

“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning.”

Albert Einstein

University of Alberta

DISCONTINUUM MODELLING OF VUGGY CARBONATES

by

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To my parents, Alvaro and María, for all their love and support.

Eskerrik asko aitas!

Abstract

The Grosmont Formation in Alberta is a heterogeneous carbonate reservoir of current interest for bitumen extraction, specifically within the vuggy porosity unit. The current research addresses the effects of vugs on the strength and stiffness of carbonate samples under uniaxial compression. Particle Flow Code 3D (PFC3D), a discontinuum modelling technique, is used to evaluate vuggy carbonate samples with different vug volumes, shapes, and locations. This thesis also presents a carbonate testing workflow, which combines computed tomography, laboratory testing, and PFC3D modelling. The workflow is evaluated with laboratory experiments on six vuggy carbonate samples from the Grosmont Formation. The workflow successfully generates samples with the correct vuggy geometry; yet the PFC3D simulations over-predict the laboratory results by 24 to 163% for the uniaxial compression strength. Future research on the calibration of PFC3D material for various scales is recommended to further the understanding of up-scaling carbonate properties for heterogeneous reservoirs.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Carbonate reservoirs are known globally as an important source for hydrocarbon resources, and more recently as potential carbon dioxide (CO₂) storage sites. In Alberta, over 500 billion barrels of in-place bitumen resources are held in carbonate deposits (ERCB 2012). These deposits are not currently considered part of Alberta's reserves due to the absence of commercial projects producing them. The two main carbonate deposits in the province are the Athabasca Grosmont and Nisku formations, with estimated resources of approximately 400 and 100 billion barrels, respectively (ERCB 2012). The Grosmont formation was the focus of several pilot projects in the 1970s and 1980s, which obtained mixed results and no eventual commercial operation established (Edmunds et al. 2009). However, the interest in this resource has increased recently due to dwindling global hydrocarbon reserves, advancements in new technologies, and high oil prices.

The focus on the Grosmont formation has resulted in abundant literature on its geology, bitumen characteristics, and flow properties; however, geomechanical properties for this formation are not readily available in the literature. Aside from the recent work by Arseniuk et al. (2012) regarding stability for open-hole completion; there is little information on the geomechanical behaviour of these rocks and their endurance to elevated temperatures and pressures.

Currently, the most promising techniques for developing the Grosmont reservoir are thermal methods such as Steam Assisted Gravity Drainage (SAGD). This technology involves injecting steam into the reservoir to heat up and mobilize the bitumen, and it is currently used in commercial operations in the McMurray Formation (commonly known as the Alberta Oil Sands). The carbonate rocks in the Grosmont Formation will be subjected to an increase in pore pressures and temperatures caused by the steam injection. Part of a successful SAGD operation is modelling of the evolution of the steam chamber in the reservoir as well as monitoring potential changes in the formation and overlaying strata (e.g. integrity of the seal or cap rock). This requires a good characterization of the reservoir properties for a successful operation and accurate prediction.

Initial studies have focused on flow modelling for the Grosmont reservoir; but geomechanical properties have not been studied as extensively. Geomechanics was first used in the petroleum field to overcome well stability and reservoir hydraulic communication problems; but it has evolved to become a part of reservoir planning and development (Santos and Ferreira 2010). The geomechanical properties usually investigated are elastic Young's modulus (E), uniaxial compression strength (UCS), Poisson's ratio (ν), friction angle (peak and residual) and cohesion (peak and residual). Elastic moduli, both dynamic (E_d) and static (E_s), are necessary for correct interpretation of sonic surveys and strain/displacement prediction. UCS data is necessary for borehole integrity, as shown in the sensitivity analysis conducted by Arseniuk et al. (2012). The connection between geomechanical behaviour and flow processes cannot be overlooked; stress changes due to increase in temperature and pressure experienced during thermal recovery can impact both steam and bitumen flow (Freeman et al. 2009).

1.1. Objective of this Study

The current study seeks to further the knowledge on the geomechanical behaviour of vuggy specimens of the Grosmont Formation. Vugs are voids within the carbonate samples generally assumed to be caused by dissolution (Lonoy 2006); these are encountered within sections of the Grosmont and are a product of its complex diagenetic history. The objective of this research is to evaluate the effect of vugs on the geomechanical properties of rock samples. It is proposed that a discontinuum model can be used to simulate vuggy carbonate rocks at the laboratory scale, based on a calibration to small intact specimens and a geometric representation of vugs in larger samples.

According to Albahlani and Babadagli (2008), the role of geomechanics in the SAGD process had not been studied for carbonate reservoirs; and the general applicability of SAGD in carbonates has not been explored as extensively as for clastic reservoirs like the oil sands. Geomechanical factors that are important for reservoir simulations such as heterogeneity and fractures are present in the Grosmont reservoirs. The first step for reservoir simulations is a proper characterization of the formation and good knowledge of basic geomechanical properties. Understanding the mechanics of the vuggy dolomites and limestones is a step towards future analysis of the reservoir on a larger scale, and would service future modelling and production of the Grosmont reservoir.

The method chosen for this research is discontinuum numerical modelling with calibration to Grosmont UCS samples. The discontinuum numerical technique used is Itasca's Particle Flow Code 3D (PFC3D). According to Palchik (2011), correct estimates of UCS and E are required to properly tackle rock engineering problems, which can be extended to rock mechanics application in reservoir and petroleum engineering. Thus, these two parameters are the focus of the current study.

The following chapter presents a short review on the Grosmont carbonates followed by a summary of the current knowledge on geomechanical properties for carbonate rocks. The development and state of practice for PFC3D is presented in the literature review in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 explains the methodology used for the numerical simulations of idealized vuggy laboratory scale samples. Chapter 4 presents a workflow developed for representing real carbonate samples in discontinuum simulations; this chapter covers the process of converting computed tomography (CT) images into PFC3D models that are calibrated to laboratory test results. Chapter 5 and 6 discuss the laboratory testing conducted on vuggy Grosmont samples and the comparison with PFC3D models, respectively. Finally, Chapter 7 presents the conclusions of the studies and recommendations for future research on Grosmont carbonates and PFC3D.

1.2. History of Production in the Grosmont Carbonates

The first production trial on the Grosmont formation was a cyclic steam stimulation (CSS) pilot project in 1974 (Jiang et al. 2009). During the following years and up to the late 1980's, other demonstration programs targeted the Grosmont formation (AOSTRA 1990). Some of these projects were carried out with the involvement of the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority (AOSTRA), which was responsible for testing and developing new technologies for Alberta's resources production (Alvarez et al. 2008). The results of the projects were inconsistent, varying between 3 to 80 m³ of bitumen per day (refer to Table 1.1). This led to hesitations regarding production from this carbonate reservoir due to discouraging results and the conclusion that the formation

processes that are thought to have occurred to the Grosmont Formation are fracturing, evaporite precipitation, evaporite dissolution, physical compaction, chemical compaction, and oil migration (Luo and Machel 1995). This last process is the source of the bitumen currently present in the formation, which generated from biodegradation of lighter hydrocarbons into 5 to 9 API bitumen. The complex diagenesis produced a highly heterogeneous reservoir, producing intervals with large void volume, ranging from 40 to 100% porosity in paleokarst caverns (Dembicki and Machel 1996).

