



# Natural convection over a non-isothermal vertical plate

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## Abstract

In many applications, convective heat transfer is coupled with conductive and radiative heat transfer which generate temperature gradients along the walls and may greatly affect natural convective heat transfer. In this paper, the influence of the non-uniformity of wall temperature on the heat transfer by natural convection along a vertical plate having a linearly distributed temperature (characterized by the slope  $S$ ) is pointed out. Heat transfer correlations giving Nusselt number vs Rayleigh number and  $S$  for both laminar and turbulent flows are obtained. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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## 1. Introduction

In many processes, natural convective heat transfer along walls is coupled with conductive and radiative heat transfer. This is typically the case in radiant heating of enclosures. Radiant heating generates temperature gradients along the walls; the resulting natural convection heat transfer may be greatly affected by these heterogeneous wall temperatures. By the way, classical correlations of natural convection along an isothermal vertical wall cannot be used without a lack of precision.

Since Schmidt and Beckmann experiments in 1930 [1], the study of natural convection along a vertical flat plate has been greatly investigated due to its extensive applications in engineering like electronic cooling equipment, building application or crystal growth processes. Different boundary conditions have been studied, works on the subject have mostly dealt with

constant wall temperature or uniform heat flux, the case of an isothermal wall immersed in a stratified medium has received great attention too. Gebhart et al. [2] made a complete synthesis of these studies, but concerning natural convective heat transfer along a non-isothermal wall immersed in an isothermal medium, literature is rather poor.

When the environment is isothermal and stagnant, a coordinate transformation allows to simplify the steady laminar boundary-layer equations from partial differential equations to ordinary differential equations. Sparrow and Gregg [3] gave a solution of this system in the case of exponential and power law temperature distributions. They showed the influence of the wall temperature distribution on heat transfer but they did not find a simple relation to express it. Afterwards, Yang et al. [4] found a new similarity solution of the boundary-layer equations for more complicated wall temperature distributions. Their conclusions were similar to those of Sparrow and Gregg: heat transfer is greatly affected by the wall temperature distribution. They showed that the local temperature difference between the wall and the medium ( $\Delta T$ ) is not sufficient to determine the local heat flux. Classical correlations

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### Nomenclature

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| $g$        | gravitational force                                 |
| $Gr$       | Grashof number ( $= g\beta\Delta T x^3/\nu^2$ )     |
| $l$        | Van Driest length                                   |
| $Nu_x$     | local Nusselt number                                |
| $\bar{Nu}$ | average Nusselt number                              |
| $Pr$       | Prandtl number                                      |
| $Pr_t$     | turbulent Prandtl number                            |
| $Ra$       | Rayleigh number ( $= g\beta\Delta T x^3 Pr/\nu^2$ ) |
| $S$        | Slope of the wall temperature linear distribution   |
| $T$        | temperature   |
| $\Delta T$ | characteristic temperature difference               |
| $u, v$     | velocity components                                 |
| $x, y$     | space coordinates                                   |

### Greek symbols

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| $\alpha$   | thermal diffusivity   |
| $\alpha_t$ | turbulent thermal diffusivity                                   |
| $\beta$    | volumetric coefficient of thermal expansion                     |
| $\Gamma$   | function of transition from the laminar to the turbulent regime |
| $\delta$   | boundary layer thickness  |
| $\rho$     | density   |
| $\nu$      | kinematic viscosity   |
| $\nu_t$    | eddy viscosity  |

### Subscripts

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| e        | external zone of the boundary layer      |
| i        | internal zone of the boundary layer      |
| iso      | isothermal configuration                 |
| $L$      | length of the wall                       |
| m        | mean                                     |
| max      | maximum                                  |
| $x$      | location                                 |
| tr       | transition                               |
| $\infty$ | location away from the wall              |
| 0        | location at the leading edge ( $x = 0$ ) |

for a uniform value of  $\Delta T$  along the wall cannot be used in such problems. Further, Semenov [5] derived the system of ordinary differential equations for all possible distributions of the wall and environment temperature leading to a similarity solution of the steady state boundary-layer equations. He chose the temperature difference at the leading edge of the wall as the characteristic temperature difference.

Similarity transformations are limited to few specific cases, so research has been investigated in order to expand available solutions to include problems with nonsimilar surface conditions. Series expansion methods were used by Yang et al. [6] in the case of exponential and sinusoidal wall temperature distribution. Kao et al. [7] developed methods of local similarity

and local non-similarity for cases with non-uniform wall temperature. Other researchers conducted investigations using various methods and techniques to handle with particular configurations [8,9]. Recent papers concerning free convection in porous media used these methods to handle with power law, exponential or sinusoidal wall temperature [10,11].

