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Rapid^{Q1} motion correction in MR-guided high-intensity focused ultrasound heating using real-time ultrasound echo information

Philippe Lourenço de Oliveira^a, Baudouin Denis de Senneville^a*, Iulius Dragonu^a and Chrit T. W. Moonen^a

The objective of this study was to evaluate the feasibility of integrating real-time ultrasound echo guidance in MR-guided high-intensity focused ultrasound (HIFU) heating of mobile targets in order to reduce latency between displacement analysis and HIFU treatment. Experiments on a moving phantom were carried out with MRI-guided HIFU during continuous one-dimensional ultrasound echo detection using separate HIFU and ultrasound imaging transducers. Excellent correspondence was found between MR- and ultrasound-detected displacements. Real-time ultrasound echo-based target tracking during MR-guided HIFU heating is shown with the dimensions of the heated area similar to those obtained for a static target. This work demonstrates that the combination of the two modalities opens up perspectives for motion correction in MRI-guided HIFU with negligible latency.R1.8 Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Keywords: motion correction; real time; MRI; ultrasound echo

INTRODUCTION

High-intensity focused ultrasound (HIFU) is a promising noninvasive technique for the local deposition of thermal energy deep inside the human body (1,2). MRI guidance of this method offers the benefits of excellent target visualisation and continuous temperature mapping using the proton resonance frequency (PRF) shift technique (3).

For the ablation of tumours in abdominal organs by MR-controlled HIFU under free breathing, the current target position must be continuously tracked in order to reposition the HIFU focal point to avoid undesirable damage of nearby healthy tissue.

It has been demonstrated that a HIFU system based on a phased-array ultrasound (US) transducer and rapid electronic displacement of the focal point, in combination with advanced real-time processing of MR images with correction of motion artefacts in temperature mapping, allows a mobile target to be tracked during the heating procedure, and enables regional temperature control (4,5). Complex deformations can be estimated and the technique enables the correction of the focal point position for periodical complex motions (rigid or elastic). However, the main difficulty is that the time duration between actual target displacement and MR-derived motion information is not negligible. This delay is the sum of a part of the acquisition time, the reconstruction time, the data transfer and the treatment planning (processing k-space data, Fourier transformation, thermal map computation, motion estimation, modelling of energy absorption and heat conduction via the bio heat transfer equation). A fast imaging update time is required, but this limits the spatial and/or temporal resolution, volume coverage and temperature precision of the scanned volume. For these reasons, the periodical motion should be anticipated to allow accurate

HIFU positioning. This anticipation process imposes a high reproducibility of the motion with small modifications of the period duration and amplitude. For most therapeutic applications within the human body, tissue displacement is usually caused by the respiratory and/or cardiac cycle, and can be assumed to be periodic in anaesthetised patients. However, this may not be the case for free-breathing patients. In this context, two approaches are currently being investigated in our laboratory.

- To provide a computationally effective processing pipeline for MR temperature maps in conjunction with high-frame-rate imaging to achieve a subsecond temporal resolution.
- 2. To use external sensors to provide independent motion information with high temporal resolution that can be employed, in conjunction with MR images, to estimate the target position.
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Abbreviations used used: ADC, analogue to digital converter; EPI, echo planar imaging; FWHM, full width at half-maximum; HIFU, high-intensity focused ultrasound; MSPS, mega samples per second; PRF, proton resonance frequency; RF, radiofrequency; RMS, root mean square; SSFP, steady state free precession; US, ultrasound.

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The aim of this study is to investigate the feasibility of the latter, using additional motion information provided by a US tracking system. US has been demonstrated to be a powerful tool for the evaluation of target displacement estimation (6). It has been shown in phantoms that US imaging can be used to correct, a posteriori, steady state free precession (SSFP)-type rapid MR images (7). In this communication, it is demonstrated in a phantom study that MR- and US-based estimated displacements are identical, and that a simple one-dimensional US echo can be used in combination with real-time volumetric MRI thermometry. For real-time purposes, it is shown that echo information is processed and results rapidly transferred to correct MR temperature maps, as well as to adapt HIFU focal point position 12 and intensity. 13

15 MATERIALS AND METHODS 16

In order to demonstrate the feasibility of using, in real time, US 17 echo information to improve real-time MR temperature monitor-18 ing of mobile targets, the following studies were carried out. 19

- 20 1. The analysis of the correlation of on-line MR- and US-based 21 displacement estimation during periodic motion of a phantom using short data processing times compatible with on-line 22 23 performance.
- 2. The analysis of the precision of HIFU heating with direct 24 US-based tracking of a mobile target in real time, together 25 26 with simultaneous volumetric MRI thermometry, without displacement anticipation, in comparison with heating of the 27 28 immobilised target.

