Experimental Evidence for Electron Heat Transport Threshold in ASDEX Upgrade H-modes


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Introduction and experimental conditions

Electron temperature profiles in tokamak plasmas have been observed to weakly react to changes of the auxiliary heating power deposition profile. This property known as 'profile resilience' or 'profile stiffness', can be explained by an increase of transport in reaction to an increase of $\nabla T / T$ above a critical value. Recently, the electron heat transport has been investigated in several tokamaks, in particular using electron cyclotron heating (ECH). The experimental observations suggest that transport is likely to be governed by turbulence increasing above a threshold in $1/L T_e = -\nabla T_e / T_e$. A critical gradient length model has therefore been proposed, first in [1] then modified and applied in [2], to experimentally investigate both the existence of such a threshold and the resilience. The diffusion coefficient is given by $\chi_e \propto \chi_s T_e^{3/2} (R/L T_e - \kappa_c) H(R/L T_e - \kappa_c)$, where $\kappa_c$ is the threshold, $\chi_s$ a non-dimensional stiffness factor (which allows inter-machine comparison [2]) and the term $T_e^{3/2}$ takes into account the Gyro-Bohm dependence of transport driven by micro-turbulence. Some of the recent results [3]-[7] confirm this assumption and are in agreement with the main candidates supposed to cause the anomalous transport, the coupled TEM/ITG and ETG driven turbulence. In contrast to these pure electron heated L-modes ($T_e \gg T_i$), the electron heat transport in H-mode with dominant ion heating ($T_i > T_e$) has been addressed only in JET [2], DIII-D [9, 10] and ASDEX Upgrade [3], but many questions remain open. A detailed investigation of the problem using ECH is therefore the aim of this paper.

For these studies in ASDEX Upgrade, low density, sawtooth free deuterium H-mode plasmas have been used. The dominant ion heating is provided by 5MW neutral beam injection (NBI). ECH is added on top to change the electron heat flux. The plasma current is $I_P = 1 MA$ and the toroidal field $B_T = 2.4 - 2.5 T$. The power delivered to the ions ($P_i$) is approximately 65% of the NBI power and to the electrons ($P_e$) 20% (approximately 1MW). Due to the low collisional coupling at these low densities, $P_e$ can be more than doubled by applying up to the available 2MW of ECH [11], while $P_i$ is not changed significantly. The discharges have been performed at $n_e \sim 4.5 \cdot 10^{19} m^{-3}$. The ECH power deposition location $\rho_{dep}$ has been changed between "on-axis" (0.1 < $\rho_{dep}$ < 0.2) and "off-axis" (0.35 < $\rho_{dep}$ < 0.55). The ECH is modulated (MECH with 50% duty cycle square wave and $\nu_{MECH} = 38.47 Hz$) to allow transient transport analysis. The total average ECH power varies from 0.4MW during a first MECH phase to 1.2MW during a second MECH phase.

Experimental observations

Figure 1 shows the effect of the ECH on $T_e$, $T_i$, $n_e$, $R/L T_e$, $R/L T_i$ and $T_e/T_i$ for an off-axis ECH discharge. The electron temperature $T_e$ increases to some extent only around the ECH power deposition region, while $R/L T_e$ is unchanged. The ion temperature $T_i$ and $R/L T_i$ are basically unchanged. Essentially no effect is observed also in the density profile. Only when the ECH is deposited in the centre, the core $T_e$ increases while the core
1.6. In practice, the strong ECH power almost does not produce any especially considering that, locally, the electron heat flux is increased by a factor up to 1.6. In practice, the strong ECH power almost does not produce any $T_e$ variations.

**Transport analysis**

The electron heat transport, assumed to be purely diffusive, is investigated with power balance (PB) and heat pulse (HP) propagation analyses using the ASTRA transport code. PB analysis yields the power balance heat diffusivity $\chi_j^{PB}$, where $j = e, \iota$ is related to the species. HP analysis is carried out as described in [12, 13] yielding the so-called "(incremental) HP diffusivity": $\chi_e^{HP} = \frac{\partial q_e}{n_e \partial T_e}$. The MECH discharges with power depositions at $\rho_{dep} = 0.1, 0.35, 0.55$ are analysed. The off-axis discharges allow the determination of $\chi_e^{HP}$ for the heat pulses propagating from the power deposition to both the plasma centre (low electron heat flux) and edge (high electron heat flux).

