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INFLUENCE OF FRICTION WELDING PARAMETERS ON HARDNESS, MICROSTRUCTURE AND MECHANICAL PROPERTIES OF THE Al-Cu JOINT

Nada Ratković¹, Dušan Arsić^{1*}, Vukić Lazić¹, Ružica Nikolić^{1,2}, Aleksandar Sedmak³

¹ Faculty of Engineering, University of Kragujevac, Sestre Janjić 6, 34000 Kragujevac, Serbia.

² Research Center, University of Žilina, Univerzitna 8215/1, 010 26 Žilina, Slovakia

³ Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, University of Belgrade, Kraljice Marije 16, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia.

Corresponding author e-mail: dusan.arsic@fink.rs

Abstract

In this paper a theoretical-experimental analysis of the aluminum-copper joining by friction welding is presented. Considering that such Al-Cu bimetal joints are widely applied in industrial practice, experimental analysis in this paper was performed on the concrete elements used in electronics. The fact that the joining is done of the two dissimilar materials points to complexity of the problem, since phenomena that appear in the joint zone extremely influence physical, mechanical and structural properties of the welded/base metals. Besides the theoretical analysis of the basic phases and mechanisms of the friction welding process, the research also included experimental analysis of the geometry changes due to the plastic deformation, the change of structure and hardness in the joint zone, as well of the basic mechanical properties of the Al-Cu joint. This paper presents some significant results, which point to the possibility for realization of the reliable joints of the two dissimilar metals.

Keywords: Friction welding, Aluminum, Copper, bimetal joint, mechanical properties, microstructure.

1. Introduction

Certain physical properties of copper and aluminum, like the high electric and thermal conductivity, enable their common application in electronics, thermo-technique and other areas, in the form of bimetals. The necessity for their joining is indispensable in joining copper and aluminum electric conductors or the cable endings. Studying and improvement of advanced welding technologies of various metals and their alloys, mainly Al, Ti, Mg and different types of steels, are at present in focus of the modern research. The friction by welding plays a significant role in those researches, whether it is rotational continuous friction welding (when the cylindrical elements are welded) or the FSW (when the welded elements are plates or thin sheets). Friction welding of various materials was the subject of these authors previous research [1-3], as well as of certain other authors [4-10]. In those articles, it was shown that successful joining by friction welding could be done for different classes of steel [1-4], steels and other metals [5] or the light metals

[6-9]. It was proven that thus realized joint could withstand successfully both static and dynamic loads in exploitation.

In this paper the procedure of continuous friction welding of parts made of aluminum and copper is presented. The purpose was to determine the influence of the basic welding parameters (friction time, friction pressure and compacting pressure) on the mechanical and micro-structural characteristics of the weld, since the bimetal joint characteristics depend on them.

2. Basic characteristics, phases and parameters of the friction welding process

Friction welding was first applied for joining parts of various types of steel, while welding of light metals started later. The friction welding is a procedure of the compression welding, when the joint is realized by plastic deformation of by friction of the heated contact surfaces. The released heat is supposed to soften and to plasticize the near-the-contact layers of materials, but the melting temperature of the easier melting material must not be exceeded. In the considered case that is aluminum, which means that the joint weld should be formed at temperature little below than 600 °C. The quantity of the released heat depends on the nature of the base metals, thermo-mechanical properties and the friction coefficient.

The friction welding process is very complex. When observing on the micro level, the mechanism of the joint realization is based on forming the metal bond (solid solution) between the base metals, all due to the diffusion process. That bond is created when the metal clean surfaces are coming close at distances that are of the order of magnitude of the crystal lattice parameters. At the beginning of welding, the contact of the welded parts is being realized only at the roughness tips while the increase of the contact area is achieved by the plastic deformation of the surfaces in contact. Compacting is done until the boundary surfaces are brought close to each other to a distance that is of the crystal parameters size, what enables forming of the common crystal lattices. The technological process of the friction welding is done in three phases, as presented in Figure 1.