Evaluation platform

Figure 1 shows details of the experimental platform.

MR acquisition

Dynamic MR temperature imaging was performed on a Philips^{Q4} Achieva 1.5 Tesla with a single-shot, gradient-recalled, echo planar imaging (EPI) sequence with a surface coil (diameter, 12 cm) placed around the target. Real and imaginary data were transferred online to a computer for temperature visualisation and control of the HIFU driver for repositioning of the heating point. This computer was equipped with a Centrino Duo 2 GHz processor and 2 GB of RAM running under the Windows XP operating system.

HIFU system

68 An inhouse-built, 256-channel, focused phased array transducer, 69 operating at 1.5 MHz and with a focal length of 80 mm, was used 70 to steer the focal point electronically. The positioning of the 71 256 individual elements (5.8 mm in diameter) was optimised for 72 minimal intensity of secondary lobes and compactness of 73 the transducer (8). For this purpose, an iterative optimisation 74 scheme, according to an acoustic field simulation based on 75 Rayleigh integration, was performed to design the transducer. A 76 conventional LC impedance matching was adjusted for each electrical impedance of the 256 channels to transform a typical 77 complex impedance of 20–280 J into 50 Ω . The power and 78 position of the focal point could be updated electronically every 79 65 ms. During hyperthermia, 100 W of electric energy were 80 transmitted in a focal dimension at $-6 \, dB$ of $1 \times 1 \times 5 \, mm^3$ with a 81 maximal pressure of 6.1 MPa. 82

US motion estimation system

A single-channel pulse/receiver filtered against MR frequency (USBox, Lecoeur^{Q5}-Electronique, France) was connected to a single transducer element (outside diameter, 6 mm; identical to the components of the 256-element phased array system described above), operating at 1.2 MHz with a beam profile <u>characterised^{Q6}</u> by 13.5° and an aperture angle of $-6 \, \text{dB}$, to evaluate the one-dimensional target displacement along the transducer direction. The received signal amplitude is about -40 dBm^{Q7}. Each 20 ms (limited by the USB driver communication used), a radiofrequency (RF) pulse was emitted and processed for motion estimation. An analogue to digital converter (ADC) of 10 bits was used, operating at 20 megasamples per second (MSPS). The sensitive region of the US tracking probe was centred on the mean position of the water-gel interface.

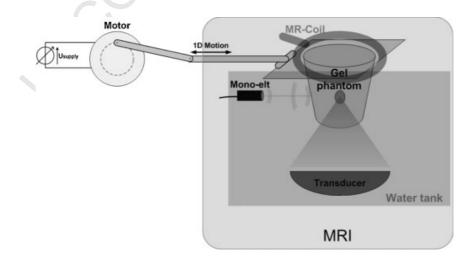


Figure 1. Experimental platform designed to evaluate the feasibility of correlating MR- and ultrasound (US)-based motion estimations, and of real-time ultrasound tracking of a mobile target with simultaneous real-time volumetric MRI thermometry. The single-element ultrasound imaging transducer is indicated as 'Mono-elt'. 1D, one-dimensional.

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2 A gel phantom (diameter, 10 cm), composed of agar, silica and 3 water with relaxation times matched to the human kidney, and a 4 US attenuation close to that of abdominal organs (approximately 1 dB/cm at 1.2 MHz), was mounted on a motorised platform to 5 simulate an abdominal organ. Its displacement was remotely 6 controlled by a mechanical transmission line. The motorised 7 phantom performed a periodic sinusoidal one-dimensional 8 displacement. The motion period was varied by adjusting the 9 voltage supply applied to the motor. The displacement direction 10 was parallel to the tracking monoelement axis, allowing a direct 11 displacement evaluation. 12

13 Correlation of online MR- and US-based motion estimations 14

MR imaging 15

Physiological phantom

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16 Single-slice MR images with a resolution of 96×96 pixels and a pixel size of $1.55 \times 1.55 \times 1.55$ mm³ were obtained every 300 ms 17 (TE = 27 ms) during a periodic motion of the phantom with a 18 maximum amplitude of 30 mm. During 55 s, several motion cycles 19 with different period durations (between 0 and 0.73 Hz) were 20 applied successively, with the target finally returning to its 21 original position. Simultaneously, US echoes were recorded. 22