Recent academic research on the Grosmont Formation has focused on more geological aspects such as the petrophysical properties of the bitumen or influence of diagenetic processes like dissolution of evaporites. Zhao (2009) conducted research on the bitumen rheology in the Grosmont Formation; the level of bitumen biodegradation and its relation to viscosity of the fluid. Borrero (2010) investigated the presence of Hondo evaporites within the Grosmont, some of which were found to have dissolved producing solution-collapse breccias. It is expected that research and knowledge on this formation will augment as interest in the resource increases and pilot projects continue to operate.

Early on, it was proposed that the top layers UG2 and UG3 would be the most promising for bitumen recovery and in-situ techniques. Thériault (1993) concluded that massive vuggy dolomite lithofacy present in UG2 would be suitable for production due to a pore system which included a network of vugs, channels, and fractures. Vuggy porosity produced by karstification is present in the two intervals which are targeted in current in-situ schemes (Arseniuk et al. 2012). Figure 1.2 presents a core example of vuggy dolomites of the UG2 unit from Osum's Laricina JV project. The presence of these vugs are not only a factor for porosity estimation and reservoir flow models, but should also be considered when analyzing the geomechanical properties of the reservoir. Therefore, the present research seeks to obtain more knowledge on the geomechanical behaviour of rock with widespread void inclusions, such as the Grosmont vuggy carbonates.



Figure 1.2: Vuggy dolomite core from Grosmont UG2 layer with varying presence of bitumen (photos of Laricina core)

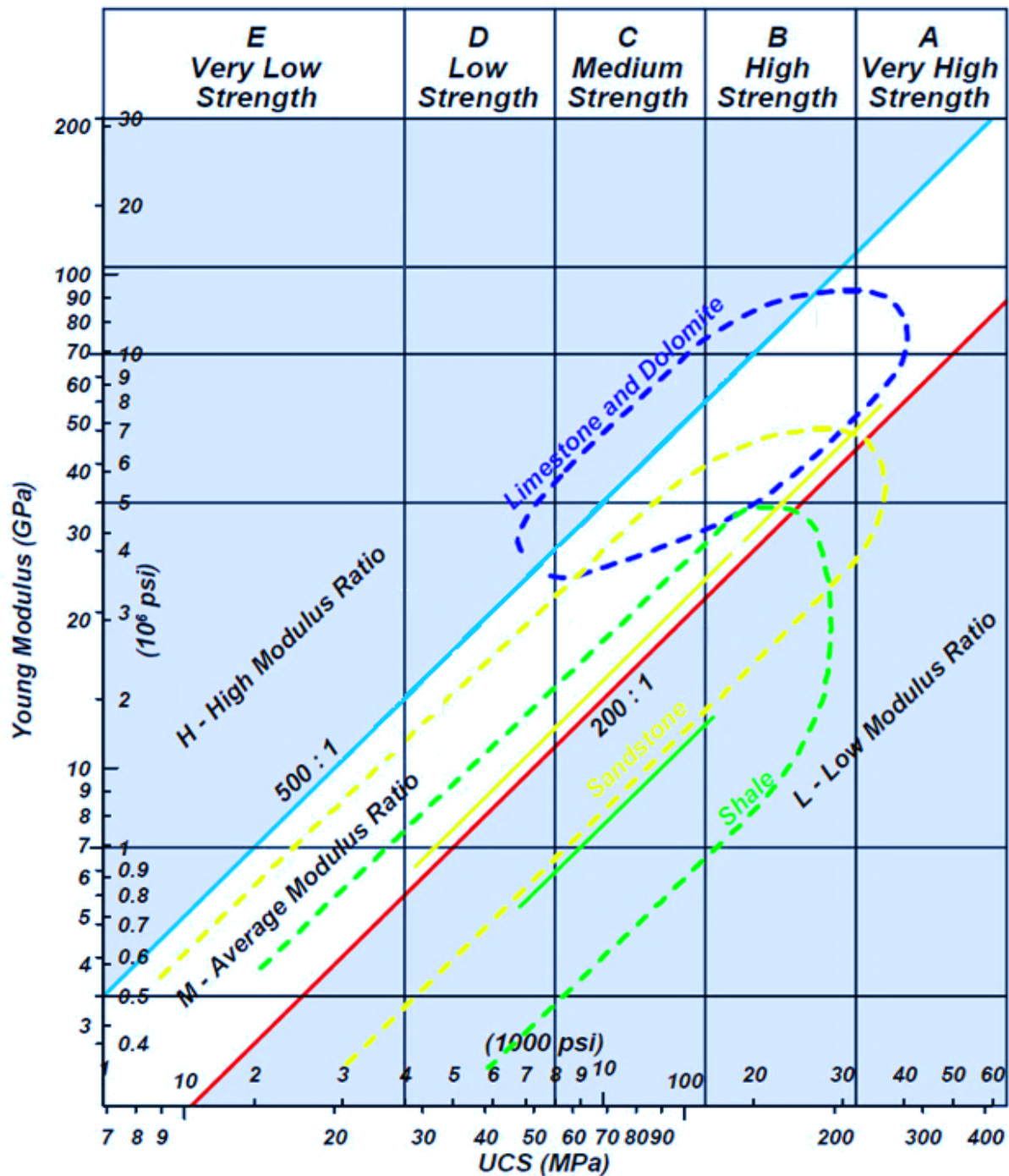


Figure 1.3: Intact properties of sedimentary rocks. Adapted from Santos and Ferreira (2010) and originally published by Deere (1968).

Initial studies on the effectiveness of UCS empirical equations showed that carbonates had a wide variation of strength, regardless of the property that was used to attempt correlation (Chang et al. 2006). Some conservative estimates could be obtained using

compressional wave time parameters, but generally the predictive results were poor, and required correlations to a particular field or formation (Chang et al. 2006).

Modulus predictions have been found to be even less reliable than UCS equations. A study by Palchik (2011) further confirmed that there are no general empirical correlations between elastic modulus and UCS. In a study by Santos and Ferreira (2010) of Brazilian off-shore carbonates, the researchers tested the predictive powers of several empirical correlations, with wireline logs and laboratory sample tests. The study found that Schlumberger's MECHPRO™ CPM gave the best results, but other equations that only used porosity as a predictor (such as those from Chang et al. 2006) also produced reasonable results and were simpler to implement. Similar to other studies, equations for elastic modulus were not found to provide good estimates.

Existing research points to porosity as an adequate predictor for UCS and a possible factor for estimating E. Estimating UCS with algorithms based on well log data was used by Arseniuk et al. (2012) to provide UCS values for the Grosmont C unit (or UG2), specifically the vuggy dolomites. This information was used to evaluate the feasibility of using open-hole completions for SAGD in the Grosmont. Material strength is required for borehole integrity; and as an important parameter for determining failure parameters such as cohesion in Mohr-Coulomb failure criteria (Arseniuk et al. 2012). Moduli prediction is relevant for interpreting seismic surveys, analysing reservoir strains, and formulating displacement predictions. Future development in the Grosmont Formation will require accurate ways to predict geomechanical parameters, as well as data of tested samples. These requirements make the present study very relevant to the future production of this resource as well as contributing to the understanding of mechanical behaviour of brittle materials with inclusions.

