Small Core Fiber Optic Connectors
Performance Model

Frederic Taugwalder, Françoise Caloz, Stefan Lüthi, Alfio Cerini, Victor Coggi
Diamond SA, via dei Patrizi 5, 6616 Losone, Switzerland

The effect of lateral offset and angular misalignment in optical fibre connectors are analyzed as a function of fiber core diameter and wavelength. Model calculations are then compared to experimental results and discussed in relation with the used fibre type.

1 Introduction

The vast majority of optical fiber produced today is used for telecommunications. The telecommunications industry has promulgated standardized measurement methods and performance classes for products operating in the near-infrared (NIR) spectrum, specifically at the 1310nm and 1530-1625nm wavelengths.

Because it has shown to offer numerous advantages over free-space optics, fiber technology has found application in a number of new areas, mostly in sensing systems in the industrial, biological, chemical analysis, security, military, space and R&D fields.

Many of these sensing systems utilize small-core fiber optimized for operation in the visible and near-ultraviolet spectrum (800–350nm). This poses new challenges for the fiber optic connectors used therein. Achieving repeatable, low-loss connections requires enhanced levels of precision and accuracy from these components. This article serves to describe the underlying mechanisms that affect the insertion loss (IL) of a fiber optic connection, and presents a model to describe connector performance in smaller-core fiber.

Experimental results corroborating the model are presented.

2 Measurement standards and model for the Insertion Loss (IL)

2.1 Measurement standards

The insertion loss (IL) of a fiber optic connector is measured as defined in IEC 61300-1 and is calculated as follows:

\[ IL = -10 \cdot \log \left( \frac{P_{DUT}}{P_{ref}} \right) \]

Eq. 1

Where:
- \( P_{DUT} \) = transmitted power of the device under test (DUT)
- \( P_{ref} \) = reference power, without DUT

Power: \([P] \) in mW,

Insertion loss: \([IL] \) in dB

IL measurements of individual connectors are conducted per IEC 61300-3-34², Method B. The sample assembly’s length should be such that the attenuation contributions from the fiber can be ignored.

Statistical IL values are tabulated per IEC 61300-3-34², randomly mated (i.e., every connector against every other connector).

Fig. 1 Schematic diagram of IL measurement procedure

2.2 Model

The IL of a physical contact (PC) connector is primarily determined by fiber parameters (Mode Field Diameter (MFD) and the index of refraction of the core (\( n_0 \)), by the wavelength (\( \lambda \)), lateral (\( d \)) and angular(\( \theta \)) alignment errors between the mating fiber cores.

D. Markuse showed for mechanical splices³ that IL can be calculated by Eq. 2. This method has been used, verified, and adopted in various international standards such as IEC 61755¹.

\[ IL = -10 \left( \frac{(2\omega_d \omega_0)^2}{\omega_1^2 + \omega_2^2} \right) \exp \left( \frac{-2d^2}{\omega_1^2} - 2 \pi \cdot \frac{\omega_0^2 \omega_1^2}{\lambda^2 \left( \omega_1^2 + \omega_2^2 \right)} \sin^2(\theta) \right) \]

Eq. 2

Where:
- \( \lambda \) = Wavelength of light in a vacuum
- \( n_0 \) = Core index of refraction
- \( \omega_1 \) = Mode field radius of launch fiber
- \( \omega_2 \) = Mode field radius of receiving fiber

From Eq. 2, one can derive a simpler form using the same fiber (i.e. \( \omega_1 = \omega_2 \)) on each side.

\[ IL = K_1 \cdot d^2 + K_2 \cdot \theta_\text{deg}^2 \]

Eq. 3

By understanding \( K_1 \) and \( K_2 \), one can deduce their influence on small core fibers.

The lateral offset coefficient, \( K_1 \), increases with the square of decreasing mode field diameter.

The angular misalignment coefficient, \( K_2 \), remain stable with diminishing MFD. This is shown in Fig. 3.
From Fig. 3, we can see that for VIS-NUV wavelengths, lateral offset has a pronounced impact on IL, and this parameter requires close attention when connectors are terminated.

