Building and Environment 46 (2011) 1354–1360

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Building and Environment

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/buildenv

Contribution to analytical and numerical study of combined heat and moisture transfers in porous building materials

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 20 September 2010
Received in revised form
1 December 2010
Accepted 29 December 2010

Keywords:
Porous materials
Coupled heat and moisture transfer
Partial differential equations
Analytical solution
Potential function

ABSTRACT

In this paper, one-dimensional model for evaluating coupled heat and moisture transfer in porous building materials was proposed. The transient partial differential equations system was solved analytically for Dirichlet boundary conditions. It consists first to introduce the Laplace transformation and then to use the potential function technique. This approach allows simplifying the initial mathematical problem to a fourth order ordinary differential equation which can be easily solved. This solution was used to assess the transient temperature and moisture distribution across materials. A comparison with numerical models from Luikov [2] and Vafai *et al.* [12] was performed, a good agreement was obtained.

1. Introduction

The coupled heat and moisture transfer in porous media has been widely studied due to its presence in many fundamental and industrial applications. Particularly in building science, researches have been carried out in the past few decades to improve building energy efficiency and indoor air quality [1].

To describe hygrothermal transfer in capillary porous media, Luikov developed a model [2] assuming analogy between moisture migration and heat transfer. Moreover, he assumed that capillary transport is proportional to moisture and temperature gradients. Also, by analogy with specific heat, he introduced the specific mass capacity which is defined as the derivative of the water content with respect to the mass potential. This model is applicable for both hygroscopic and non-hygroscopic materials. It was used by several researchers [3–7].

In order to solve the coupled system for temperature and moisture potentials, many authors used both analytical and numerical approaches. Generally, the solution of the governing partial differential equations depends on the specific problem considered. Qin *et al.* [8] presented one of these specific cases addressed to a multi-layer building material and they obtained satisfactory numerical and experimental results. Ribeiro [5] presented an exact solution of Luikov system for a moist spherical capillary porous body. Their analytical procedure is a combination of the matrix functions and the Laplace transformation. Chang *et al.* [9] proposed an analytical solution obtained for the slab under natural hygrothermal boundary conditions. Their approach is based on the use of transformation functions. These authors [9] cited the work of Liu *et al.* [4] who introduced potential functions corresponding to their system of equations, by a change of variables for temperature and moisture content. They used the boundary condition of the third kind and compared their results with those of Thomas et al. [10] who conducted experimental studies on wood (pine). In the cited papers [5], there exist analytical difficulties to find the solution when the domain of convergence of the series is limited.

This paper presents a Potential Transfer Function Method applied to partial differential equations. It concerns one-dimensional heat and moisture transfer through a plane geometry of porous building component. Non-symmetric Dirichlet boundary conditions are considered. These conditions are more suitable for applications with high value of the dimensionless Biot number (typically, for cases where the average temperature and relative humidity at the surface of the building component converge very quickly to the ambient temperature and relative humidity as confirmed by Younsi [11]). The inverse Laplace Transformation was exactly obtained. The numerical solution was also performed using the same boundary conditions. Moreover, comparison with other numerical model given by Luikov [2] and that of Vafai *et al.* [12] was achieved.

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0360-1323/$ – see front matter © 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.buildenv.2010.12.020