Can interplanetary magnetic field reach the Venus surface?

Yasuhito Narita[1,2] and Uwe Motschmann[3,4]

[1]Space Research Institute, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Schmiedlstr. 6, A-8042 Graz, Austria
[2]Institute of Physics, University of Graz, Universitätsplatz 5, A-8010 Graz, Austria
[3]Institut für Theoretische Physik, Technische Universität Braunschweig, Mendelssohnstr. 3, D-38106 Braunschweig, Germany
[4]Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt, Institut für Planetenforschung, Rutherfordstr. 2, D-12489 Berlin, Germany

Correspondence: Y. Narita
(yasuhito.narita@oeaw.ac.at)

Abstract. The question is addressed if there is a possibility of interplanetary magnetic field reaching the Venus surface by magnetic diffusion across the ionosphere. We present a model calculation and estimate the magnetic diffusion time at Venus, and find out that the typical diffusion time scale is in a range between 11 hours and 40 hours, depending on the solar activity and the ionospheric magnetic field condition. Magnetic field can thus permeate Venus surface and even Venus interior when
5   the solar wind is stationary (i.e., no magnetic field reversal) on the time scale of half-a-day to several days.

1 Problem of Venus surface magnetic field

Venus, being the nearest neighbor to the Earth, differs from the Earth in that the intrinsic magnetic field is absent. Nevertheless, a magnetospheric cavity is formed around Venus with a standing shock wave (bow shock) and a magnetotail as the solar wind becomes deflected by the Venus ionosphere and the interplanetary field drapes about the planet. In situ measurements by
10   Pioneer Venus Orbiter studied the Venus magnetic environment in detail such as a tail structure (Saunders and Russell, 1986) or bow shock (Russell et al., 1988).

Low-altitude profile of the Venus magnetic field was first obtained during the Pioneer Venus orbiter entry in the nightside ionosphere (Russell et al., 1993). The magnetic field becomes stronger above an altitude of about 160 km. Overall, the magnetic field is in the range between 10 nT and 50 nT. Venus Express magnetometer (Zhang et al., 2006) further studied the Venus
15   magnetic field at altitudes of as low as 130 km over the Venus north pole during the aero-braking campaign. The average field is about 45 nT from an altitude of 300 km down to 180 km (Zhang et al., 2015) with a peak of about 90 nT at 200 km. The field magnitude becomes diminished from 12 nT at an altitude of 150 km to 7 nT at an altitude of 130 km (Zhang et al., 2016).

We address the question if the magnetic field of interplanetary origin can ever reach the Venus surface. Hybrid code simulations suggest a penetration of the atmosphere by the interplanetary magnetic field in less than an hour (Martinecz et al.,
20   2009). As the grid resolution is not very high, the numerical diffusion superimposes the physical diffusion. Thus the simulated penetration time may not be taken as a proof, and improvements of the model are appropriate. To answer the question on the magnetic field at the Venus surface, we estimate the magnetic diffusion time in the Venus atmosphere. Two competing scenarios are possible. In scenario 1, naively speaking, the magnetic field can reach the planetary surface and even penetrate

the planetary body, which is achieved when the Venus atmosphere is sufficiently diffusive and the interplanetary magnetic field surrounding Venus is stationary for a longer period of time. In scenario 2, on the other hand, the magnetic diffusion process at low altitudes becomes reset when the external field (in the induced magnetic field) reverses its orientation.

The problem of the surface magnetic field at Venus is formulated as a competition between the diffusion time (such that the field reaches the surface on a detectable level) and the reset time (such that the field diffusion process is reset by the change in the interplanetary magnetic field). The interplanetary magnetic field has a four-sector structure in the solar ecliptic plane in the solar minimum phase. Therefore, the longest time length for a stable interplanetary magnetic field (without the field reversion due to the sector boundary crossing) is about 6 to 7 days. Here we report our study that the magnetic diffusion time in the Venus atmosphere is of the order of 40,000 to 146,000 s, that is, in the range between 11 hours and 40 hours. It is thus likely that the interplanetary magnetic field reaches the Venus surface and further into the Venus interior by permeability for a long time period of stationary solar wind. Our conclusion will be tested against the upcoming magnetic field measurements of the low-altitude region (down to 90 km) by the BepiColombo flyby at Venus.

2 Diffusion time estimate

2.1 Order of magnitude

We first estimate the diffusion time in an order-of-magnitude fashion. Magnetic diffusion time τ_d is defined as

$$\tau_\mathrm{d} = L^2 \mu_0 \sigma, \tag{1}$$

where L the characteristic length scale, $\mu_0 = 4\pi \times 10^{-7}$ H m^{-1} the permeability of free space, and σ the electric conductivity. The Pedersen conductivity is relevant to the diffusion problem here. We take the length scale (or thickness in altitude) $L = 100$ km for the conducting atmospheric layer and the Pedersen conductivity of about $\sigma = 1$ S m^{-1} (justified in section 2.2). We obtain the diffusion time of the order of 10,000 s (more strictly, 12,566 s when using the nominal values above). The magnetic field can thus penetrate the Venus ionosphere within about 200 minutes (or about 3.5 hours). As we see below, the conductivity can be even higher by one order of magnitude, and the diffusion time scales up to 100,000 s.