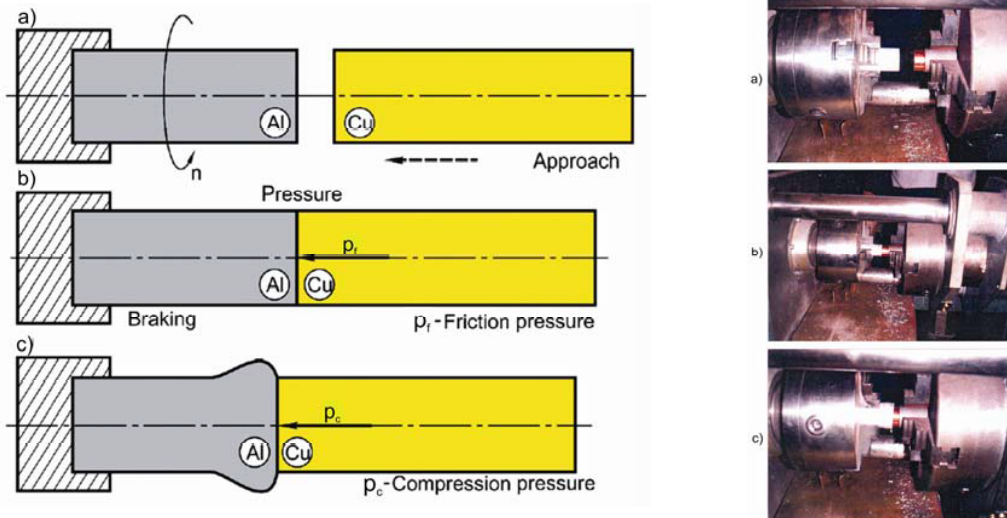


Figure 1. Phases of the technological process of the friction welding [6]

Quality of the joint is determined by the three basic variables, which influence mechanical and micro-structural properties of the welded joint. Those are the relative speed (number of rpms), pressure and time.

The friction speed influences, to the great extent, the character, shape and magnitude of the realized plastic deformation, as well as the heat generating process. It has been proven that within the range of the small angular velocities the plastic deformation process is being realized at larger depth. Unlike that, either at large values of speed, the complete welding cannot be realized, or the joints are of the poor quality.

The pressure during the friction phase has a strong influence on the thermo-deformation phenomena. There are two different pressures – the friction pressure (p_f) and the compression pressure (p_c). The friction pressure action during the heating causes intensive deformation of material, heat release and temperature increase. The friction welding cycle could be realized by different variations of pressure vs. time, while as the optimal is considered the step-wise variation cycle [6].

The time depends on other factors that are influential in the welding process, like base metal properties, friction speed and pressure, shape and sizes of the welded parts. The friction time is the time needed for the contact surfaces to heat up to the maximum temperature.

Technological parameters of the friction welding were adopted based on experience, literature recommendations and large number of trials. The proper selection of parameters affects the output characteristics of the joint, so accordingly, it is necessary to select the optimal parameters. The adopted parameters were:

- number of rpms $n = 2500$ rpm,
- welding time $t = 4 - 15$ s,
- friction pressure $p_f = 50$ MPa,

- compression pressure $p_c = 150$ MPa.

Estimate of the selected parameters optimality is done experimentally by the tensile test, hardness measurement and analysis of the joint's micro structure.

3. Base metals, structures and metallurgical changes in the mixing zone of the Al-Cu joint

Base metals. Two used base metals, copper and aluminum belong into a group of the colored metals and are characterized by the excellent thermal and electrical conductivity, corrosion resistance, high plasticity, etc. Their mechanical and physical properties are given in Table 1. In this experiment, samples for friction welding were prepared from technically pure Al99.5 and electrotechnically pure Cu99.95.