The current study seeks to further the knowledge on the effect that inclusions (such as vugs) have on the strength and stiffness of a material, which can be measured by a change on UCS and E, respectively. Intuitively, it would be expected that inclusions would reduce the strength and stiffness of the material; however, the amount of this reduction and the effects of shape and location variations are more difficult to quantify and predict. From Griffith (1921) it has been established that the curvature or sharpness of a single defect has a quantifiable effect on the decrease in tensile strength. This is relevant for the UCS value, since rock failure can commonly be dominated by overcoming the tensile strength of the rock. Insight on whether shape is an important factor in material strength and stiffness is important for improving current predictions on mechanical behaviour of vuggy carbonate materials.

The present work also studies the effect of vugs on wave transmission properties. Sonic surveys and laboratory ultrasonic test are used to obtain dynamic stiffness parameters for the material. The presence and location of the vugs can cause dissipation of the signal and an increase of signal noise. Sonic surveys are common in the oil industry and compression and shear wave velocities are characterization parameters for the material in the smaller strain ranges. Modelling of wave propagation through vuggy material provides some insight on how these results can be interpreted, as well as the first step for future modelling in the PFC3D environment under different pressure and temperature conditions. Furthermore, the relation between E_s and E_d for vuggy samples is studied, and the calibration of PFC3D materials to represent both behaviours is investigated. The study of carbonates under smaller strain ranges is more applicable to the day-to-day

operations of the petroleum industry, which mostly functions away from peak stress and failure conditions.

This study presents an initial step to testing and modelling of vuggy carbonates and attempts to further the knowledge on the geomechanical properties of these materials. The lessons learned from this work can be applied to future discontinuum modelling, for simulating different rocks with inclusions, and for other application outside of oil production, such as CO₂ capture and storage. Coupled geomechanical and flow simulations are becoming increasingly more common in the petroleum industry, but for any model to be successful the input properties must be of good quality. The present research hopes to open the path for improving characterization, with eventually advancing larger scale reservoir modelling.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Continuum and Discontinuum for modelling rock

From the early works of Griffith in 1921, the fundamentals of rock failure have been a topic of interest. Theories and empirical formulas had been proposed, none of which have been able to fully capture all the characteristics of rock mechanical behaviour. With the advent of technology and computer processing power, the rock mechanics field turned to numerical modelling to analyze complex situations that single failure criteria or theoretical models could not resolve. Numerical models for rock are now an established tool for engineering design purposes and case study analysis (Bobet et al. 2009). Numerical techniques can be generally subdivided into two broad groups: continuum or discontinuum models.

Continuum models represent the material as continuous and failure is described implicitly through the use of constitutive laws (Potyondy and Cundall 2004). Discontinuities in the rock, such as joints or fractures, can be incorporated in the model by previously specifying them; however, formation of new discontinuities and rupture of the material cannot be represented. In essence, the material must remain a continuum for the model to proceed. Some examples of continuum methods are Finite Element Method (FEM), Finite Difference Method (FDM), and Boundary Element Method (BEM); available rock modelling software that employs continuum models are FLAC 2D/3D, ABAQUS, PENTAGON, PHASE2, PLAXIS, EXAMINE 2D/ 3D, and DEFE to name a few (Bobet et al., 2009).

Discontinuum models, on the other hand, represent the material as a collection of particles which are joined together at the contacts. These techniques model failure explicitly; with the formation, closure, or coalescence of cracks occurring naturally as an extension of the model definition (Potyondy and Cundall 2004). Primary discontinuum formulations are the Discrete Element Method (DEM) with its several variations, and Discontinuous Deformation Analysis (Bobet et al. 2009). Some of the computer codes available for discontinuum rock modelling are UDEC, 3DEC, LDEC, PFC2D/3D, and YADE.

The use of continuum or discontinuum modelling can be illustrated with the diagram shown in Figure 2.1, which is based Bobet et al. (2009). Part a) and b) are shown as straight forward discontinuum and continuum analysis, respectively. The decision is more complicated for cases c) and d). In case c) the material is continuous in each zone but there are clear large discontinuities across regions. In this example, a continuum method that considers the specific geometric discontinuities could be used; the behaviour of the rock will be controlled by structure and the joints should be explicitly included in the modelling. For case d), the joints are pervasive and in a relatively smaller scale than the problem range; in this case the rock could be modelled as homogeneous material, with some account for the reduced strength due to jointing. A pseudo-continuum model could be applied, with parameters based on failure criteria such as Hoek-Brown with the modifications for GSI (Hoek et al. 2013). These four scenarios are some basic cases and combinations of the above may occur in nature; it is up to the engineer to decide which method is appropriate on a case by case basis, prior to attempting any modelling.

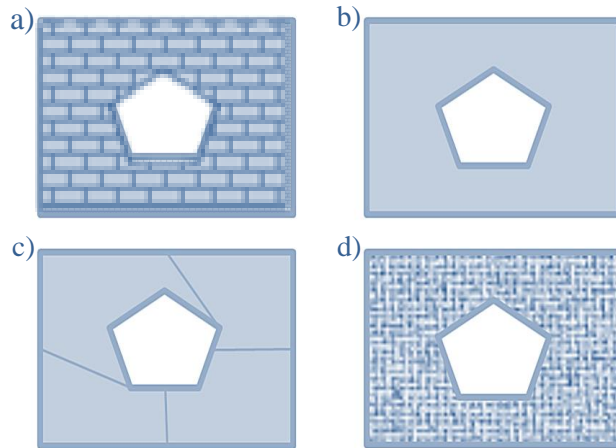


Figure 2.1: Graphical representation of different modelling situations due to the geometry of the problem and rock mass (modified from Bobet et al. 2009)

It can be difficult to determine in which case it is necessary to use discontinuum, continuum, or some combination of the two methods. The choice will depend on the geometry of the problem, the relative scale between the studied range and geological discontinuities, and the material behaviour (Bobet et al. 2009). The biggest deciding factor would be whether relative displacement between regions of the rock is sufficient for material contacts to disappear or be created; in these cases, continuum methods should not be applied (Bobet et al. 2009). It is important to note that regardless of the choice of method, numerical models are still approximations; and the engineer should understand the limitations of each model for a proper interpretation of the results.

2.2. Discrete Element Modelling (DEM)

DEM was first proposed by Cundall and Strack in 1979 for granular assemblies, further development of the formulations was presented in 1988 in two-part papers for the contact identification schemes and mechanical calculations (Cundall 1988 and Hart et al. 1988, respectively). The work by Cundall later developed into commercial codes such as UDEC, 3DEC, PFC2D, and PFC3D. Other early endeavours in DEM were carried out by Rothenburg and Bathurst, first employing disc assemblies (Bathurst and Rothenburg 1988) and later on using elliptical-shaped particles (Rothenburg and Bathurst 1991; Rothenburg and Bathurst 1993).