These methods cannot be applied with total confidence to problems of arbitrary wall temperature distribution. From this consideration, Lee and Yovanovitch [12] developed a new approximate method to study the boundary-layer flow over a flat plate having an arbitrary surface temperature variation. They carried out the linearization of the conservation equations by introducing an effective velocity which characterizes

the boundary-layer flow induced by the buoyant force. Their model is accurate even if it needs an empirical correlation to be closed.

Another alternative to study natural convection over a flat plate with an arbitrary temperature distribution is the use of numerical methods which are the most versatile for handling general boundary conditions [11,13]. Moreover, these numerical methods, either finite-difference, finite-volume or finite-element methods, can handle with turbulent boundary-layer flows.

The objective of the present work is to determine the influence of the non-uniformity of wall temperature on heat transfer by turbulent natural convection over a vertical flat plate with a linearly varying temperature distribution. This problem has not yet been studied in turbulent regime. The non-uniformity of wall temperature is defined by the slope of the temperature profile ( $S$ ). We developed a numerical model based on a finite-volume formulation to solve boundary-layer equations. Turbulence was taken into account via an algebraic model. A complete parametric study was carried out both in laminar and turbulent regimes and for different slopes of the wall temperature profile. This numerical approach is of great interest for two main reasons. On one hand, it gives a better understanding on convective flow and heat transfer. On the other hand, it allows to provide easy-to-use correlations  $Nu=f(Ra, S)$  in order to predict heat transfer.

## 2. Problem statement

The geometry and the coordinate system of the present problem are shown in Figs. 1 and 2, where a vertical plate is depicted with a linear temperature distribution. The plate is immersed in a quiet fluid which is assumed to be maintained at a uniform temperature. The velocity and temperature fields in two-dimensional, steady-state turbulent natural convective flow may be described by the set of usual boundary-layer equations, given as:

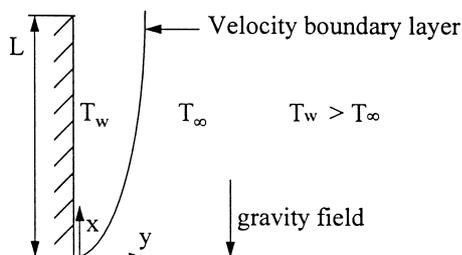


Fig. 1. Geometry and coordinate system.

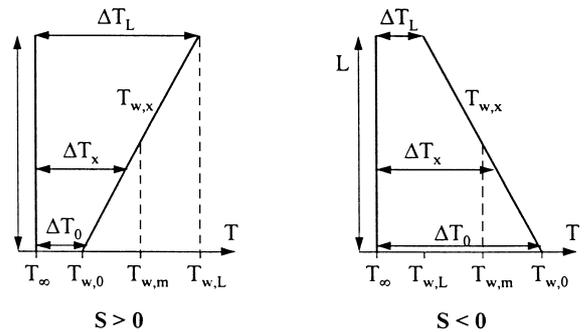


Fig. 2. Wall and ambient temperature profiles according to  $S$ .

$$\frac{\partial u}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial v}{\partial y} = 0 \tag{1}$$

$$\frac{\partial uu}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial vu}{\partial y} = \frac{\partial}{\partial y} \left( (v + v_t) \frac{\partial u}{\partial y} \right) + g\beta(T - T_\infty) \tag{2}$$

$$\frac{\partial uT}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial vT}{\partial y} = \frac{\partial}{\partial y} \left( (\alpha + \alpha_t) \frac{\partial T}{\partial y} \right) \tag{3}$$

with boundary conditions:

$$y = 0: \quad u = 0; \quad v = 0; \quad T = T_w(x)$$

$$y \rightarrow \infty: \quad u \rightarrow 0; \quad v \rightarrow 0; \quad T \rightarrow T_\infty$$

$$x = 0: \quad u = 0; \quad v = 0; \quad T = T_\infty$$

$$x = L: \quad \frac{\partial u}{\partial x} = 0; \quad \frac{\partial v}{\partial x} = 0; \quad \frac{\partial T}{\partial x} = 0.$$

## 3. Numerical procedure

The discretization of the boundary-layer equations is based on the finite-volume formulation. We used the parabolic characteristic of these equations to solve them step by step. At the station  $x$ , the flow results from downstream conditions,  $u$ -momentum and energy conservation equations are solved using the TDMA algorithm [14]. Continuity equation is then solved to obtain the transverse velocity  $v$ .