23 MR motion estimation 24

25 Image processing techniques can be used to estimate online 26 organ displacements from anatomical images (9,10). Image registration allows a robust estimation of organ displacement. 27 with excellent two-dimensional/three-dimensional spatial infor-28 mation (11) when compared with other existing approaches, 29 such as those using MR navigator signals (12) or US echoes (6,7). 30 The objective is to relate the coordinate of each part of tissue 31 in the image to register with the corresponding part in a 32 reference image (typically the first of the temporal series). In 33 this communication, the translational transformation was est-34 imated using a differential approach of Gauss-Newton (13). 35 MR-based estimated displacements were compared with gold standard positions available from the motion platform in (4), and 36 demonstrated to be accurate with a precision better than 1/4 37 pixel. Positions available from the motion platform are therefore 38 not reported in this study. 39

40 US motion estimation 41

42 The motion was estimated using a speckle tracking technique: a 43 one-dimensional cross-correlation algorithm (14,15) between a reference and the current RF signal was used to estimate the 44 time-shift corresponding to the target displacement along the 45 beam axis of the monoelement. 46

47 Real-time synchronisation of MR- and US-based motion 48 estimations 49

50 A temporal synchronisation of MR- and US-based motion 51 estimations is required. For this purpose, an oscilloscope kept track of the start of the MR pulse sequence with a microsecond 52 temporal resolution, and this information was transferred to the 53 computer (see Fig. 1). Two constant delays were then taken into 54 account for comparison: (i) a delay related to MRI (similar to the 55 aperture time for a snapshot with a camera) which corresponds 56 to half the image acquisition time (equal to TE in the case of a 57

single-shot, gradient-echo, EPI sequence); (ii) a delay related to the US system, which relates to the time duration in US echoes (less than a millisecond).

Assessment of correlation between MR- and US-based motion estimation

The correlation between MR- and US-based motion estimation was analysed using a linear regression, considering a significant Pearson correlation (R^2) higher than 0.95. The slope and y-intercept values were compared with the identity function. The residual fitting error was evaluated with an average absolute mean difference. In addition, the root mean square (RMS) value between MR- and US-based motion estimations was evaluated for different motion period durations.

Real-time US tracking of a mobile target with simultaneous real-time volumetric MRI thermometry

MR imaging

The amplitude of the periodical phantom (period, 6 s) motion was set to 10 mm along the z-axis. The phantom was heated with HIFU using 100 W of acoustic power during 20 s. MR volumetric thermometry data were obtained using three slices with a resolution of 96 \times 96 pixels and a pixel size of 1.33 \times 1.33 \times 6 mm^3 every 360 ms (TE, 46 ms).

HIFU positioning with motion

US-based estimated motion was used to adjust the focal point of the HIFU device to the current location of the chosen target. However, US-based motion estimation and HIFU sonication cannot operate simultaneously because of the proximity of the operating frequencies of the two devices, and the high HIFU power amplitude with regard to the receiver signal amplitude used for US tracking. For this reason, temporal multiplexing was necessary: the HIFU generator was successively ON during 65 ms and OFF during 25 ms, allowing US motion estimation system from speckle acquisition. Therefore, the HIFU sonication was updated every 90 ms.

Online MR temperature monitoring of the mobile target

Motion-compensated MR thermometry was performed as presented in (4,16). This PRF-based method acquires a complete set of reference magnitude and phase images for each organ position during a pretreatment step. During the intervention, the current magnitude image was compared with the prerecorded set and the closest match was selected by evaluating the intercorrelation coefficient. The corresponding prerecorded phase image served as reference for current temperature computation. This strategy allows the correction of online periodical interscan motion-related errors in PRF temperature methods.

RESULTS

Comparison between MR- and US-based motion estimations

The implemented image registration algorithm required 50 ms of computation time on our HIFU computer for one image with a resolution of 96×96 pixels, and is thus compatible with online conditions. Figure 2 compares online MR- (in red) and US- (in

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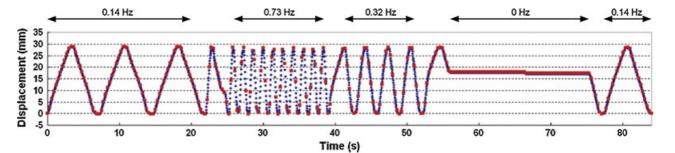


Figure 2. Comparison between MR- (in red) and ultrasound (US)- (in blue) based displacement estimations obtained for a phantom undergoing different periodic motion with varying frequencies.

blue) based estimated displacements. A linear regression resulted in an identity function (the slope and y-intercept values are 1.01 and 0.04, respectively) with an excellent correlation ($R^2 = 0.9991$), as shown in Fig. 3a. The average absolute error between MR- and US-based displacement estimations was approximately equal to 0.22 mm (maximum, 1.39 mm). Figure 3b reports the RMS value of the difference between MR- and US-based displacement estimations for different target motion frequencies. It can be observed that this RMS value increases linearly with the motion frequency.