An important aspect of rock behaviour is to understand that failure is due to either tension or shear. The formation of compression-induced tensile cracks can be explained by schematics such as Figure 2.2; where axially loaded particles are split apart by exceeding the tensile strength of the restraining bond. A model that wishes to represent the mechanics of failure must be able to represent formation and interactions of these cracks (Potyondy and Cundall 2004). This is an advantage of DEM, where the behaviour is represented directly and micro-cracks occur naturally without the need to impose crack locations prior to modelling a material. DEM schemes do not rely on constitutive equations nor do they impose any assumptions and limitations on the macroscopic behaviour (Mas Ivars et al. 2011). Failure arises and evolves on the micro-scale based on geometric conditions and set of assigned properties to the discrete particles and the contacts between them.

providing some insight on the mechanism of cracking in the presence of lithophysae that caused the reduction in strength and stiffness with increasing porosity. This research provided encouraging results for the modelling of weak rocks with discontinuum techniques.

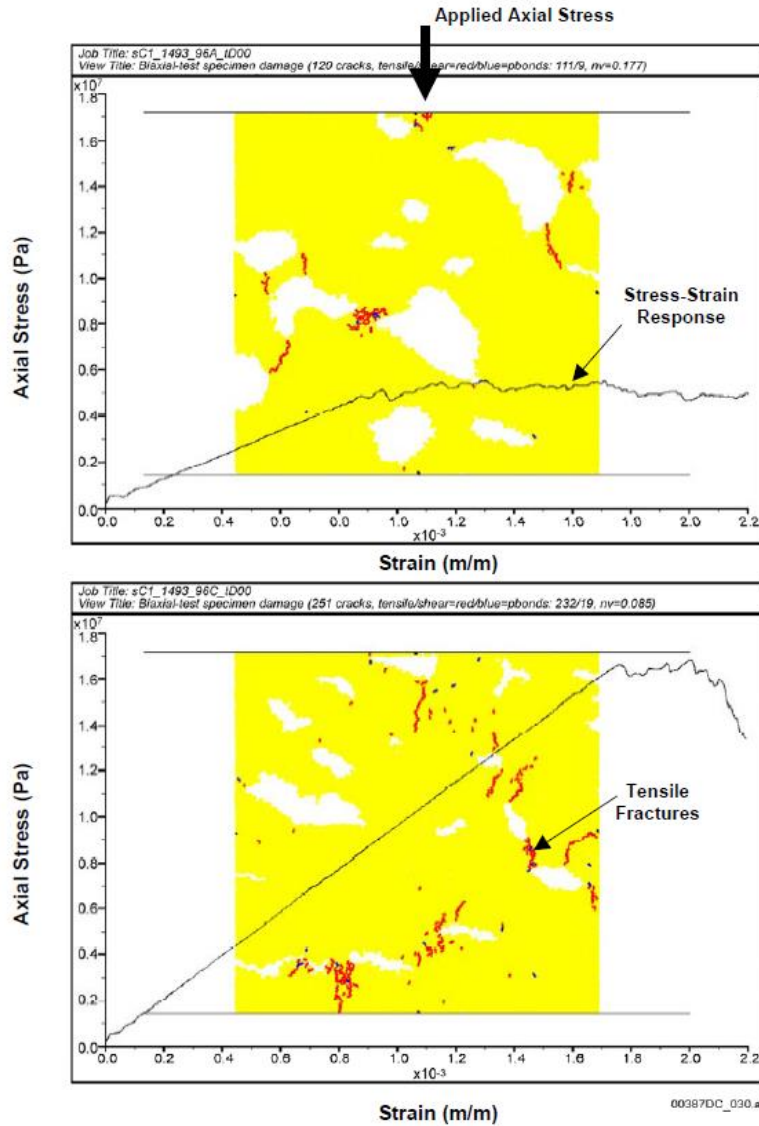


Figure 2.6: PFC2D simulations of lithophysae tuff (from Bechtel 2004)

PFC was also used to study the behaviour of fractured rock mass by Park et al. (2004). They compared UDEC and PFC2D with discrete fractures, systematically increasing the number of joint sets in the PFC2D models. The results for both PFC2D and UDEC were similar, and produced a decrease in both E_s and peak strength with increasing number of joint sets. The number of joints was observed to have an effect on the post peak behaviour, changing from brittle to perfectly plastic as the number of joints increased (Park et al. 2004).

The behaviour of the micro-parameters in PFC and their effect on overall behaviour was studied by Holt et al. (2005). They compared PFC models to control experiments using glass beads and epoxy, which were compared to PFC's spherical particles and parallel bonds, respectively. The controlled experiments were carried out to provide more quantitative comparison between micro-properties and known properties of the glass and epoxy. In addition, Holt et al. (2005) created different tests environments in PFC that could provide further calibration aid. Wave velocity tests were conducted to provide correlation with dynamic stiffness parameters, and a scratch test was established to provide additional strength parameter relations (Holt et al. 2005). The wave velocity results are especially encouraging given that geomechanical properties of rocks are commonly estimated through correlations to sonic logs because direct measurements become prohibitive at reservoir scale. Moreover, laboratory rock physics tests are commonly done to obtain dynamic elastic parameters for rock samples.

Calibration of PFC2D to a weak rock also was attained by Cho et al. (2007), who used a clumped PFC2D model to simulate “Sulfaset”, a synthetic weak rock used in setting anchor bolts. Cho et al. (2007) were able to reasonably match the UCS, stiffness and failure envelope; however, the initial non-linearity present in the stress vs strain curve of the laboratory data could not be modelled (see Figure 2.7). This non-linear segment of the curve is described as the crack closure region by Martin and Chandler (1994) and it is caused by the closure of existing micro-cracks within the sample. It is expected that softer rocks would have a more distinct crack closure phase; however, PFC2D was not able to simulate this.

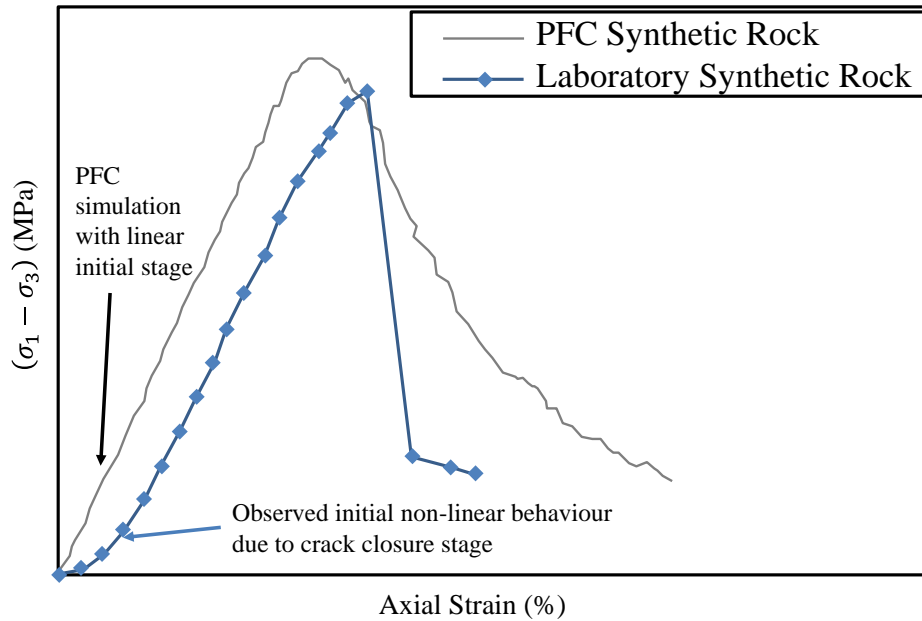


Figure 2.7: Limitations of PFC in simulating weak rock laboratory results (modified from Cho et al. 2007)