## 4. Turbulence modelling

The eddy-viscosity model is used to model the Reynolds stress and the turbulent heat flux. We used an algebraic model for the turbulent viscosity. Algebraic models were developed to describe the tur-

bulence in a forced-convection boundary-layer. The most famous are those of Cebeci-Smith [15] and Baldwin-Lomax [16]. According to Spalding and Patankar [17], those models are accurate if the variation of the mixed length with the wall distance is expressed by Van Driest’s equation. New algebraic models were developed in the past decade and were satisfactorily used for solving forced convection boundary layers [18,19]. Natural-convective boundary layer flows retained less attention. We selected the model of Cebeci-Khattab [20] which is derived from Cebeci-Smith’s one and the model of Mason-Seban [21]. A comparison of these models was made by the present authors [22]. The model of Mason-Seban was chosen for the present study. It is characterized by the contribution of the effective viscosity and the turbulent Prandtl number which are considered separately for the internal and external zones of the boundary-layer. For the internal zone

$$v_t = l_i^2 \left| \frac{\partial u}{\partial y} \right| \Gamma_{tr}$$

$$Pr_t = 0.85$$

$$l_i = 0.41y[1 - \exp(-y^+/26)]$$

and for the external zone

$$v_t = l_e^2 \left| \frac{\partial u}{\partial y} \right| \Gamma_{tr}$$

$$Pr_t = 0.50$$

$$l_e = 0.09\delta$$

with:

$$y^+ = \frac{yu_\tau}{\nu}$$

$$u_\tau = \sqrt{\nu \left( \frac{\partial u}{\partial y} \right)_w}$$

and  $\delta$  is the distance to the wall where  $u = 0.05u_{max}$ .

The limit between the internal and the external zone is chosen such as the turbulent viscosity is continuous at this point. The function  $\Gamma_{tr}$  describes the transition from the laminar regime ( $\Gamma_{tr}=0$ ) to the turbulent state ( $\Gamma_{tr}=1$ ). Expressions of this function exist for forced-convection boundary-layers [23] but the lack of data for the transition regime for natural-convection boundary-layer led us to consider a linear variation of  $\Gamma_{tr}$  between 0 and 1 which seems to be a good approximation [24]. According to Doan-Kim-Son [25], the transition zone extends from  $Gr_x = 2 \times 10^9$  to  $Gr_x = 10^{10}$ .

**5. Model accuracy**

Using our model, we calculated the laminar natural convection boundary layer in the case of an isothermal vertical plate immersed in a stagnant isothermal med-

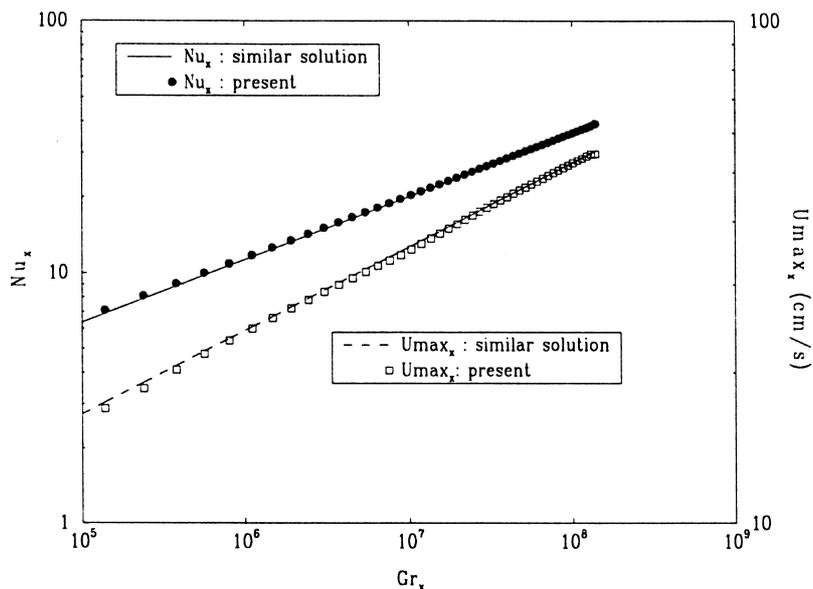


Fig. 3. Comparison of predicted Nusselt number and maximum upward velocity with similarity solutions in laminar regime.

