

DESCRIPTION

TITLE OF INVENTION

MARKER DETECTION SYSTEM AND METHOD OF OPERATING MARKER DETECTION
5 SYSTEM

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates to a marker detection
system for detecting a magnetic marker laid in a road and a method
10 of operating the marker detection system.

BACKGROUND ART

[0002] Conventionally, there has been a suggestion of a
magnetic marker detection method for detecting a magnetic marker
15 laid in a road by using a plurality of magnetic sensors attached
to a vehicle (for example, refer to Patent Literature 1 described
below). In this magnetic marker detection method, a difference
between output values of two or more magnetic sensors among the
plurality of magnetic sensors is obtained to suppress influences
20 of disturbance magnetism, thereby enhancing accuracy of detecting
the magnetic marker.

CITATION LIST

PATENT LITERATURE

25 [0003] Patent Literature 1: Japanese Unexamined Patent
Application Publication No. 2017-083189

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

TECHNICAL PROBLEM

30 [0004] However, the above-described conventional magnetic
marker detection method has the following problem. That is, if each
magnetic sensor has an individual difference in an output

characteristic, a variation error of the output values due to the individual difference is amplified by differential operation to become a large error. Thus, magnetic sensors are required to be regularly calibrated in a use period of the vehicle, which may increase burdens on a vehicle user side.

[0005] The present invention was made in view of the above-described conventional problem, and is to provide a system and an operating method capable of detecting a magnetic marker with high accuracy by using a plurality of magnetic sensors.

SOLUTION TO PROBLEM

[0006] One mode of the present invention resides in a marker detection system which detects a magnetic marker laid in a road by using a sensor unit in which a plurality of magnetic sensors which measure strength of magnetism are arranged, each of the magnetic sensors of the sensor unit being individually provided with a magnetic-field generation part which generates a magnetic field in accordance with a current passed, the system including:

a storage part which stores characteristic information of each of a plurality of the magnetic-field generation parts indicating a magnetic output characteristic, which is a relation between the current passed to the magnetic-field generation part and magnetism with which the magnetic-field generation part acts on a corresponding magnetic sensor of the magnetic sensors;

an estimation part which estimates a magnetic differential value A, which is an amount of change of the magnetism acting on the corresponding magnetic sensor due to a current differential value A, which is an amount of change of the current passed to the magnetic-field generation part, by referring to the characteristic information of each of the magnetic-field generation parts stored by the storage part; and

a calibration part which calibrates the each of the magnetic

sensors so as to enhance uniformity in sensitivity, which is a ratio between an output differential value A, which is an amount of change of a sensor output outputted by the corresponding magnetic sensor in accordance with a change of the current by the current differential value A acting on the magnetic-field generation part, and the magnetic differential value A estimated by the estimation part for the current differential value A.

[0007] One mode of the present invention resides in a method of operating a marker detection system which detects a magnetic marker laid in a road by using a sensor unit in which a plurality of magnetic sensors which measure strength of magnetism are arranged,

each of the magnetic sensors of the sensor unit being individually provided with a magnetic-field generation part which generates a magnetic field in accordance with a current passed, and the marker detection system including a storage part which stores characteristic information of each of a plurality of the magnetic-field generation parts indicating a magnetic output characteristic, which is a relation between the current passed to the magnetic-field generation part and magnetism with which the magnetic-field generation part acts on a corresponding magnetic sensor of the magnetic sensors,

the method including:

a magnetic estimation step of estimating a magnetic differential value A, which is an amount of change of the magnetism acting on the corresponding magnetic sensor due to a current differential value A, which is an amount of change of the current passed to the magnetic-field generation part, based on the characteristic information of each of the magnetic-field generation parts stored by the storage part; and

a calibration step of calibrating the each of the magnetic sensors so as to enhance uniformity in sensitivity, which is a ratio

between an output differential value A, which is an amount of change of a sensor output outputted by the corresponding magnetic sensor in accordance with a change of the current by the current differential value A acting on the magnetic-field generation part, and the magnetic differential value A estimated at the magnetic estimation step for the current differential value A.

Advantageous Effects of Invention

[0008] In the present invention, based on the characteristic information of the magnetic-field generation part, the magnetic differential value acting on the magnetic sensor by the magnetic-field generation part can be estimated. And, in the present invention, by using a result of estimation of the magnetic differential value acting on the magnetic sensor, the magnetic sensor can be calibrated.

[0009] As described above, according to the present invention, each magnetic sensor can be calibrated by using the magnetic-field generation part individually provided to each magnetic sensor, and highly-accurate detection of the magnetic marker laid in the road can be achieved.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0010] FIG. 1 is a front view of a vehicle with a sensor array attached thereto in a first embodiment.

FIG. 2 is a bird's eye view depicting a lane where magnetic markers are laid in the first embodiment.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram depicting a configuration of the sensor array in the first embodiment.

FIG. 4 is a block diagram depicting a configuration of magnetic sensors and a calibration circuit in the first embodiment.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram depicting a configuration of a detection unit in the first embodiment.

FIG. 6 is a flow diagram depicting a flow of a process for detecting a magnetic marker in the first embodiment.

FIG. 7 is a descriptive diagram of a device for performing a process under a maintenance mode in the first embodiment.

5 FIG. 8 is a flow diagram depicting a flow of the process under the maintenance mode in the first embodiment.

FIG. 9 is a flow diagram depicting a flow of a process under a normal mode in the first embodiment.

10 FIG. 10 depicts descriptive diagrams of a process of calibrating the magnetic sensor in the first embodiment ((a) sensor output characteristic of the magnetic sensor before calibration and (b) sensor output characteristic of the magnetic sensor after calibration).