Cho et al. (2007) stipulated that the reason the model could not achieve non-linearity was due to not including flaws within the material prior to testing; further hypothesizing that the non-linearity could be achieved by randomly applying pores or cracks within the model. However, as can be observed from research by Bechtel (2004), PFC models with

Further modifications on the YADE model were published by Scholtès and Donzé (2013), in which the microstructure was enhanced by allowing proximate balls that were not directly in contact with a ball to be considered to be connected (refer to Figure 2.11). This increases the number of possible contact per ball (i.e. coordination number), which is an implicit enhancement to interlocking of particles and increases the strength of the material. As noted by Scholtès and Donzé (2013), this process is similar to the clump method used by Cho et al. (2007) for PFC2D, with the added advantage that complex particle shapes are not necessary. This modification allowed YADE to model material with high UCS to tensile ratios and non-linear failure envelopes; moreover, the authors report more proportional relation between the micro-properties in the model and macro-properties that are measured in the laboratory tests.

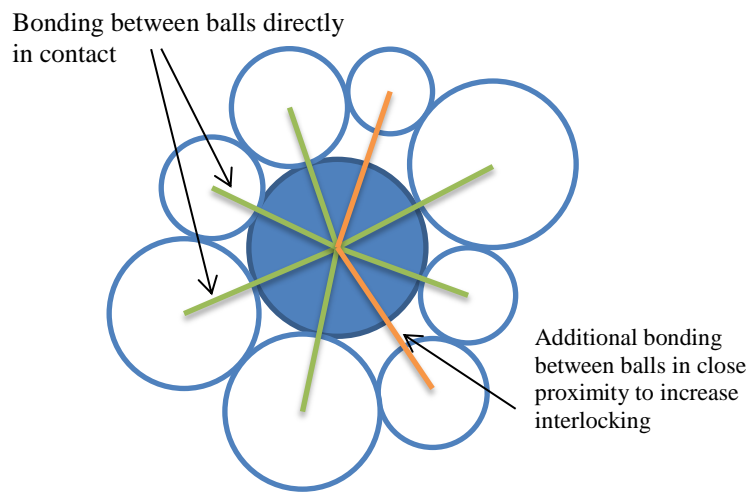


Figure 2.11: Graphical representation of enhanced bonding in YADE which allows connections between balls not directly in contact (modified from Scholtès and Donzé 2013)

2.10. Contributions of Current Research

The current program looks to expand knowledge on the effect of voids or inclusions in rocks. The context of this research is heterogeneous carbonate specimens that present vugs of various shapes and sizes. The first objective is to evaluate the effect of vug geometry on the strength and stiffness on idealized vuggy samples at the laboratory scale. The UCS test environment within PFC3D as well as analogous P- and S-wave velocity tests are used on samples with different vug configurations to determine the changes caused by vugs size, shape, and location. The second objective is to simulate real samples within PFC3D created with the help of computed tomography (CT) imaging technology. This would allow comparing the PFC3D simulations to equivalent physical laboratory test results. It is the hope that these simulations can provide an initial step towards non-destructive tests for samples in which limited core is available, as well as providing insight on up-scaling methods for heterogeneous reservoirs.

comparison with the different PFC3D simulations. The vug volume ratio is the main geometric parameter used in this study to evaluate the effect of vug volume on the strength and stiffness of samples.

3.2. Single and Two Vug Simulations

UCS test simulations of vuggy specimens with different resolution and vug sizes were conducted. Cylindrical samples of 60 mm height and 30 mm diameter were created using several particle sizes with the BPM. The micro-properties used in this initial trial were those used in the verification problems for the PFC3D software (ITASCA 2008b), with minimum ball radius of 1.22 mm (resolution of approximately 9 particles across sample diameter). The other materials used ball radius of 0.8 mm (resolution of about 14 particles for width) and radius of 0.5 mm (resolution of approximately 22 particles per diameter). As has been noted in previous studies, ball radius affects the behaviour of PFC samples and would require some calibration to obtain the same overall response. For this study, this additional calibration was not carried out, and the behaviour of the vuggy material is compared to its “parent” by normalizing the results to the intact material samples.

Spherical vugs of varying radius from 2.44 mm to 9.76 mm were placed in the centre of the cylindrical sample. Although the vugs are assigned to be spherical in shape, the shape obtained was dependent on the resolution (refer to top row of graphics in Figure 3.2). The higher resolution the closer the shape will be to the assigned shape; this appears to be of lower importance for the larger vugs (see bottom row of Figure 3.2). The results of the virtual UCS test are presented in Figure 3.3; the results shown are the compressive strength of the test normalized to the intact strength. The increase of the resolution reduces variance in the results but appears to produce similar averaged results; and may indicate that a lower resolution (albeit still capable of reasonable geometry representation) can be used to represent the vugs.

A second set of simulations with vugs of 4.88 mm were located in the centre of the sample, at 5 mm above the centre (offset in y direction along the length of the sample) and 5mm offset in the z or x direct, which are perpendicular to the sample length (refer to Figure 3.4 for results). The change in location of the vug had some effect on the strength of the sample. The influence was found to be smaller than varying the size of the vugs, and some scatter in the data was observed for the vugs that were offset by 5mm in the x and z direction. The UCS for single vug simulations was observed to reduce almost linearly with increasing size of vug. However, as soon as a second vug is added this relation changed as shown in Figure 3.4. This shift in behaviour shows that interaction between the vugs may be significant.