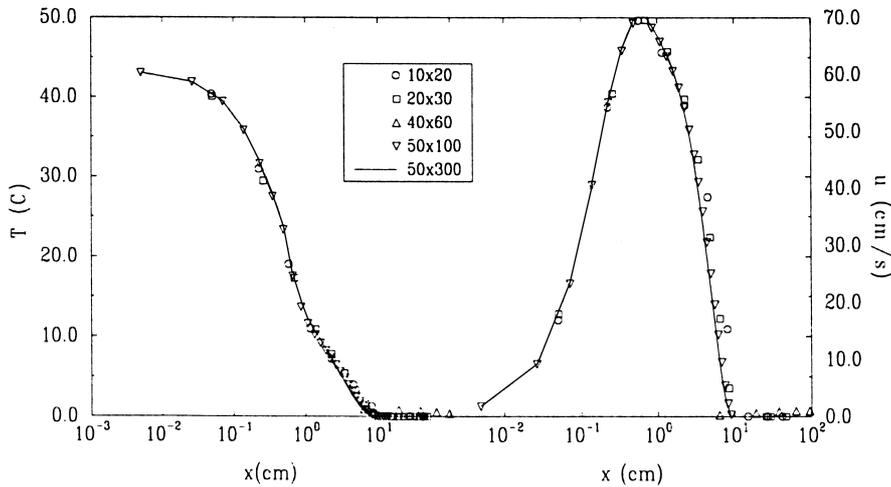


Fig. 4. Grid independence demonstration: temperature and  $u$ -velocity profiles.

ium. The comparison with similar solutions [26] is given in Fig. 3. Similar solutions are the following for  $Pr=0.72$  (case of air).

$$Nu_x = 0.357Gr_x^{0.25} \tag{4}$$

$$u_{max,x} = \frac{v\sqrt{Gr_x}}{2x} \tag{5}$$

In laminar regime, whatever the local Grashof number is, the model agrees very well with similar solutions for both heat transfer and maximal longitudinal velocity. In turbulent regime, grid dependence was first checked. Uniform grid spacing was employed in the longitudinal direction ( $x$ ) but non-uniform grid spacing was used in the transversal direction ( $y$ ) where at least one grid point was located inside the viscous sublayer. Fig. 4 shows the temperature and  $u$ -velocity profiles for five different grids at  $Gr_x=4.5 \times 10^{10}$ . Further results were obtained using a  $40 \times 60$  mesh grid.

In turbulent regime, our results were compared with the experimental data of Doan-Kim-Son [25] and Kato et al. [27] for  $Gr_x=4.5 \times 10^{10}$ . Results show that the algebraic turbulence model overestimates the maximum velocity and underestimates the heat transfer by nearly 15% (Table 1). Such results mean that the model pre-

dicts a too weak turbulent diffusion. Despite this, Figs. 5 and 6 show that the numerical profiles of velocities and temperatures are in a good agreement with the experimental measurements. Moreover, Fig. 7 shows that the slope of our numerical results (the correlation in Fig. 7) is the same as those of experimental results: so the discrepancy is not dependent on Grashof number.

### 6. Parametric study

Our main objective was to determine the influence of the non uniform wall temperature distribution on heat transfer. We focused on the case of a linearly wall temperature distribution characterized by the slope  $S$ . Both negative and positive  $S$  values were investigated

Table 1  
 $Nu_x$  and  $u$ -velocity ( $Gr_x=4.5 \times 10^{10}$ )

| Mesh $x$ - $y$   | 20–10 | 30–30 | 60–40 | Kato's experiments |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------------------|
| $Nu_x$           | 291.8 | 280.6 | 279.1 | 329.0              |
| $U_{max}$ (cm/s) | 67.59 | 67.63 | 67.50 | 59.0               |

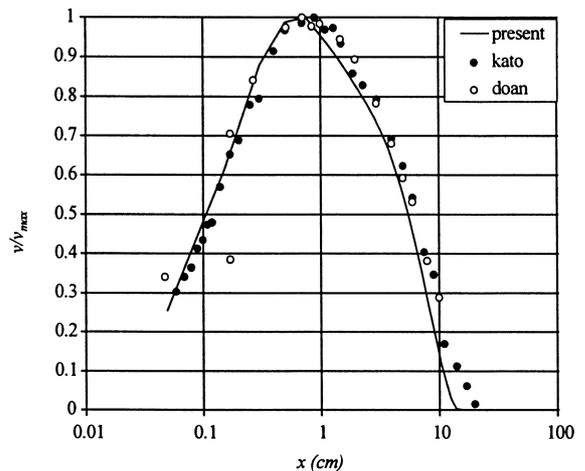


Fig. 5. Comparison of predicted  $u$ -velocity profiles with experimental results in turbulent regime ( $Gr_x=4.5 \times 10^{10}$ ,  $S=0$ ).

