakly-guiding regime and present strong vectorial behavior [32-

34], resulting in the strong polarization dependent peaks in SP-LPFG. Such strong polarization dependence makes SP-LPFGs good candidates for the PDE in twist sensing application.

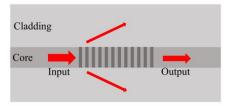


Fig. 1 Schematic of long period fiber grating.

In our experiment, a femtosecond laser (800 nm, 1 kHz, 150 fs) was focused into the core of stripped SMF (SM 28) by a 100× objective lens. The stripped SMF was mounted on a high resolution three dimensional stage to translate it relative to the laser focus. To keep the fiber straight, constant axial stress is applied to the fiber. The fiber position was monitored by a CCD camera, guaranteeing that the fiber is at the right position. The whole fabrication process was controlled by a computer. To fabricate the LPFG, a pulse energy of 200 nJ was used, and the fiber was translated along the fiber axis with a constant speed of 20 μ m/s, at the same time, the laser was turned on and off periodically by a mechanical shutter to introduce the periodic refractive index modulations (RIMs) into the fiber core, which construct the grating. During the fabrication, the transmission spectrum of the LPFG was monitored by an OSA in real time.

Figure 2 depicts the experimentally measured transmission spectrum of the fabricated grating, which has a period of 40 µm and a duty cycle of 50%, and 70 periods are introduced, corresponding to a total length of 2.8 mm (see inset of Fig. 2). This length is much more compact than normal LPFG (usually tens of millimeters), since the induced RIM is highly localized in the core, i.e., occupying part of the fiber core in the cross-section. Compared with the RIM that occupies the whole core transversely in normal LPFG (Fig. 1), such highly localized RIM suppresses the cancellation of negative and positive coupling to high order cladding modes, thus allowing much stronger coupling strength. The spectrum in Fig. 2 is measured with un-polarized light, where the deepest peak shows a strength of ~15 dB. The inset loss is ~4 dB (indicated by red dash line in Fig. 2), which mainly results from Mie scattering of the localized RIM [35]. The insert loss can be reduced by using decreased laser energy, at a cost of lower coupling efficiency, which should be balanced according to the requirements of practical applications. Note that though a relatively higher pulse energy is used, the grating survives at >3000 µc strain, which is comparable to LPFGs inscribed with CO₂ laser [36], indicating that the mechanical strength of the grating is well maintained.

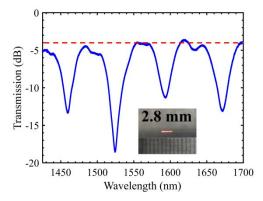


Fig. 2 Transmission spectrum of the fabricated grating measured with un-polarized light. Inset shows the photograph of the grating, where the grating length is indicated by the red-light scattered out of the fiber, and the interval of the ruler is mm.

To realize polarization related twist sensing, more of our concern is the polarization dependence. During the measurement, the polarization of light entering the grating is controlled by a polarizer followed by a polarization controller (PC), and the measured spectra of the peak around 1528 nm for two orthogonal polarizations are shown in Fig. 3. It can be seen from Fig. 3 that two peaks are fully distinguishable with polarized input light, and a strength over 25 dB is achieved for one of the polarizations (blue line in Fig. 3). Such strong polarization dependence mainly results from the vectorial nature of the high order cladding modes, since the grating period is very small [31]. Sensitive twist sensing will be achieved by the strong polarization dependence, as will be discussed in the next section.

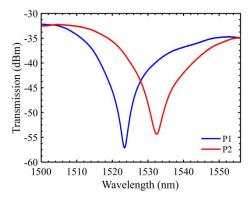


Fig. 3 Transmission spectra of the fabricated grating with two orthogonal input polarizations (P1 and P2).

3. Sensing and discussion

The schematic of the setup for twist sensing is depicted in Fig. 4, broadband light from a super-continuum (SC) passes through a polarizer, providing the initial polarized light whose polarization is controlled by the following PC, and the evolution of the output spectrum is monitored with an OSA. The grating is fixed between a fiber holder and a fiber rotator with engraved dial. During the measurement, the grating is slightly strained to keep it straight, thus eliminating the unwanted perturbation such as bending.