Structural and metallurgical changes in the mixing zone of the Al-Cu joint. The essence of micro structural and phase processes of the two-component system aluminum-copper for the friction welding could be explained with help of the equilibrium binary phase diagram Al-Cu, Figure 2

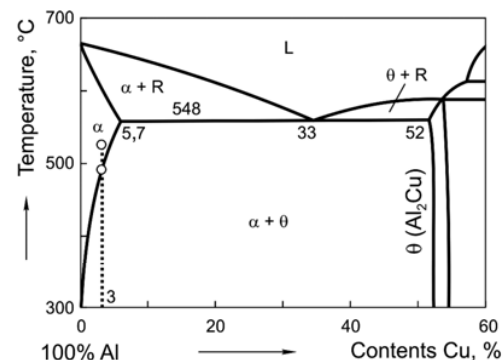


Figure 2. Equilibrium phase diagram Al-Cu [6, 11]

Table 1. Physical and mechanical properties of aluminum and copper

Property	Al	Cu
Melting point, °C	660.4	1083
Thermal conductivity, W/mK	222	395
Density, g/cm ³	2.699	8.96
Coefficient of linear expansion, 1/°C	23.9	16.5
Tensile strength, MPa	50 ÷ 80	150
Hardness, HB	15 ÷ 20	25
Elasticity modulus, MPa	71000	127000
Elongation, %	30 ÷ 45	52
Plasticity	good	good

Samples were made in form of cylinders with sizes presented in Figure 2.

4. Experimental investigations

Quality and properties of the realized joints were determined experimentally by the tensile test, hardness measurement and analysis of the micro structure of the joint's characteristic zones.

Tensile test. For this test, the cylindrical samples were prepared made of the welded Al-Cu joints (Figure 4(a)).

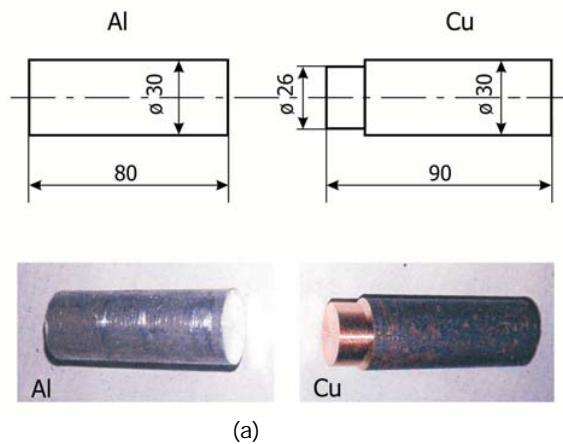


Figure 2. Technical drawing and physical appearance of samples (a) and welded Al-Cu samples (b)

Samples were obtained in different conditions – the duration of the welding process was varied what directly influences the tensile properties of the joint.

On samples welded by friction, the breaking occurred mainly on the aluminum part, Figure 4(b) or in the zone of the Al-Cu joining, what is a very important indicator of the adequate selection of the friction welding parameters.

Results of tensile tests of the base metals and heterogeneous welded joints are shown in Table 2 as a function of the friction time.

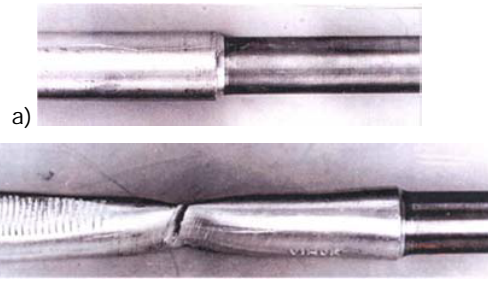


Figure 4. Sample for tensile test (a) and high-quality welded joint after test – fracture in base metal (b)

Table 2. Tensile strength of base metal samples and friction welded joints' samples

Time, s	Al/Cu	4	6	7	8	9	10	12
R _m , MPa	75/220	61	69	72	85	83	81	75
Breaking spot	BM	joint	joint	Al	Al	Al	joint	Al

Based on results presented in Table 2 one can conclude that the shorter welding time results in obtaining the joint with the properties that are worse than those of the base metals. This is why the recommendation is that the welding should last longer (> 7 s), for the welded joint to obtain better mechanical properties (higher strength).