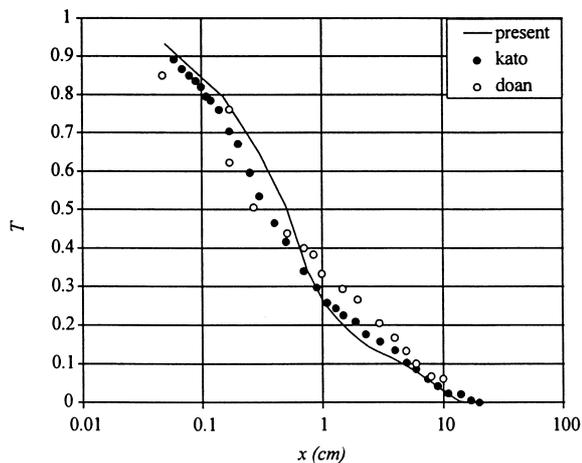


Fig. 6. Comparison of predicted temperature profiles with experimental results in turbulent regime ( $Gr_x = 4.5 \times 10^{10}$ ,  $S=0$ ).

(Fig. 2). We determined the influence of this parameter on velocity and temperature profiles as well as on the Nusselt number for a large range of Rayleigh number. Nusselt and Rayleigh numbers were based on the mean temperature difference  $\Delta T = (T_{w,m} - T_\infty)$ .

6.1. Velocity and temperature profiles

We first studied the influence of the wall temperature distribution on the  $u$ -velocity profiles (Figs. 8 and 10) and on the temperature profiles (Figs. 9 and 11) in laminar regime ( $Ra=10^6$ ) and in turbulent regime

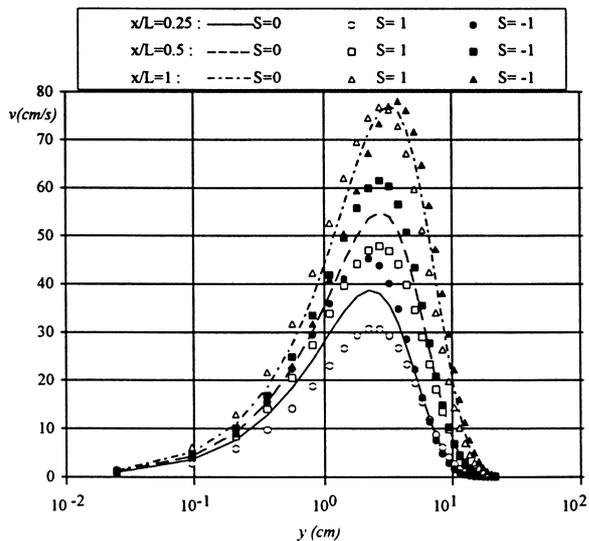


Fig. 8. Velocity profiles for different  $S$  and  $x$ -location ( $Ra=10^6$ ).

( $Ra=10^{10}$ ). For different wall temperature distributions ( $S = -1, 0, 1$ ), we focused on the influence of  $S$  at three locations (quarter, mid-height and top of the wall).

In laminar regime ( $Ra=10^6$ ), Fig. 8 presents the  $u$ -velocity profiles at these three locations ( $x/L = 0.25, x/L = 0.5$  and  $x/L = 1$ ). As expected, the higher is the location, the greater is the velocity: in the isothermal case ( $S=0$ ), the maximum value of the  $u$ -velocity is respectively about 38, 54 and 77  $cm\ s^{-1}$ . The influence of