### 3 Experimental Investigation

For this study, a series of connectors were terminated on single mode (SM) and polarization-maintaining (PM) fiber optimized for the 400-800 nm wavelength range with MFD ranging from 3\(\mu\)m to 5\(\mu\)m. The connectors featured 0º physical contact (PC) endface polishes.

The connectors further featured a two-component ferrule construction, consisting of ceramic (ZrO2) outer ferrules and titanium inserts. Ferrules of this construction are standardized under IEC 617554 as optical interfaces for telecommunications.

The termination process, known as Active Core Alignment (ACA), included core eccentricity and exit angle measurements, allowing comparison of the experimental data to the model. Relevant process parameters included:

- Tight ferule tolerance \(< 0.2\mu\text{m (2.500 \(\pm\) 0.003)}\)
- Eccentricity \(< 0.125\mu\text{m}\)
- Exit angle \(< 0.4^\circ\)

Using these parameters, IL values \(\leq 0.1\) dB are routinely achieved in production for telecommunications-grade connectors.

#### 3.1 Insertion loss (IL)

A series of patchcords with fibers for 405 nm (MFD=2.9\(\mu\)m), 532 nm (MFD=3.5\(\mu\)m), 630 nm (MFD=4.2\(\mu\)m) and 780 nm (MFD=4.6\(\mu\)m) were built using the above-mentioned process.

IL measurements on these patchcords per IEC 61300-3-4, Method B showed good agreement with the model, as shown in Fig. 4.

The results presented here show good correspondence from model to experimental data.

### 4 Conclusion

The effects of lateral and angular alignment mismatches between mating cores in fiber optic connectors is greatly influenced by the mode field diameter and experimental data was shown to confirm validity of the model used for standard telecom NIR fibers.

It was also shown that for small core fiber, lateral offsets are the primary source of connector insertion loss (IL).

Already thoroughly proven in the traditional telecommunications spectral bands (1310 nm and 1530–1625 nm), Active Core Alignment is powerful tools for the production of high-precision connectors to handle the demands of the visible and near-ultraviolet spectrum.
5 Annex

5.1 Equation reduction

\[ I_L = -10 \log \left( \frac{2 \pi \omega_0}{\omega_0^4} \right) \cdot \exp \left( 2 \pi^2 \frac{\omega_0^2}{\lambda^2} \right) \cdot \frac{1}{\lambda^2} \frac{d^2}{d \theta^2} + \frac{1}{\lambda^2} \frac{d^2}{d \theta^2} + \frac{1}{\lambda^2} \frac{d^2}{d \theta^2} \cdot \sin^2(\theta) \right) \],

where \( \omega_0 = \omega_0^o = \omega \).

\[ I_L = -10 \log \left( \frac{4 \omega_0^2}{\omega_0^4} \right) \cdot \exp \left( 2 \pi^2 \frac{\omega_0^2}{\lambda^2} \right) \cdot \frac{1}{\lambda^2} \frac{d^2}{d \theta^2} + \frac{1}{\lambda^2} \frac{d^2}{d \theta^2} + \frac{1}{\lambda^2} \frac{d^2}{d \theta^2} \cdot \sin^2(\theta) \right) \],

\[ I_L = \log(\omega) = \frac{\ln(\omega)}{\ln(10)} \]

\[ I_L = -10 \ln(10) \left( \frac{2 \pi^2 \omega_0^2}{\lambda^2} \right) \cdot \exp \left( 2 \pi^2 \frac{\omega_0^2}{\lambda^2} \right) \cdot \frac{1}{\lambda^2} \frac{d^2}{d \theta^2} + \frac{1}{\lambda^2} \frac{d^2}{d \theta^2} + \frac{1}{\lambda^2} \frac{d^2}{d \theta^2} \cdot \sin^2(\theta) \right) \],

\[ I_L = K1 \cdot d^2 + K2 \cdot \sin^2(\theta) \]

for small angles, we have \( \sin^2(\theta) = \theta^2 \).

\[ \Rightarrow I_L \simeq K1 \cdot d^2 + K2 \cdot \theta^2 \].

5.2 Various fiber parameters

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5.3 References