Measurement of hardness and micro structure analysis. Hardness measurement was performed to determine the homogeneity of the welded joint, namely the presence of the undesired brittle phases (θ -CuAl₂ and δ -Cu₉Al₄). Hardness was measured along the three direction and at 5 points along the

sample axis, Figure 5(a). The measurement points are distributed like this: direction I coincides with the welded sample's axis, direction II is at a distance of 3 mm from the axis and direction III is 8 mm away from the axis. Measurement points are at the distance of 1 mm. Obtained results for four tested samples are shown in Table 3, while the distribution hardness for sample # 1 is shown in Figure 6, with micro structures of the joint's characteristic zones.

In majority of samples, hardness was pretty uniform and evenly distributed. As expected, the highest increase of hardness was recorded in the zone of melting/diffusion, where, besides the achieved

high temperature, the Al melting occurred what created conditions for intensive diffusion of Cu and appearance of the intermetallic phases of high hardness. That was confirmed also in [7]. The θ (CuAl_2) phase has the body centered cubic (BCC) lattice. By increasing of the Cu content in the alloy, it crosses into the θ -phase area, where the θ -phase transforms into the body centered tetragonal (BCT) lattice. Micro hardness of such a θ -phase is 450 to 650 HB.

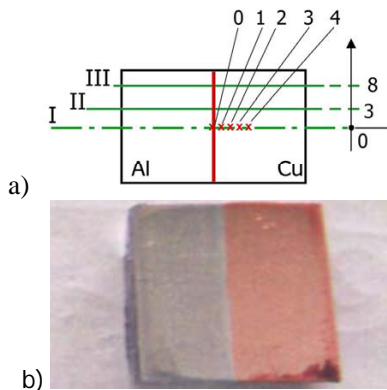


Figure 5. Sample for hardness measurement: (a) Schematic of the measurements points and (b) physical appearance.

Concerning the microstructure, it could be said that it depends largely on the welding parameters, since during the friction welding of copper and aluminum occurs creating and breaking of micro joints, as well as surfacing of copper layer on the aluminum front surface in the initial phase. That causes the friction plane to move away from the joining plane, while the micro structural processes occur within the mixing zone (Figure 6, position 3).

From analysis of micro structure of joints, it was established that the diffusion zone width was in range 2-10 μm , while the grain size was 0.1-0.2 μm .

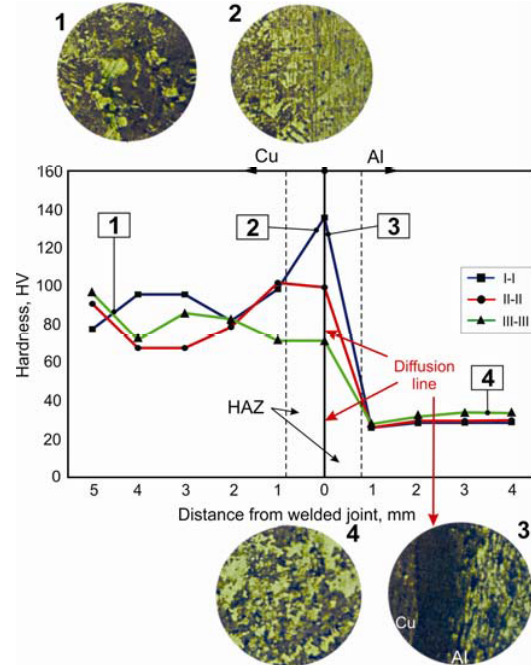


Figure 6. Hardness distribution along the axis for sample 1 with microstructures of the joint's zones.