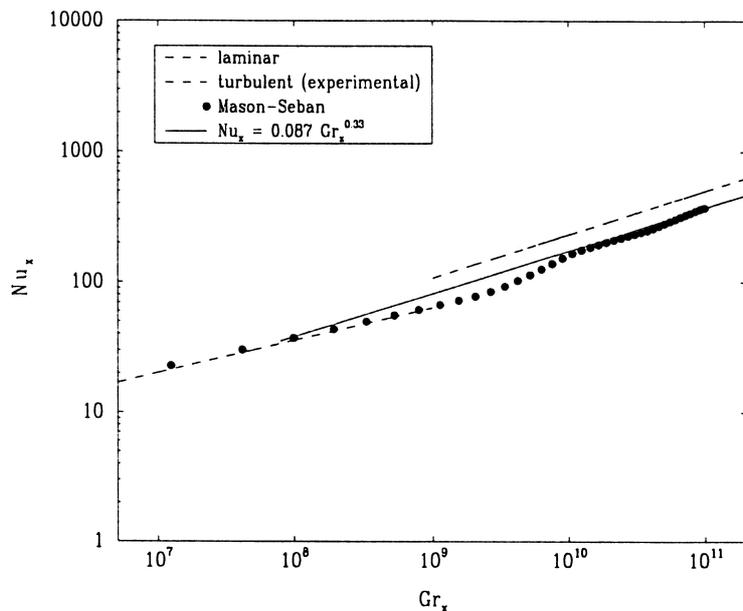


Fig. 7. Comparison of predicted Nusselt number with experimental results in turbulent regime ( $S=0$ ).

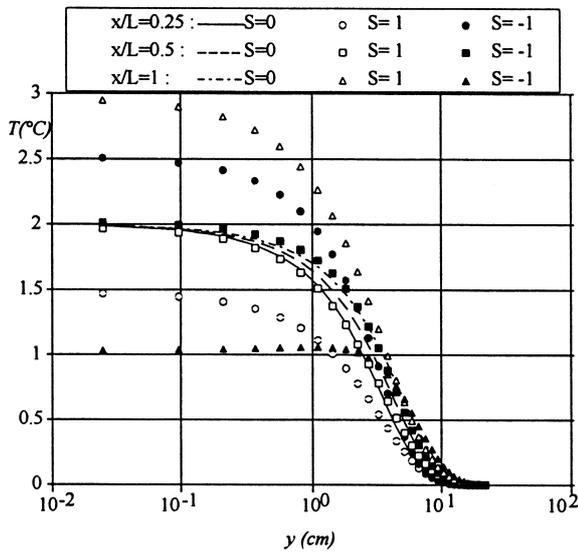


Fig. 9. Temperature profiles for different  $S$  and  $x$ -location ( $Ra=10^6$ ).

the wall temperature distribution can be observed: in the lower part of the wall ( $x/L=0.25$ ), the  $u$ -velocity is greater for a negative value of  $S$  than for the isothermal configuration ( $S=0$ ); it is lower for a positive value of  $S$ . Fig. 9 presents the corresponding temperature profiles. In the lower part of the wall ( $x/L=0.25$ ), the wall temperature is greater for a negative value of  $S$  than for the isothermal configuration ( $S=0$ ); it is lower for a positive value of  $S$ . The largest temperature difference ( $T_{w,x}-T_\infty$ ) is obtained in the case of  $S=-1$ ,

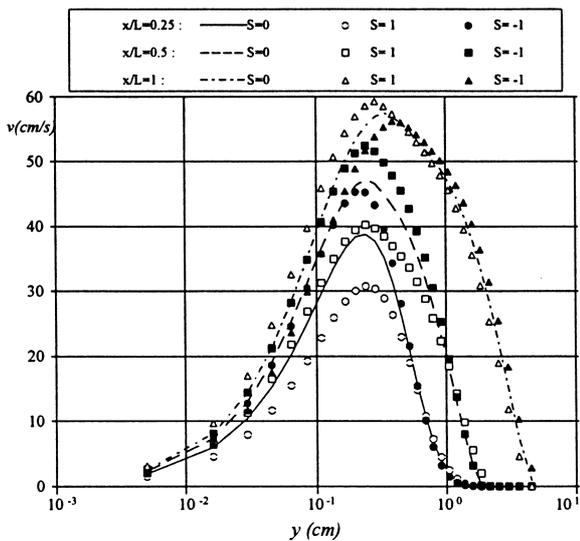


Fig. 10. Velocity profiles for different  $S$  and  $x$ -location ( $Ra=10^{10}$ ).