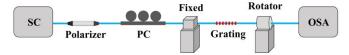


Fig. 4 Schematic of the experimental setup for twist sensing. SC: super-continuum, PC: polarization controller.

Before rotating the fiber, we adjusted the initial polarization state using the PC, to fully excite the peak on the shorter wavelength side (represented by P1 in Fig. 3). To characterize the twist sensing properties of the grating, the fiber rotator was rotated by 180° clock-wisely with 10° step, and the transmission spectrum was recorded every 10°. Figure 5a shows the spectral evolution of the grating under twist. It can be clearly seen that, with the increase of twist angle, the strength of the peak on the short wavelength side decreases (see black circles in Fig. 5a), and beyond certain angle, this peak fully disappears whereas the other peak appears and starts to grow. The dependence of the

peak intensity with twist angle is depicted in Fig. 5b, which shows a sine-like function that agrees with previous reports [24]. The slopes of two linear fitting regions from 0° to 40° and from 130° to 170° are 0.257 dB/deg and -0.131 dB/deg, respectively. In view of the practical application, the grating can be pre-twisted to this region, in order to achieve a high sensitivity and linear response. The twist direction can also be detected with the pre-twist, depending on whether the peak intensity increases or decreases. It should be noted that the peak intensity is not a monotonic function of twist angle, i.e., different twist angle can result in the same peak intensity. Therefore, to gurantee reliable twist sensing, the detectable angle range using peak intensity should be limited to 90°, or supplementary judgment by wavelength (Fig. 5c) is required.

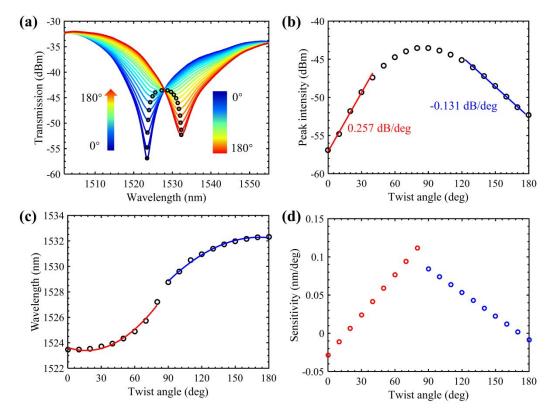


Fig. 5 Evolution of (a) transmission spectra (peak positions are denoted by black circles), (b) peak intensity, (c) peak wavelengths with increasing twist angle, and (d) wavelength-interrogated twist sensitivity calculated from the fitted function at each measurement point.

Table 1. Sensing performance of fiber-grating-based twist sensors Interrogation Method Sensitivity Length Orientation Reference (year) SP-LPFG 0.257 dB/deg 2.8 mmVector This work Cascaded LPFGs [28] (2018) -0.268 dB/deg 47.56 mmScalar ITO-coated TFBG 0.274 dB/deg [21] (2020) 15 mm Vector SMF-TFBG [23] (2014) Intensity 0.299 dB/deg 10 mm Scalar **MMF-TFBG** [22] (2014) $0.075 \, \mathrm{dB/deg}$ NA Vector Phase shift FBG 0.088 dB/deg 1.72 mmVector [27] (2016) Cascaded HLPFG 0.0074 dB/deg 58 mm Vector [30] (2014) Vector SP-LPFG 0.115 nm/deg 2.8 mmThis work CO₂ LPFG 0.019 nm/deg 20 mmVector [2] (2004) Wavelength HLPG [5] (2017) 0.067 nm/deg 34 mm Vector 0.029-0.11 nm/deg [37] (2020) Improved HLPG 18-36 mm Vector

It can be seen from Fig. 5a that the peak wavelength (denoted by black circle in Fig. 5a) also evolves with twist angle,

suggesting that the grating can also work as a wavelengthinterrogated twist sensor. Figure. 5c depicts the peak wavelengths as a function of the twist angle, where the wavelength evolution of the deepest peaks is fitted with quadratic functions separately (see blue and red lines in Fig. 5c). Figure 5d shows the sensitivity calculated from the fitted function in Fig. 5c at each measurement point, with a maximum sensitivity of ~ 0.115 nm/deg.