2.2 More quantitative estimate

In reality, the conductivity depends on the altitude, the ionospheric condition, and the solar activity. We estimate the diffusion time more quantitatively by numerically integrating the differential diffusion time (or diffusion speed) $L\mu_0\sigma$ over the altitudes in the following way:

$$\tau_\mathrm{d} = \int_{z_\mathrm{min}}^{z_\mathrm{max}} 2z\mu_0\sigma \,\mathrm{d}z \tag{2}$$

$$= L^2 \mu_0 \langle\sigma\rangle, \tag{3}$$

where z is the altitude from the surface, $z_{\min}$ and $z_{\max}$ the lower and upper limits of the height integration, $L = z_{\max} - z_{\min}$ the thickness of the diffusion layer, and $\langle \sigma \rangle$ the average conductivity The factor 2 in the integration comes from the fact that the integration yields $z^2 \mu_0 \langle \sigma \rangle$ if the diffusivity is constant over the altitude change.

The task is to evaluate the electric conductivity as a function of the altitude. Since the Pedersen conductivity transmits the magnetic field by diffusion, the electron density, the collision frequency, and the magnetic field profiles are needed to calculate the conductivity before performing the height integration. The procedure of the diffusion time estimate is summarized as follows.

1. Electron density profile.

   Altitude-dependent electron number density data are obtained by the Pioneer Venus Orbiter radio occultation measurements. We take values from Figure 2 in Kilore and Luhmann (1991) at higher solar zenith angles (above 55 degree), under the condition of solar maximum and that of solar minimum. The profile of the electron density is displayed in the first panel of Fig. 1.

2. Collision frequency profile.

   The profile of the collision frequency is taken from the recent calculation by Dubinin et al. (2014) (Figure 16 in the article) which is based on theoretical velocity-moment estimates (Schunk and Nagy, 2000) using the temperature and neutral density profiles from Fox and Sung (2001). We consider the electron-neutral collisions in the present work, since the ion-neutral collisions play only a minor role in carrying the current (discussed in item 4, the Pedersen conductivity estimate). The collision frequency is displayed as a function of the altitude in the second panel of Fig. 1.

3. Magnetic field profile.

   Magnetic field data from the Venus Express are used as a reference from 300 km to 180 km (Villarreal et al., 2015) and further down to 130 km (Zhang et al., 2016). The former data set is from a single event, but is illustrative in the model construction in that the transition is smooth with a magnetic pileup and an asymptotic behavior at higher altitudes (solid curve in black above an altitude of 170 km in the third panel of Fig. 1). The latter data set is from 33 peri-apsis passages, and we take the median values (solid curve in black below 150 km in the same panel). We use the secant function $\text{sech}(x) = 2/(\exp(x) + \exp(-x))$ to construct a magnetic field model. The secant function is used separately below the magnetic pileup peak (set to $z_0 = 200$ km altitude) and above the peak in the form of $B = B_1 \text{sech}((z - z_0)/d) + B_0$. We use the secant function as an empirical model because the secant function is known to describe solitary structures such as the KdV soliton (Korteweg-de Vries) or the density profile of the Harris current sheet. We obtain from the fitting procedure the following coefficients: (1) $B_0 = 40.0$ nT (offset value), $B_1 = 50.0$ nT (height of the secant bell shape), and $d = 7.0$ km (width of the bell shape) for $z_0 \geq 200$ km, and (2) $B_0 = 6.5$ nT, $B_1 = 83.5$ nT, and $d = 12.0$ km for $z_0 \leq 200$ km. The uncertainty of the magnetic field model is referred from the statistical fluctuations shown in Zhang et al. (2016), and is approximated to a factor of 0.5 for the lower limit and a factor of 1.5 for the upper limit. Graphics of the magnetic field model are displayed in the third panel of Fig. 1.

Table 1. Results from the diffusion time estimate. The symbol τ_{d} stands for the diffusion time.

magnetic field model	τ_{d} at solar maximum	τ_{d} at solar minimum
mean field case	$86,265$ s	$50,008$ s
strong field case	$69,960$ s	$40,955$ s
weak field case	$146,666$ s	$82,821$ s