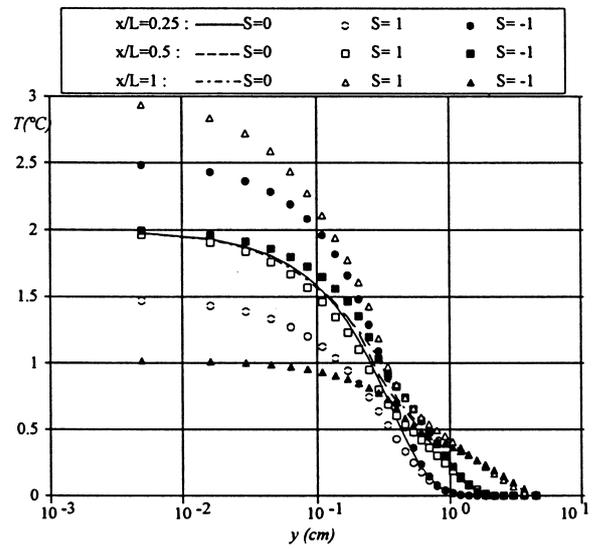


Fig. 11. Temperature profiles for different  $S$  and  $x$ -location ( $Ra=10^{10}$ ).

and consequently, the buoyancy force is more important in this case than in the cases  $S=0$  and  $S=1$ . The previous remarks on the  $u$ -velocity profiles confirm this result, velocities are the lowest for  $S=1$  and the greatest for  $S=-1$ .

At mid-height ( $x/L=0.5$ ), the temperature profiles are not dependent on  $S$ , but  $u$ -velocity profiles depend on the wall temperature slope. Velocities are larger for negative than for positive values of  $S$ . This result is due to the fact that the  $u$ -velocity at a location  $x$  depends on the cumulative effects of the buoyancy force from the leading edge of the wall to this location.

At the top of the wall ( $x/L=1$ ), the  $u$ -velocity pro-

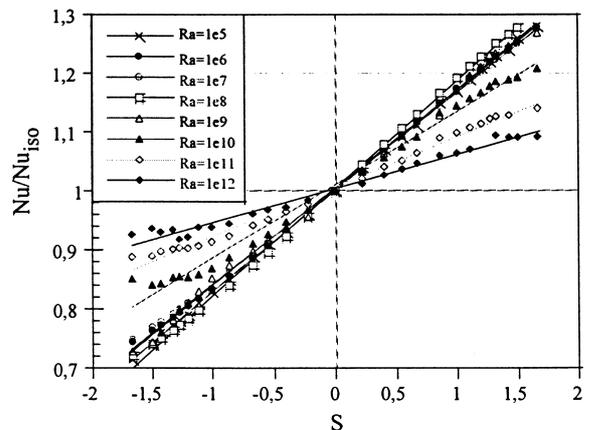


Fig. 12. Influence of  $S$  on the heat transfer.

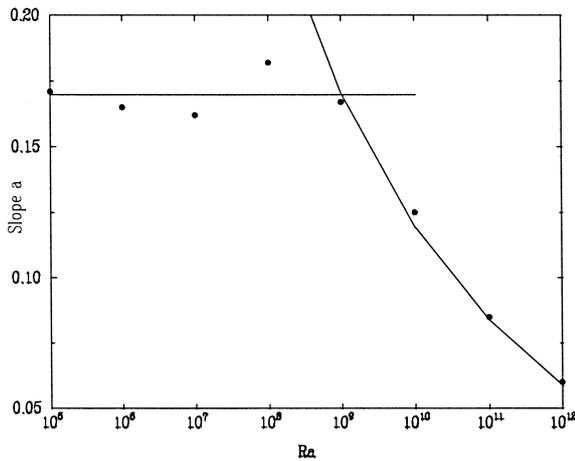


Fig. 13. Slope of the linear regression.

files are similar for  $S = -1, 0$  and  $1$ , due to identical cumulative buoyant effects. The buoyancy force integrated along the plate is equal to  $\rho_0 g \beta L (T_{w,m} - T_\infty)$ .

In turbulent regime ( $Ra = 10^{10}$ ), identical phenomena are observed (Figs. 10 and 11).

These results show that if the mean temperature difference  $\Delta T = (T_{w,m} - T_\infty)$  is chosen as the characteristic temperature difference rather than the temperature difference at the leading edge of the wall, the buoyancy force is not dependent on  $S$ , and both Rayleigh and Nusselt numbers are based on this characteristic temperature difference [5].

