Numerical investigations of transition to high confinement plasmas

A.H. Nielsen¹, G.S. Xu², J. Madsen¹, V. Naulin¹, J. Juul Rasmussen¹, B.N. Wan²

¹ Association EURATOM – DTU, Dept. of Physics,
Technical University of Denmark, Kgs. Lyngby, Denmark
² Institute of Plasma Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences
Hefei 230031, People's Republic of China

One of the most outstanding issues in magnetic fusion research is the understanding of the transition from the Low (L-mode) to the High (H-mode) confinement regime, which ITER will rely on to achieve the goal of ignition. Although the H-mode is routinely achieved in a multitude of magnetic confinement devices since the first observation more than 30 years ago the transition still lacks full theoretical explanation and predictive modelling.

We present a numerical modelling of the L-H transition based on the first-principle fluid model HESEL (Hot Edge-Sol-Electrostatic). The model - an extension of the ESEL model - is a four-field drift-fluid model using the Braginskii closure for collisions and including generalized vorticity, density, electron and ion pressure equations. The model is solved on a 2D domain at the out-board mid-plane of a Tokamak including both open and closed field lines. The parallel dynamics is parameterized in each region accounting consistently for the parallel losses in the open field line region – the scrape of layer.

The results reveal different types of L-H-like transitions in response to ramping up the input power. For a fast rising input power we obtain a fast abrupt transition, and for a slow rising power we obtain the slow L-I-H transition, involving a so-called dithering I-mode appearing between the L- and H-mode. The L-I-H transition has been observed in several devices and investigated in great detail by applying advanced imaging systems. We have furthermore obtained a density scaling of the threshold power for the transitions.

Here we particularly focus on the L-I-H transition, where our results essentially reproduce recent experimental findings in the Experimental Advanced Superconducting Tokamak – EAST [1]. This includes the dynamics of the oscillatory I-mode, and the phase relations of the triggering events in response to the ramp up of the input power. These results hold promises for developing a full predictive modelling of the L-H transition, which is an essential step in understanding and optimizing future fusion devices and a future fusion power reactor.