A Shape-Memory Alloy Actuated Tilt Mechanism and Reflective Surface Enhancement for Parabolic Dish Radio Telescopes.

Dana Ahmed Allromaih, Jana Sultan Alshehri, Shahad Anas Alswailem, Elaf Abdulaziz Aldawsari, Tayef Ali AlRammah, Rama Fahad Alzaidy, Reema Abdullah Aldosari,Dr. Yazan Allawi

Department of Electrical Engineering, College of Engineering, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, P.O. Box 84428, Riyadh 11671, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Fixed radio telescopes face challenges in signal tracking due to their inability to move ،This project aims to develop a passive tilting mechanism using Shape Memory Alloy (SMA) springs that respond to thermal stimuli without requiring external power or motors. The goal is to enhance signal reception by enabling slight dish adjustments based on temperature changes. Through theoretical analysis and material comparison, the NiTi-CFRP Hybrid was identified as the most suitable SMA due to its high responsiveness, low weight, and durability, offering an efficient and reliable solution for improving telescope performance.

Introduction

Reflective dishes in space systems are subject to environmental and thermal effects that can cause surface deformations and loss of pointing accuracy, negatively impacting signal quality and observation efficiency.

Therefore, there is a growing need for smart technologies capable of adapting to these changing conditions.

Shape Memory Alloys (SMAs) are among the most promising smart materials used for this purpose, as they have the ability to return to their original shape after deformation when exposed to thermal or magnetic stimuli, due to their phase transformation between martensite and austenite.[1]

SMAs are characterized by their lightweight nature and controllability, making them well-suited for developing precise actuation systems and enhancing the efficiency of reflective surfaces in modern telescopes.[2]

System Model

The proposed model relies on the use of smart springs made from materials that respond to thermal changes, strategically mounted beneath the base of the parabolic radio telescope. These springs alter their shape or length when exposed to heat, allowing the dish to move in multiple directions without the need for traditional mechanical motors.

The mechanism is designed with smart springs distributed at specific points under the dish. Each group of springs is exposed to separate thermal stimuli. As the temperature changes, the springs expand or contract, resulting in the tilting or rotation of the dish in the desired direction to receive signals.

To achieve this functionality, we selected a NiTi-CFRP hybrid material. NiTi provides shape-memory behavior and reliable actuation under thermal input, while CFRP offers structural strength and lightweight support. This combination ensures accurate, responsive, and durable movement for the telescope system.

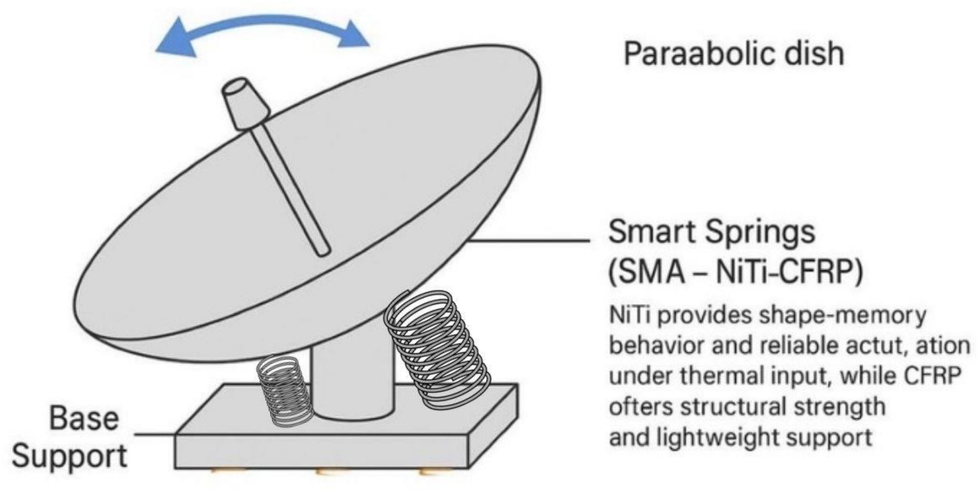


Figure 1. Passive tilt system using smart springs (NiTi-CFRP) activated by heat.

Proposed Solution

To enhance the signal tracking capabilities of fixed radio telescopes, we propose a passive tilting mechanism using shape-memory alloy (SMA) springs that automatically respond to heat or magnetic fields, with no external power required.

We will compare four SMA materials: NiTi, Cu-Al-Ni, Fe-Mn-Si, and NiTi-CFRP Hybrid based on:

- Mechanical strength and flexibility
- Response speed
- Weight and efficiency
- Environmental durability

This approach eliminates the need for motors, reduces energy consumption, and provides a lightweight, cost-effective solution. The goal is to identify the optimal material for a self-tracking system that will enable fixed telescopes to perform similarly to movable ones, increasing their signal reception capabilities.