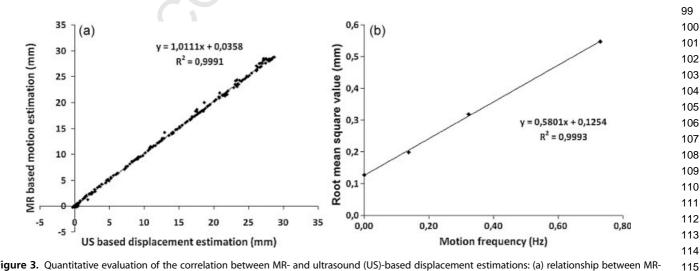
25 Direct US tracking of a mobile target with simultaneous26 real-time volumetric MRI thermometry

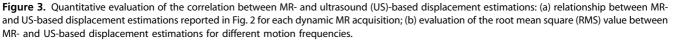
Figure 4 shows the spatial temperature distribution obtained with an immobilised target (Fig. 4a), and with a target undergoing a periodical translation without (Fig. 4b) and with (Fig. 4c) adjustment of the focal point position, after 15 s of heating. The results obtained on the immobilised target are used as a gold standard for comparison: a maximal temperature increase of 19.5°C was measured and the full width at half-maximum (FWHM) area dimensions were $4.3 \times 4.2 \text{ mm}^2$. Without focal point position correction (Fig. 4b), the heated area extended over a length of 12 mm (heating area dimensions, $4 \times 12 \text{ mm}^2$) and only a 10.2°C maximum temperature increase was obtained. With focal repositioning based on US echo (Fig. 4c), the heated area had a circular shape and the energy was deposited over the same tissue area relative to that for the immobilised phantom. The heating area dimensions were $4.3 \times 4.5 \text{ mm}^2$ and a maximum temperature increase of 16.3°C was measured.

DISCUSSION

Correlation of online MR- and US-based displacement estimations

It can be observed from Figs 2 and 3 that the displacement estimated with each modality matches precisely for different motion frequencies. The uncertainty of the reported results depends on the robustness of the motion estimation method relative to each modality, the accuracy of the synchronisation technique and the evaluation platform. Figure 3b shows that there is a small discrepancy between US- and MRI-derived displacements depending on the frequency of the periodic motion. Intrascan motion artefacts may hamper motion estimation based on MR images, especially in the case of rapid target displacement. Intrascan motion artefacts were minimised using a fast single-shot EPI sequence. In addition, some uncertainty may be related to geometric distortions in MR images. Although the MR sequences have been optimised to avoid geometrical distortions in our study, appropriate real-time corrections (17) may be applied in regions prone to high susceptibility changes





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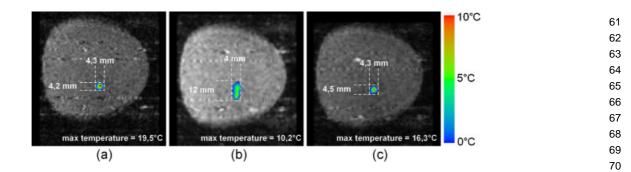


Figure 4. Temperature difference maps obtained online after 15 s of heating with an immobilised target (a), and with a target undergoing a periodical motion without (b) and with (c) the focal point position corrected in real time based on ultrasound echo information.