### 6.2. Heat transfer

We studied the influence of the wall temperature distribution on the ratio of Nusselt numbers:  $\frac{\overline{Nu}}{\overline{Nu}_{iso}}$  where  $\overline{Nu}$  is the average Nusselt number for the present configuration, and  $\overline{Nu}_{iso}$  is the average Nusselt number for the isothermal configuration at the same Rayleigh number. The use of this ratio minimizes the systematic error due to the turbulence model which, as seen before, underestimates the Nusselt number by nearly 15%. This choice also offers the advantage to be independent of Prandtl number. Results in Fig. 12 show that the higher  $S$ , the larger the heat transfer. The influence of  $S$  is rather important since heat transfer is affected by 20% for  $|S| = 1$ . It is also worth noting that this effect is more important for laminar than for turbulent regime.

$$\frac{\overline{Nu}}{\overline{Nu}_{iso}}$$

appears to be a linear function of  $S$ :

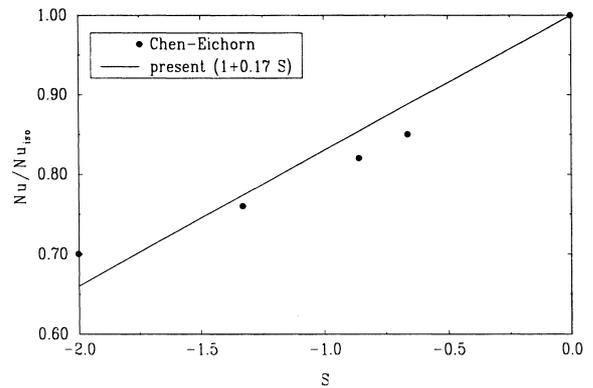


Fig. 14. Comparison with Chen and Eichorn experiments.

$$\frac{\overline{Nu}}{\overline{Nu}_{iso}} = 1 + aS$$

where  $a$  is a function of Rayleigh number as shown in Fig. 13.

In laminar regime,  $a$  can be considered as constant but it depends on Rayleigh number in turbulent regime. In these conditions, the influence of the wall temperature distribution on the heat transfer can be finally given by the following equations:

$$Ra \leq 2 \times 10^9: \frac{\overline{Nu}}{\overline{Nu}_{iso}} = 1 + 0.17S \tag{6}$$

$$Ra > 2 \times 10^9: \frac{\overline{Nu}}{\overline{Nu}_{iso}} = 1 + 4.15 Ra^{-0.15} S. \tag{7}$$

### 6.3. Comparison with experimental results

As discussed earlier, Yang et al. [4] showed that heat transfer is affected in the same way by the wall temperature distribution and the medium temperature distribution. However, literature is poor concerning the influence of the wall temperature distribution. The lack of experimental results in such a configuration led us to compare our numerical results to experimental results obtained in the case of an isothermal plate immersed in a linearly stratified medium. The symmetry of both configurations allows this comparison. Chen and Eichorn [28] experimentally studied the case of natural convective heat transfer along a vertical isothermal surface immersed in a stratified medium. This is the only experimental work available in the literature; Angirasa and Srinivasan [29] numerically studied this case and their results agree with experimental results of Chen and Eichorn.

Our numerical results obtained in the case of a non isothermal plate immersed in an isothermal fluid were compared to their measurements in the case defined

by:  $Gr=10^6$  and  $Pr=6$ . Results in Fig. 14 show a good agreement (maximum relative error < 6%).

## 7. Conclusion

A numerical study of a natural convection flow along a non isothermal vertical plate immersed in an isothermal fluid was carried out. The wall temperature was characterized by a linear distribution with a slope  $S$ .

The following conclusions were obtained. First, we showed that buoyancy forces are locally affected by  $S$ ; but total buoyancy forces based on mid-height temperature difference are not dependent on the slope of the temperature profile. Second, heat transfer is greatly influenced by the wall temperature distribution. This influence which is more important in laminar regime than in turbulent regime is given by the following equations:

$$Ra \leq 2 \times 10^9: \frac{\overline{Nu}}{\overline{Nu}_{iso}} = 1 + 0.17S$$

$$Ra > 2 \times 10^9: \frac{\overline{Nu}}{\overline{Nu}_{iso}} = 1 + 4.15Ra^{-0.15}S$$

where  $\overline{Nu}$  is the average Nusselt number for the non isothermal case, and  $\overline{Nu}_{iso}$  is the average Nusselt number for the isothermal configuration at the same Rayleigh number. In the case of a laminar flow, these numerical results were compared to Chen and Eichorn experimental results with a good agreement. So these equations can be used to easily predict the heat transfer along a non-isothermal vertical plate.

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