A comparison between our work and several typical previously reported OFTS based on fiber grating is listed in Table 1, including tilted FBG (TFBG) both in SMF and multimode fiber (MMF), and helical LPFG (HLPFG), where the unit of the twist sensitivity is unified for convenient comparison. It can be seen from Table 1 that our SP-LPFG sensor offers high sensitivity as well as compactness and vector sensing ability, while requiring no additional coating or use of special fiber. Moreover, the measured wavelength sensitivity in Fig. 5 is higher than many of the reported schemes (see wavelength-interrogated schemes in Table 1), indicating the potential of the SP-LPFG in wavelength-interrogated twist sensing application.

The cross-sensitivity of the proposed twist sensor to strain is also characterized utilizing the setup depicted in Fig. 4. To investigate the influence of strain on twist sensing, the spectral response of the grating to strain is measured with pre-twist angles of $10^\circ,\ 30^\circ$ and $50^\circ,\ respectively. Figure 6 depicts the measured evolution of peak intensity and wavelength with increasing strain, where the linear fitting for each measurement is also shown (see the red lines in Fig. 6). We can see that the slope of each fitting is very small, with a maximal slope of <math display="inline">0.000033\ dB/\mu\epsilon$ for peak intensity and $0.000157\ nm/\mu\epsilon$ for peak wavelength, suggesting that the proposed twist sensor is insensitive to strain, which is one of the important perturbations in twist measurement.

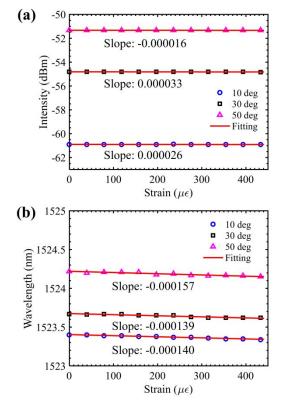


Fig. 6 Evolution of (a) peak intensity, and (b) peak wavelength with increased strain, when the grating was pre-twisted with an angle of 10° (blue circles), 30° (black rectangles), and 50°

(magenta triangles). The linear fitting of the evolution is depicted by red lines.

We also characterized the cross-sensitivity of the proposed grating to temperature, which is another important perturbation in twist measurement. During the characterization, the grating was heated from 30 °C to 60 °C with 5 °C step, under pre-twist angles of 10°, 30° and 50°, respectively. The measured results are depicted in Fig. 7, with the maximal coefficient of 0.0095 dB/°C for intensity interrogation (Fig. 7a), and 0.0037 nm/°C for wavelength interrogation (Fig. 7b), respectively, indicating a low temperature cross-sensitivity.

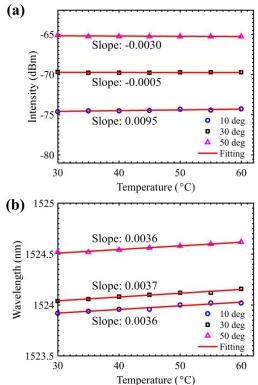


Fig. 7 Evolution of (a) peak intensity, and (b) peak wavelength with increased temperature, when the grating was pre-twisted with an angle of 10° (blue circles), 30° (black rectangles), and 50° (magenta triangles). The linear fitting of the evolution is depicted by red lines.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, a sensitive vector twist sensor based on SP-LPFG is proposed and demonstrated. The SP-LPFG is much more compact compared with normal LPFG, with a total length of only 2.8 mm. The proposed twist sensor can be interrogated by both intensity and wavelength, and high twist sensitivity of 0.257 dB/deg and 0.115 nm/deg is achieved for the two interrogation schemes. Such high sensitivity is achieved without modifying the physical structure of fiber, such as post-coating or partly removing the fiber cladding, enabling more stable grating structure. Moreover, the proposed sensor is insensitive to strain and temperature, which are two of the most important perturbations in twist measurement. With the above advantages, the proposed sensor is a good candidate for structure monitoring applications.

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