4. Pedersen conductivity.

We take the Pedersen conductivity (Vasyliunas, 2012; Dubinin et al., 2014), and approximate to the conductivity carried by the electrons,

$$\sigma_{\mathrm{p}} = n_{\mathrm{e}}e^2 \left(\frac{\nu_{\mathrm{in}}}{m_{\mathrm{i}}(\nu_{\mathrm{in}}^2 + f_{\mathrm{gi}}^2)} + \frac{\nu_{\mathrm{en}}}{m_{\mathrm{e}}(\nu_{\mathrm{en}}^2 + f_{\mathrm{ge}}^2)} \right) \tag{4}$$

$$\simeq \frac{n_{\mathrm{e}}e^2 \nu_{\mathrm{en}}}{m_{\mathrm{e}}(\nu_{\mathrm{en}}^2 + f_{\mathrm{ge}}^2)}, \tag{5}$$

where n_{e} is the electron number density, e the elementary charge, m_{i} and m_{e} the mass of ions (assuming protons) and electrons, respectively, f_{gi} and f_{ge} the gyrofrequency of ions and electrons (in units of s^{-1}, not the angular frequency in units of $\mathrm{rad\,s}^{-1}$), ν_{in} the collision frequency between ions and neutrals, and ν_{en} the collision frequency between electrons and neutrals. The ion term in the Pedersen conductivity (Eq. 4) is neglected in our calculation because the ion-neutral collision frequency is smaller than the electron-neutral collision frequency by one order of magnitude, and moreover, the dominant ion species is not protons but heavier species such as oxygen atoms O^+ or molecules O_2^+ (Fox and Sung, 2001). The ion term is thus smaller than the electron term by about two or three orders of magnitude. The Pedersen conductivity is displayed as a function of the altitude in the fourth panel of Fig. 1 in the mean magnetic field case. The peak conductivity is in the range between $1\ \mathrm{S\,m}^{-1}$ and $10\ \mathrm{S\,m}^{-1}$.

5. Integration.

Height integration is performed to evaluate the diffusion time τ_{d} using Eq. (2) and the five-point Newton-Cotes integration formula. We resample values of the electron density, the collision frequency, and the model magnetic field for the numerical integration at a spatial resolution of 1 km, and extrapolate the values in a linear fashion on the logarithmic scale at altitudes down to 100 km and up to 400 km.

2.3 Results of diffusion time estimate

Diffusion time varies in the range from about 40,000 s (11 hours) to about 146,000 s (40 hours). Solar activity and the local magnetic field in the ionosphere influence the diffusion time. A minimum of 11 hours (about half-a-day) for the diffusion time is needed for the magnetic field to penetrate the Venus ionosphere and atmosphere. If the electron density is higher or the local magnetic field weaker, the diffusion time can scale up to 40 hours (about 2 days). Therefore, Venus surface may exhibit
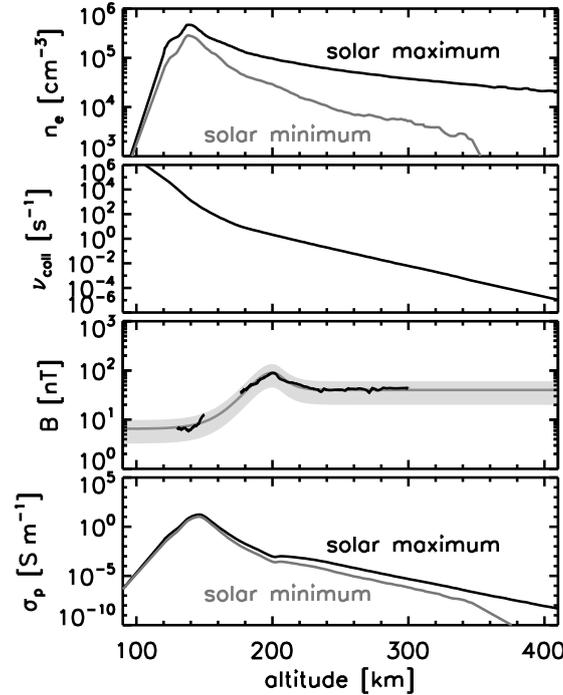
Figure 1. Electron number density n_e from Pioneer Venus Orbiter radio occultation measurement after Kilore and Luhmann (1991), model collision frequency between electrons and neutral particles ν_coll after Dubinin et al. (2014), magnetic field B after Venus Express measurements in black after Villarreal et al. (2015); Zhang et al. (2016) and model magnetic field with a fluctuation range (in gray), and Pedersen conductivity σ_P as a function of altitude from the Venus surface.

non-zero magnetic field when the solar wind is stationary (in the sense that the interplanetary magnetic field does not show a reversal) on the time scale of half-a-day to several days.

3 Lessons and outlook

We conclude the diffusion time estimate with the following notes. First, a stationary solar wind condition on a time scale of
5 half-a-day to several days is likely occurring in the Venus environment. The interplanetary magnetic field can theoretically reach (under the condition of stationary solar wind) the Venus surface and justifies the non-zero field measurements by Venus Express. Second, further improvement is possible by including the ion-neutral collisions and the solar activity influence on the collision frequency. Third, the BepiColombo mission plans two flyby maneuvers at Venus on its cruise to Mercury. In particular, the spacecraft will reach a low altitude down to 90 km during the second flyby in 2020. Our diffusion time estimate
10 can be tested against the flyby magnetic field measurements in interplanetary space around Venus and the low-altitude region.

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