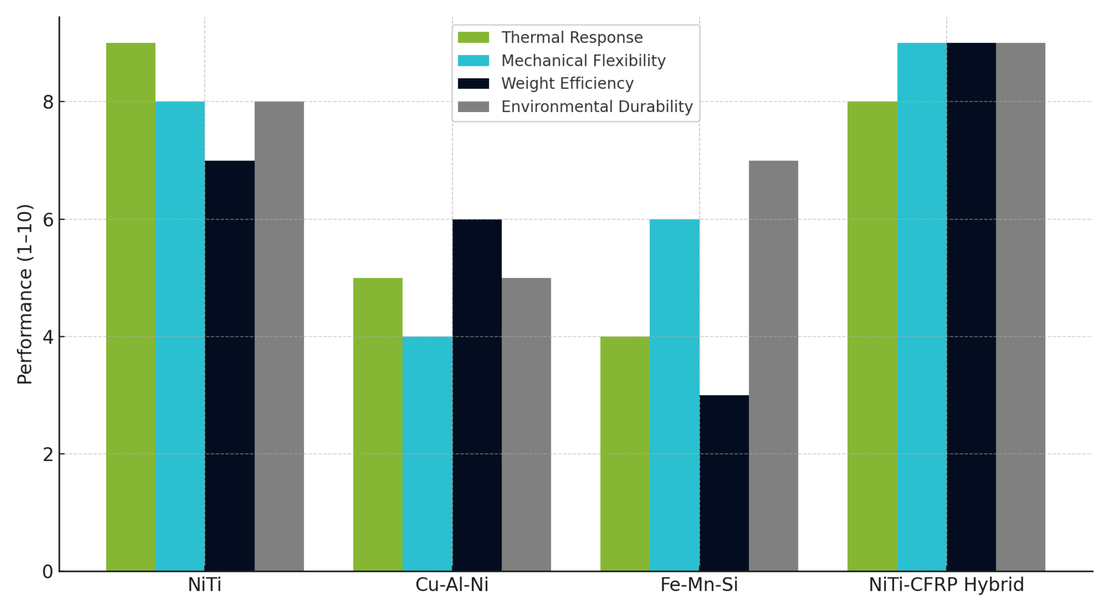


Chart 1. SMA Materials Performance Overview

Results

A comparative evaluation of four Shape Memory Alloys NiTi, Cu-Al-Ni, Fe-Mn-Si, and NiTi-CFRP Hybrid was conducted based on previously published research, focusing on thermal response, mechanical performance, weight, and environmental durability.

- NiTi exhibited fast activation and high flexibility [10].
- Cu-Al-Ni showed slower responsiveness and greater brittleness [11].
- Fe-Mn-Si was durable but heavier and less responsive [12].
- NiTi-CFRP Hybrid offered the best overall balance, combining rapid actuation, lightweight construction, and strong environmental resistance [13].

This comparison was based solely on literature review, without physical simulation. The results indicate that NiTi-CFRP Hybrid is the most promising candidate for passive tilt mechanisms in radio telescope applications.

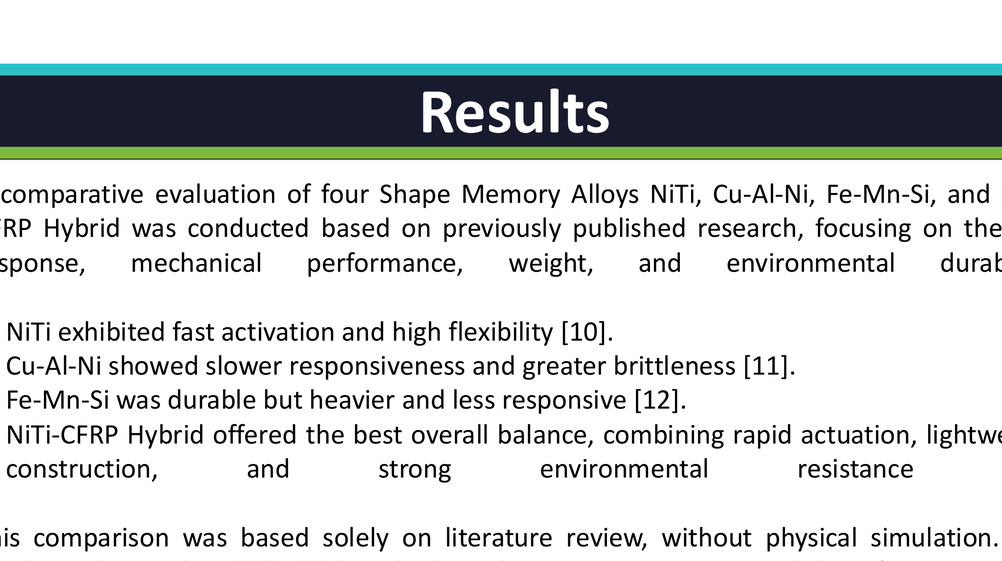


Figure 1. Trend Representation of SMA Properties Across Conditions

Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that the use of Shape Memory Alloys (SMAs) offers a promising solution to address the challenges of signal tracking in fixed radio telescopes by developing a passive tilt mechanism driven by thermal changes. Through a comprehensive literature review, four materials (NiTi, Cu-Al-Ni, Fe-Mn-Si, and NiTi-CFRP Hybrid) were compared based on their thermal responsiveness, mechanical performance, weight, and environmental durability.

The results identified NiTi-CFRP Hybrid as the optimal choice due to its rapid response, lightweight nature, and structural strength. Additionally, a small-scale prototype was constructed to practically test this mechanism, yielding encouraging preliminary results that confirm the potential of this approach to enhance signal reception efficiency while reducing energy consumption and costs by eliminating the need for traditional motors. Nevertheless, there remains a need for extensive testing and physical simulations under space-like conditions to validate the mechanism's real-world performance.

This work contributes to the development of innovative smart technologies in the field of radio telescopes, enhancing efficiency and sustainability in space exploration, and paves the way for future studies focused on the practical implementation of this technology.

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Group Members

Jana Sultan Al-shehri 444000294 |63T
Danah alromaih 444000229 |61T
Reema Aldosari 444000178 |64O
Tayef Ali Al-Rammah 444000285|640
Shahad Anas Alswailm 444000103|64O
Rama Fahad Alzaidy 444000316|64O
Elaf Abdulaziz Aldawsari 444000062| 63O

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