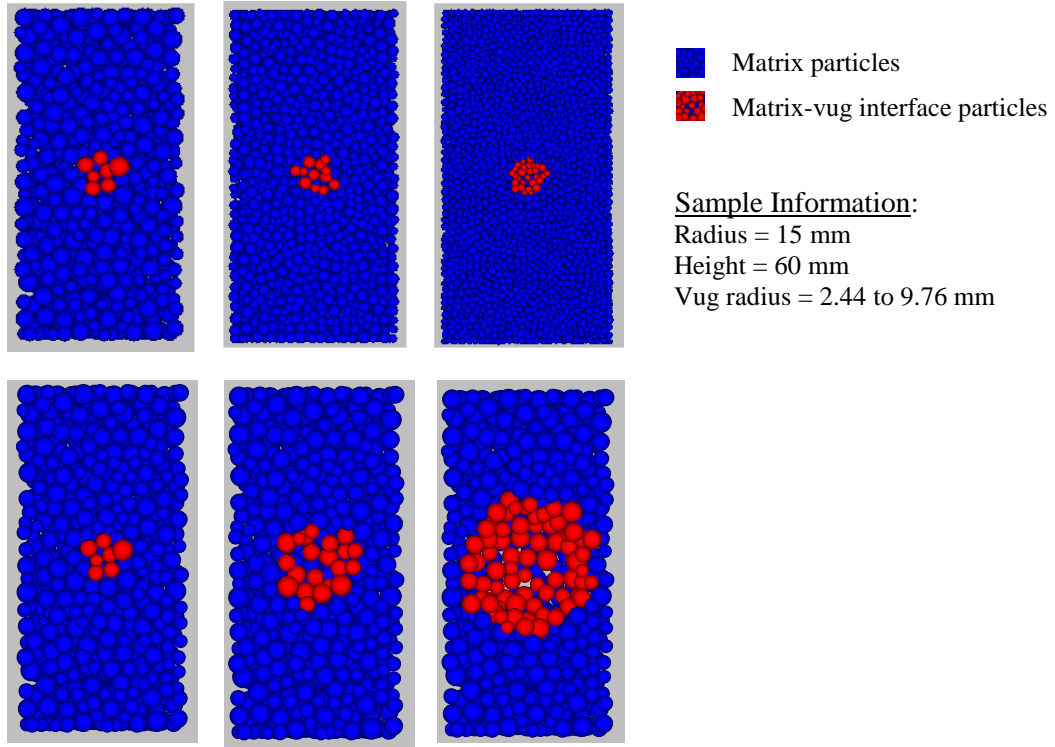


Figure 3.2: Single vug simulations. Top row: same vug size - different resolutions. Bottom row: same resolution with varying vug size

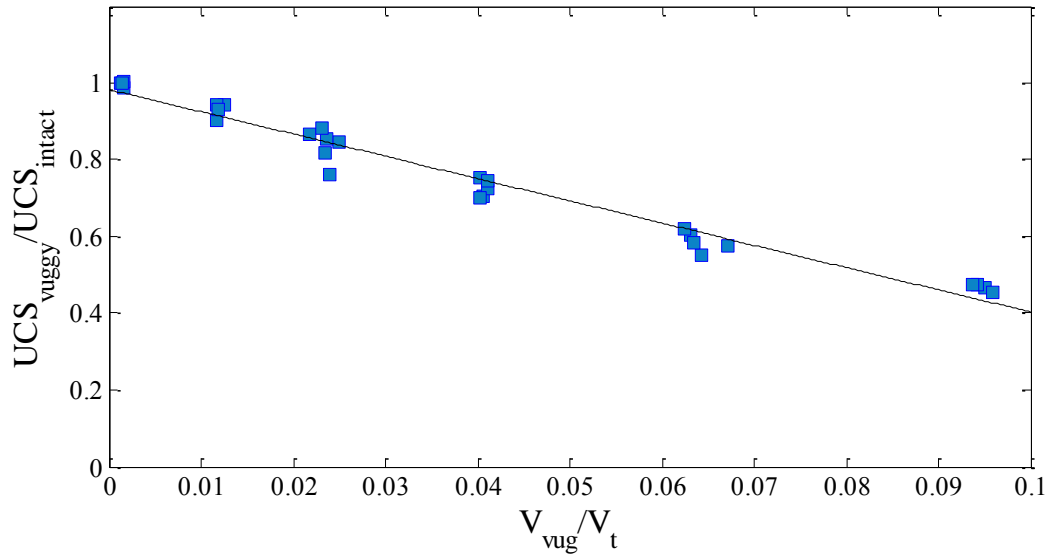


Figure 3.3: Single vug simulation results, UCS values normalized to the intact material

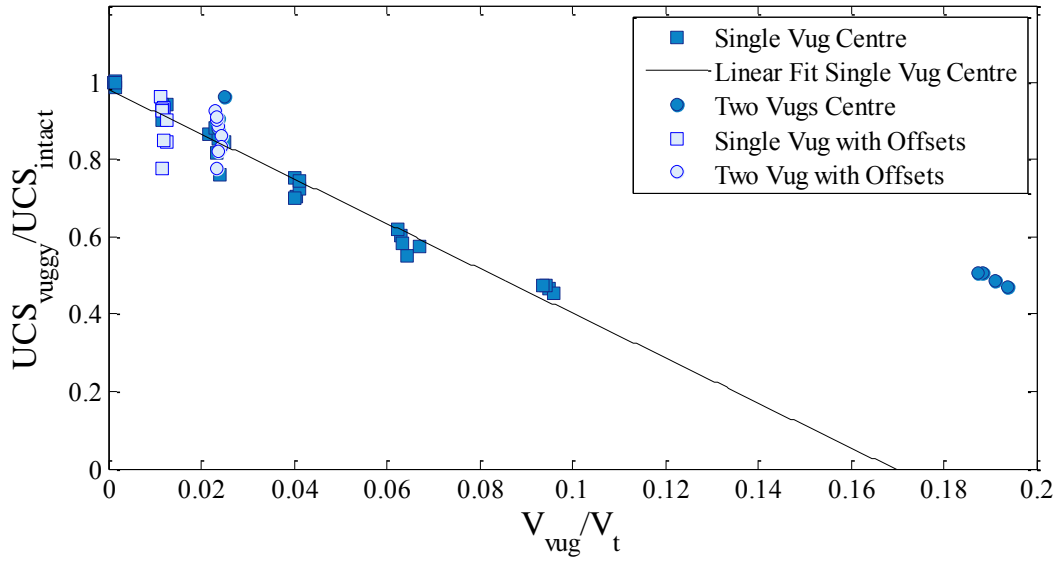


Figure 3.4: Single and two vug simulations, values are normalized to the intact material

The simulations discussed above consider only spherical vugs. The next shape that was studied was ellipsoids. Samples with a single elliptical vug were simulated with different orientation for the axis of the ellipsoid. Figure 3.5 shows the change in the normalized UCS at different ellipsoid orientations. The orientation angle beta is measured as shown in Figure 3.5.