The welding time influence on the plastic deformation and the samples' lengths. Investigation of the welding time influence was done at the end, since due to friction, the samples are shortened and the part of material is lost into the so-called "mushroom". During the welding of Al and Cu, a very intense plastic deformation of the coupled parts occurs both in the radial and axial direction, of both materials, especially aluminum, as the weaker and softer one. By monitoring the dimensions' changes with time, the relationship was established between the process duration and the samples' deformation, Figure 7.

Table 3. Results of hardness measurement for four samples: #1 for 6 s; #2 for 7 s; #3 for 8 s; #4 for 9 s.

Sample No. Direction	Sample 1*			Sample 2			Sample 3			Sample 4		
	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III
BM Cu	78	91	97	97	106	92	97	103	97	111	110	106
	96	68	72	96	96	95	103	110	97	110	100	110
	96	68	86	95	105	93	110	99	95	99	103	111
	82	79	84	95	93	92	119	102	99	103	99	106
		75										
HAZ	99	102	72	44	77	72	59	70	57	40	39	102
	136	100	72	45	78	74	60	70	57	38	39	101
BM Al	27	27	29	32	30	33	34	32	33	34	40	31
	29	30	32	30	30	33	31	31	32	35	32	32
	29	30	35	30	33	32	30	30	32	32	32	32
	29	30	34	30	32	32	30	30	32	35	32	32

*Hardness distribution and micro structures in Figure 6.

Measurements results show that length reduction of the aluminum part is much bigger than that of the copper one. The difference, depending on the welding parameters, could reach even 10:1 ratio.

Deformation in the radial direction is much harder to measure since the "mushroom" is formed on the front side of the aluminum element. During the welding process the softened aluminum layers are being extruded from the friction plane towards the periphery so the big "mushroom" is formed,

which is partially transferred to the frontal part of copper, over the whole perimeter, [6]. The wreath diameter is increasing with extension of the welding time.

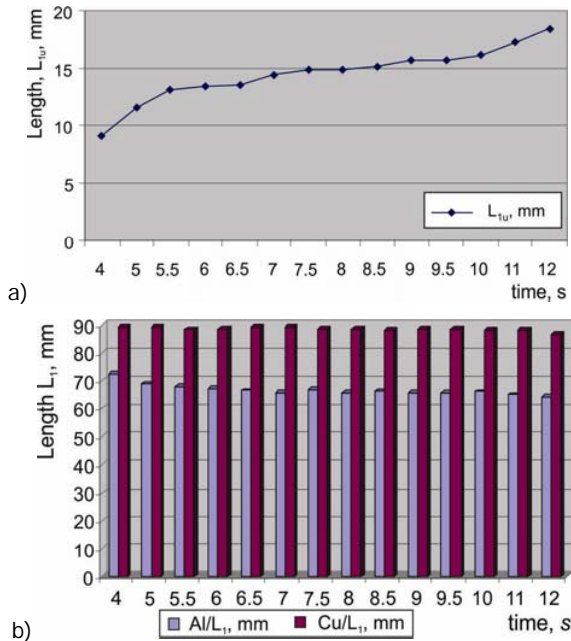


Figure 7. Total welded samples' shortening as a function of time: (a) diagram and (b) histogram.

5. Conclusion

Joining of Al and Cu can be successfully performed by the friction welding, but to obtain the welded joint, which fulfills all the required technical conditions, it is necessary to pay special attention to selection of the process parameters. Analyses of the experimental results have shown that the basic process parameters significantly influence joint's structural and mechanical characteristics. If the optimal welding conditions were applied, it is possible to achieve the joint's strength, which is at the level of the aluminum strength, which means that during the tensile test the break must occur outside the joint zone. If that was achieved, then the bimetal Al-Cu friction welded joint is considered as the high quality joint.

However, the welding time influence should also be kept in mind. With increase of the welding time the tensile strength increases, however, the shortening of the sample, especially the Al part, is much bigger. In addition, increase of hardness in the joint zone is expected, where it could reach 130 HV, as well as the grain size increase to 0.1-0.2 μm , with the diffusion zone width of 2-10 μm .

6. Acknowledgement

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