13 (especially near tissue-air and tissue-bone interfaces). Although 14 a maximal difference between the two estimated positions of 15 1.39 mm was observed for extreme target positions at the 16 highest motion frequency (0.73 Hz), a very good correspondence 17 between MR- and US-based displacement estimations was 18 always obtained. 19

20 Real-time US tracking of a mobile target with simultaneous 21 volumetric MRI thermometry

22 US echo-based target tracking of a single heated point allowed 23 a controlled temperature increase comparable with that in 24 the reference experiment on the static phantom. The size of the 25 heated region size was similar for the moving phantom relative 26 to that of the stationary phantom, indicating accurate HIFU tracking. The time lag of the HIFU sonication was limited by both US 27 acquisition and processing (equivalent to the US signal acquisi-28 tion + data transfer + processing time, and equal to 20 ms in our 29 study) and by the lag time to update the HIFU system (90 ms in our 30 study). Although the hardware should still be optimised further in 31 the case of fast target displacement, it was sufficient in this study 32 (mimicking respiratory related displacements of the liver and 33 kidney) to demonstrate the feasibility of the tracking studies. 34 However, the maximal temperature increase with the tracked 35 experiment was somewhat lower than the reference experiment on 36 the immobilised target (16.3°C compared with 19.5°C, respectively). 37 Two hypotheses may explain this decrease in temperature. First, the observed decrease in temperature may arise from partial volume 38 effects in MRI thermometry. Second, the observed decrease may 39 also arise from the laterally focused beam as a result of the 40 transducer element directivity (lower energy deposition in the 41 targeted area when the focal point moves out of the geometric 42 focus as a result of secondary lobes). 43

The excellent temporal resolution of the displacement 44 information update allowed tracking of the mobile target 45 with negligible latency. Therefore, no anticipation process is 46 required, avoiding restrictions with regard to target displacement 47 (periodicity of the motion, accidental motions). The results 48 obtained demonstrate the feasibility of continuous HIFU treatment in an ex vivo moving phantom with a frequency of 49 approximately that of the respiratory cycle. It was also 50 demonstrated that this fast US tracking can be performed 51 simultaneously with quantitative volumetric MRI thermometry. 52

CONCLUSION

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Although it is well established that MR imaging can provide motion estimates with a high spatial resolution, it is difficult in

73 practice to acquire online three-dimensional isotropic images 74 because of technical limitations, spatial and temporal resolution 75 trade-offs, and low SNR associated with fast three-dimensional 76 acquisition sequences. In addition, the time duration between 77 the actual target displacement and the availability of the 78 motion information from MR data is not negligible. Therefore, an 79 anticipation process is required, imposing restrictions on the motions that can be corrected for. This study demonstrates the 80 excellent correlation of MR- and US-based displacement 81 estimation. In addition, US echo information has been shown 82 to give a fast continuous update of displacement information, 83 allowing real-time tracking of a mobile target with negligible 84 latency, and thus avoiding the requirement of any anticipation in 85 the HIFU firing pattern. Although the hardware should still be 86 optimised further (as the HIFU sonication update rate is limited by 87 the 90 ms lag to update the HIFU generator), it was sufficient to 88 demonstrate the principle of the feasibility study. This study opens up perspectives to combine MR and US modalities to 89 provide accurate spatial and temporal estimation of target 90 displacement together with online MR temperature monitoring. 91

This feasibility study was performed with simplified one-92 dimensional US tracking and two-dimensional MR imaging with 93 unidirectional displacements. In order to apply such methods 94 in vivo, further improvements will be required, as, in this case, the 95 target may move in obligue angles with respect to the US probe. 96 The results obtained in this communication suggest two paths of 97 investigation. First, further work can be performed using a 98 one-dimensional pulse receiver as follows: as physiological 99 motions caused by respiratory and cardiac cycles are reproducible, MR imaging can be used in a preceding training step to 100 relate the US speckle pattern to the MR visualised organ 101 displacement. Subsequently, during therapy, the US speckle 102 pattern can be compared in real time with the training data in 103 order to retrieve the corresponding organ position. The main 104 limitation of this approach arises from the fact that no direct 105 displacement measurement is obtained using US, as the 106 correlation between MRI and US measurement is performed 107 with different units. Second, an extension of the method would 108 be to investigate the use of two-dimensional/three-dimensional 109 US information to identify complex target motion in oblique 110 angles with respect to the probe. Pernot et al. (6) used four pulse receivers to estimate the three-dimensional displacement 111 of the targeted organ (three transducers were required to 112 estimate the displacement, and another was added to increase 113 the robustness of the process). However, the challenge of such an approach is when US is obstructed by ribs and/or air in the beam path. For the analysis of nonrigid displacements under real-time conditions, an acceleration of image processing will be required.

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This is achievable, for example, by offloading all computationally intensive calculations to a dedicated graphics processing unit (18). Nevertheless, the results offer perspectives for the correction of more complex motion patterns in real time. This fast estimation of complex organ deformation may improve the safety of the intervention by increasing the precision of the focal point position adjustment with target displacement, an important factor when high-power amplitudes are used for energy deposition.

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