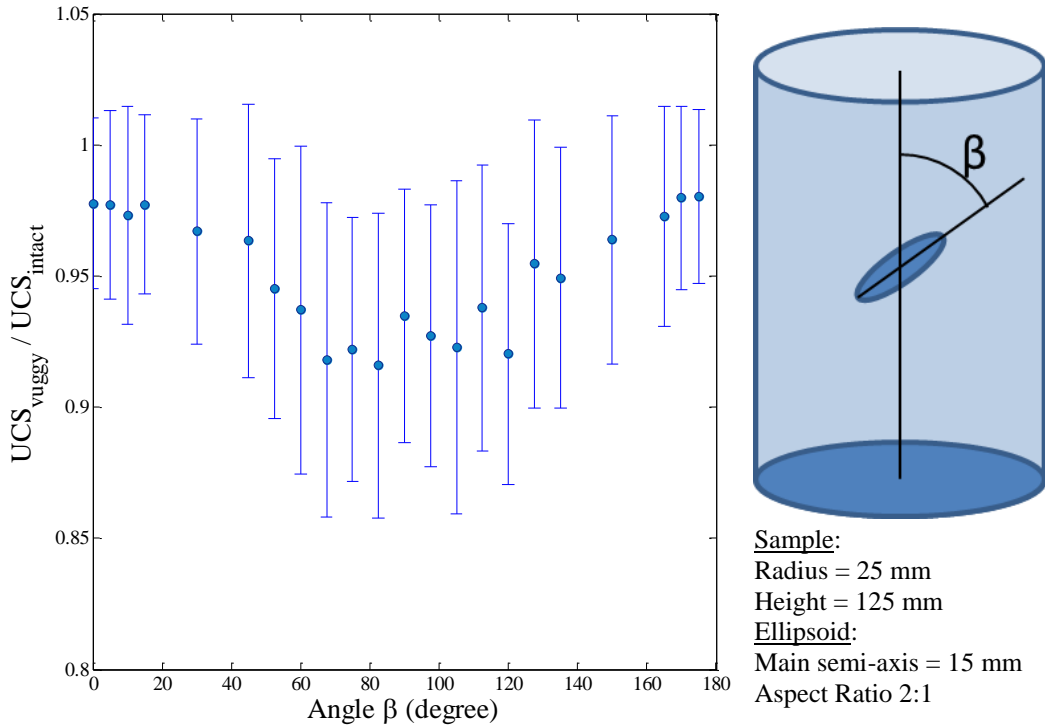


Figure 3.5: Single vug ellipsoid simulation results, variations in the UCS with changes in the ellipsoid orientation (error bars represent the standard deviation based on results from ten realizations)

Unlike similar experiments with fractures, which are continuous throughout the sample, the lowest strength did not occur at 30-45 degrees (Hoek and Brown 1980) but between 80 and 120 degrees. The slight double dip observed is similar to the graphs presented by Hoek and Brown (1980) for two discontinuities that intersect at 90 degrees. The three-dimensional effect captured in the simulations shows a promising result that vug effects can be modelled by PFC3D. The outcomes presented for the single ellipsoid vug were the average of ten sample realizations (material resolution was 7.5 particles per diameter) with equal properties but using different seed numbers. The graph is not exactly symmetric, which may be due to the discontinuous nature of the material that causes the shape to be slightly irregular. Further studies could be made reducing the particle size or increasing the number of sample realizations.

3.3. Modelling of Vuggy Carbonates

3.3.1. Parameters for Carbonates in PFC3D

The next step towards modelling of vuggy carbonates was to create idealized PFC3D samples with micro-properties that reflected strength and stiffness of a carbonate material. The change in behaviour from intact to vuggy samples was investigated using four different materials. All samples created were of 25 mm radius by 125 mm height (length to width ratio of 2.5). The BPM (as presented in Potyondy and Cundall 2004) was used for the numerical simulations by selecting parallel bond with radius multiplier of 1 for all models. The materials chosen (M1 through M4) are intended to represent carbonate rocks of low to high strength, and low to high E_s/UCS ratio.

The micro-properties used for each material are presented in Table 3.1; and the observed UCS and E for the intact specimen is presented in Table 3.2. The bond strengths shown in Table 3.1 are presented as an average plus/minus standard deviation. The UCS and E_s for most of the intact materials created are plotted in the summary graph proposed by Deere (1968) for sedimentary rock (refer to Figure 3.6). The micro-properties for materials M1 to M3 were selected so the samples behaviour would fall within the limestone-dolostone area, with different strengths and E_s/UCS ratios for comparison. The properties for the M4 materials were chosen to represent a much lower strength and stiffness, as an extreme case. Consequently they fall outside the carbonate range plotted in Figure 3.6.

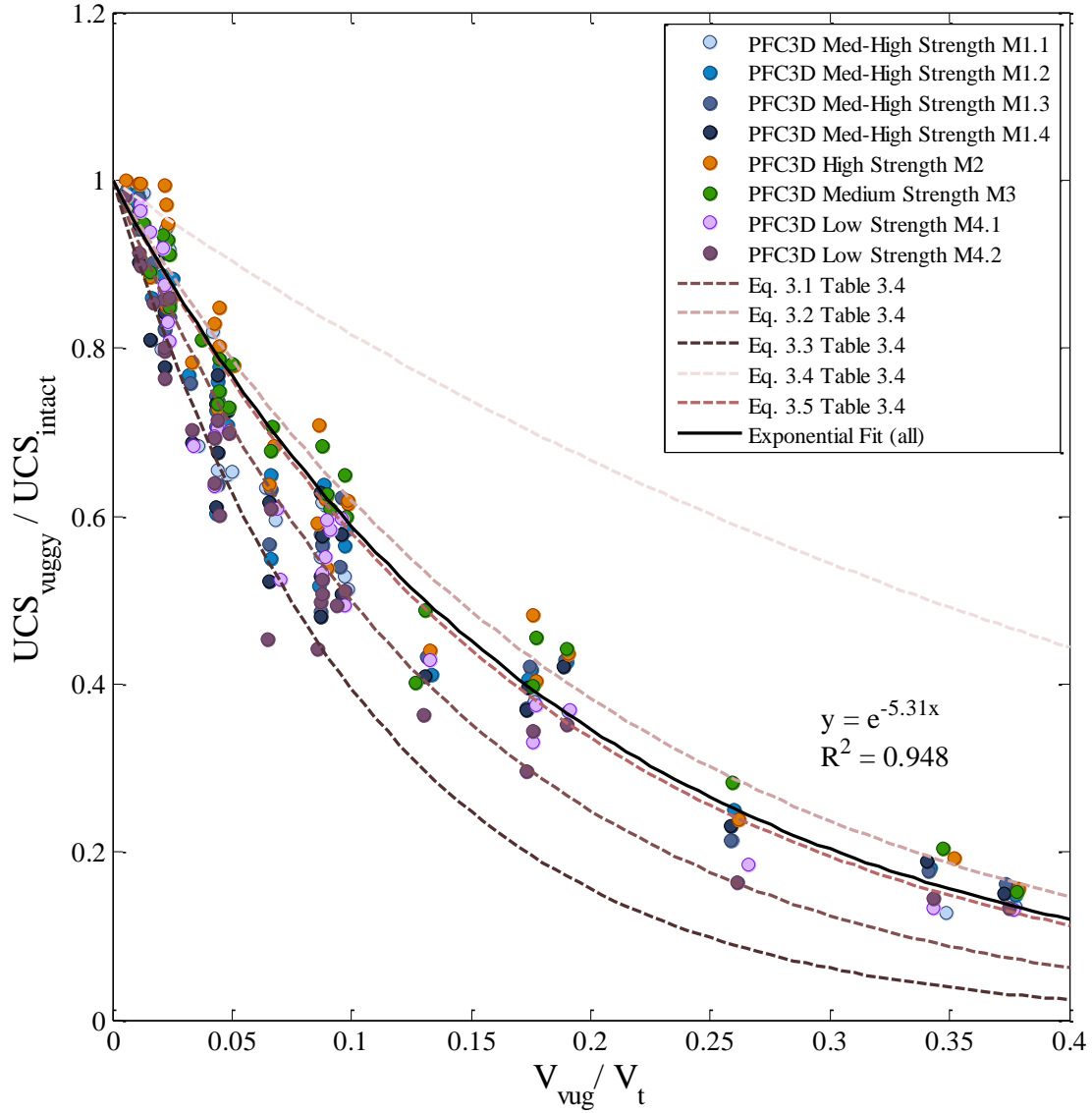


Figure 3.10: Normalized UCS vs. vug volume ratio for samples with randomized vugs