Figure 2 summarises the results of both PB and HP analyses, which have been carried out at $\rho_{an} = 0.25$ for the discharges with the MECH depositions at $\rho_{dep} = 0.1, 0.35$, and at $\rho_{an} = 0.45$ for those with the MECH deposition at $\rho_{dep} = 0.35, 0.55$. In figure 2 (a,b) we observe that, as usual, $\chi_e^{HP} > \chi_e^{PB}$ and that $\chi_e^{HP}$ is always higher for high electron heat flux ($\rho_{dep} > \rho_{an}$) than for low electron heat flux ($\rho_{dep} < \rho_{an}$). At $\rho_{an} = 0.25$, $\chi_e^{PB}$ and $\chi_e^{HP}$ change only little with increasing $R/L_{Te}$. This can be interpreted with the $T_e$ profiles being weakly resilient at $\rho_t = 0.25$. At $\rho_{an} = 0.45$, $\chi_e^{HP}$ and $\chi_e^{HP}$ increase significantly for small variations of $R/L_{Te}$ just above $R/L_{Te} \sim 6$. Hence, the $T_e$ profiles exhibit a strong resilient behaviour, and a threshold is estimated at $(R/L_{Te})_{crit} \sim 6$. This interpretation is supported by figures 2 (c,d). Figure 2 (c) shows the dependence of $q_e$ on $n_e \cdot \nabla T_e$, the ratio of which, by definition, yields the power balance heat diffusivity. The slope of the curve $q_e$ versus $n_e \cdot \nabla T_e$ at each point is $\chi_e^{HP}$, which is calculated from the HP analysis and is represented by segments at each full symbol. The points for the analyses carried out at $\rho_t = 0.25$ and $\rho_t = 0.45$ are clearly separated, indicating a different resilient behaviour between these two locations. Assuming for the heat transport the model introduced in

![Figure 1](image-url)
Figure 2: Heat diffusivity dependence on $R/L_{T_e}$ at (a) $\rho_t^{en} = 0.25$ and (b) $\rho_t^{en} = 0.45$. Dependence of the electron heat flux on (c) $n_e \cdot \nabla T_e$ (segments on the points represent the $\chi_{e}^{BP}$) and on (d) the $R/L_{T_e}$ for all analysed discharges.

the beginning, it is logical to plot $q_e$ versus $R/L_{T_e}$, as shown in figure 2 (d). Here, the points at $\rho_t = 0.25$ and $\rho_t = 0.45$ are clearly unified and the existence of a threshold in the electron heat transport properties around $(R/L_{T_e})_c = 6$ is strongly suggested.

**Interpretation and comparison with other experiments**

As already mentioned, the most probable candidates believed to cause the turbulent transport are the coupled TEM/ITG and, perhaps, in addition the ETG driven turbulence. These instabilities have the common property of developing above respective thresholds in $R/L_T$. When strong heat fluxes are transported in both the electron and ion channels, like in the here considered plasmas, turbulence involving both ITG and TEM is most likely to be responsible for the heat losses. We have verified that in this experimental domain, the value $R/L_{T_e} = 6$ does not correspond to an effective threshold for the TEM instability. This indicates that such value should rather correspond to the boundary between an instability domain in which the heat transport is weakly determined by $R/L_{T_e}$ (at $\rho_t = 0.25$, $R/L_{T_e} < 6$, low heat flux) and a domain in which $R/L_{T_e}$ is a drive for the instability (at $\rho_t = 0.45$, $R/L_{T_e} > 6$, high heat flux). Moreover, in the core region of the plasma $R/L_{T_i} \geq R/L_{T_e}$, while for $\rho_t \geq 0.5$ the ratio is the opposite, with $R/L_{T_e} \geq R/L_{T_i}$. This could in principle lead to a transition in the dominant modes governing the transport in the core (inside ECH deposition) and in the outer regions (outside ECH deposition). Further investigation and experiments are needed in order to verify this possibility. Another difficulty is added by possible ETG modes being active: the profiles are in fact very close to the ETG threshold calculated according to [14].

Figure 3 (a) and (b) show the comparison of the $R/L_{T_e}$ dependence of $q_e$ and $\chi_e^{BP,HP}/T_{e}^{3/2}$...
between the pure electron-heated L-mode plasmas (here called ”eL-modes”) presented in [8] and the NBI-heated H-modes (“iH-modes”) presented in this work. In figure 3 (a) the resilience behaviour of the electrons is given by the slope of the line connecting the points. For a similar variation of $q_e$ ($\sim +50\text{ kW/m}^2$), the corresponding variation of $R/L_T$ is different: in the eL-modes it is varied by a factor of 2, while in the iH-modes it is increased by not more than 20%. Consequently, it results that the iH-modes are apparently 4 times more resilient than the eL-modes. In figure 3 (b) the data is fitted using the critical gradient length model previously introduced. The model is used to fit the experimental profiles of $T_e$, amplitude and phase of the modulation using ASTRA. As a result, the dimensionless stiffness factor $\chi_s$ [2], corresponding to the slope of the curve above $\kappa_c$, is determined and used for comparisons. The computation of $\chi_s$ for the eL-modes and iH-modes in ASDEX Upgrade results in comparable values, with $\chi_s = 0.1 – 0.25$. The reason for this apparent contradiction lays in the $T_e^{3/2}$ dependence of transport driven by micro-turbulence. The temperature in the iH-modes is 2.5 times larger than in the eL-modes, resulting in a factor of 4 due to the $T_e^{3/2}$ term, which therefore explains the apparent inconsistency.

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References