A selection of the equations provided for predicting carbonate behaviour are presented in Table 3.4. The empirical correlations were normalized to an intercept of 1 to compare with the PFC3D results, both the correlation and the PFC3D data were plotted together as seen in Figure 3.10 and show very similar trends. Moreover, a large amount of the data points fall within the boundaries of the curves. This presents evidence that PFC3D is capable of modelling the decrease in strength due to void space increase, which has been observed in real carbonate samples.

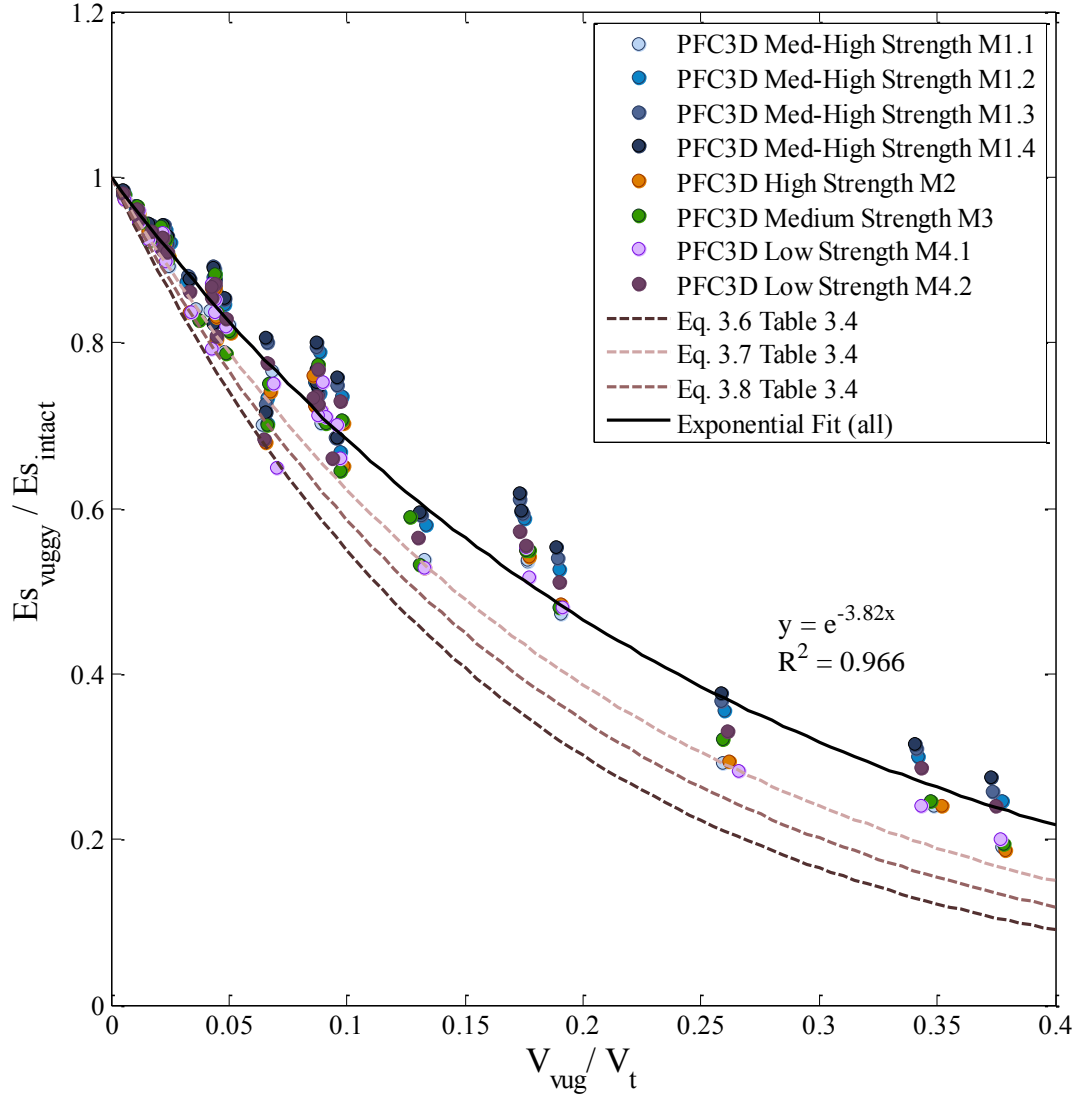


Figure 3.12: Normalized stiffness vs vug volume ratio for samples with randomly placed vugs

The stress versus strain curves for the simulated samples are presented in Figure 3.13 for material M1.1 and M1.2. The plot presents the difference in behavior between intact samples and increasing vuggy porosity for spherically shaped vugs. Similar behaviours were observed in the results for vuggy samples with other shapes, and these are included in the Appendix A. Figure 3.14 presents the stress strain curve for materials M4.1 and M4.2 for samples with oblate shaped vugs. These materials are considerably softer and weaker but the change in behavior is similar. The post behaviour of PFC3D does not necessarily match the real sample behaviour and its representation requires separate calibration; however, the focus of this study is on the change prompted by the vugs, which can be observed to change the behaviour of the sample from brittle to ductile.

The arrival time for the S-wave was generally taken as the first large negative trough, and all attempts were made to maintain consistency within the materials. The ease in determining this point varied with material type and presence of vugs. In samples with low stiffness or with a large numbers of vugs, the assessment of the S-wave became very difficult and was subject to error. In all cases, the velocity measurements were checked to ensure the v_d and E_d was within a reasonable range. The best indication of mistaking faster P-wave arrivals with the S-wave was obtaining a negative v_d . With the combination of ball displacement monitoring, velocity checks in all directions, and maintaining a consistent criteria, all attempts were made to be as accurate as possible in the S-wave arrival time; however, the results at large vug volumes had large variations.

These P- and S-wave simulations could be considered an analogy for laboratory wave velocity tests. It is not part of the regular testing environment provided by Itasca and was developed during this research based on previous work by Holt et al. (2005) with Hertzian contact law. The purpose of using this dynamic environment was to provide insight on the effect of vugs under low strain or elastic applications. The fish code developed to execute these tests is presented in Appendix B. More research is encouraged on this dynamic behaviour, as it can potentially provide an avenue for calibrating ball stiffness properties for dynamic testing. Refer to Chapter 6 for further discussion on the calibration of materials with both dynamic and static test data. Hopefully, the results presented encourage future research in this area and the presence of more rock physics testing in traditional reservoir geomechanics.