15 FIG. 11 is a descriptive diagram depicting a pickup coil and a magnetic-field generation coil arranged in parallel along an amorphous wire in a second embodiment.

FIG. 12 is a referential diagram for describing a coil formation method in the second embodiment.

20 DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS

[0011] In the present invention, a current differential value acting on a magnetic-field generation part indicates an amount of change of current to be passed. For example, when a state of non-energization to the magnetic-field generation part is switched
25 to an energization state, a value of the current to be passed is switched from a zero state to a current value under the energization state, and thus the current differential value becomes the current value itself under the energization state.

Embodiments

30 [0012] Modes for implementing the present invention are specifically described by using following embodiments.

(FIRST EMBODIMENT)

The present embodiment is an example regarding a marker detection system and its operating method suitable for detecting a magnetism generation source. Details of this are described by using FIG. 1 to FIG. 10.

5 [0013] Marker detection device 1 forming one example of the marker detection system is a vehicle onboard device to be incorporated in vehicle 5 to detect magnetic markers 10 laid in a road, as in FIG. 1 and FIG. 2. Magnetic markers 10 are laid, for example, in road surface 100S so as to be along a center of lane
10 100 where vehicle 5 travels. For example, magnetic marker 10 forming a columnar shape having a diameter of 20 mm and a height of 28 mm is accommodated and buried in accommodation hole 100H bored in road surface 100S.

[0014] (1) Configuration of Marker Detection Device

15 As in FIG.1 and FIG.2, marker detection device 1 is a device with sensor array (one example of a sensor unit) 11 including a plurality of magnetic sensors S_n and detection unit (one example of a detection part) 12 having incorporated therein a CPU (central processing unit) not depicted and so forth combined together. In
20 particular, sensor array 11 of the present embodiment includes a function of calibrating magnetic sensors S_n .

[0015] Sensor array 11 is attached to vehicle-body floor 50
corresponding to a bottom surface of vehicle 5. In a case of vehicle 5 of the present embodiment, an attachment height with reference
25 to road surface 100S is approximately 200 mm.

Detection unit 12 is a unit which subjects a sensor signal outputted from sensor array 11 to a process and detects magnetic marker 10. A result of detection by detection unit 12 is inputted to, for example, an ECU (Electronic Control Unit) not depicted or
30 the like on a vehicle 5 side, and used in various controls such as automatic steering control and lane departure warning for vehicle 5 to travel while keeping the lane.

[0016] (1.1) Configuration of Sensor Array

Sensor array 11 is a sensor unit with fifteen sensor chips 2 arranged on a straight line as in FIG. 3. Sensor array 11 is configured to include, in addition to fifteen sensor chips 2, differential circuits D_n (n is a natural number of 1 to 15), differential circuits G_m (m is a natural number of 1 to 14), calibration circuit 110, and so forth.

[0017] Sensor chip 2 is an electronic component with one magnetic sensor S_n and one magnetic-field generation coil (one example of a magnetic-field generation part) C_n incorporated therein and further with an electronic circuit incorporated therein to be made into one chip. As the electronic circuit, pulse circuit 22 and signal processing circuit 24, which will be described further below, and so forth are incorporated. In sensor array 11, fifteen sensor chips 2 are arranged on the straight line. With this, in sensor array 11, a mode is achieved in which fifteen magnetic sensors S_n are arrayed on the straight line. Also, by adopting sensor chips 2 with magnetic-field generation coils C_n incorporated therein, a mode is achieved in which magnetic-field generation coil C_n is individually provided to each magnetic sensor S_n .

[0018] Sensor array 11 is attached so that magnetic sensor S_1 is positioned on a left side of vehicle 5 (on a passenger's side of a right-hand drive vehicle) and the other sensors are aligned in a numerical sequence toward right side along a vehicle-width direction. A space between magnetic sensors S_n in sensor array 11 is set at 70 mm so that two adjacent magnetic sensors can simultaneously detect magnetism of magnetic marker 10. With this space being set, it is possible to calculate a differential value indicating a gradient in the vehicle-width direction by differential operation or the like on output values from two adjacent magnetic sensors or operation values based on the output values.

[0019] Differential circuit D_n is a circuit which calculates

a differential operation value indicating a gradient in a time direction based on output values from each magnetic sensor S_n as in FIG. 3. Differential circuits D_n each store an output value at a time of a temporally-preceding previous magnetic measurement (sampling). Differential circuit D_n calculates a time differential value indicating the gradient in the time direction by subtracting a previous output value from a temporally-subsequent output value this time.

[0020] Differential circuit G_m is a circuit which calculates a differential value in the vehicle-width direction, which is a differential operation value indicating the gradient in the vehicle-width direction, by performing, as for time differential values of two differential circuits D_n corresponding to two adjacent magnetic sensors S_n , subtraction one time differential value from the other time differential value.

[0021] Sensor array 11 outputs differential operation values (differential values in the vehicle-width direction) by fourteen differential circuits G_m as sensor signals. Sensor array 11 includes output ports of fourteen channels so as to be able to simultaneously output the differential operation values of fourteen differential circuits G_m . Note that sensor array 11 of the present embodiment performs magnetic measurement in a cycle of 3 kHz so as to support high-speed traveling of vehicle 5 and inputs sensor signals to detection unit 12 every time magnetic measurement is performed.

[0022] In sensor chip 2 included in sensor array 11, as in FIG. 4, magnetic sensor S_n is configured by using an MI (Magneto-Impedance) element. The MI element is an element including amorphous wire (magnetic wire) 20 made of a CoFeSiB-based alloy and having nearly zero magnetostriction and pickup coil (coil) 21 wound around this amorphous wire 20. Magnetic sensor S_n is a high-sensitivity sensor with a measurement range of magnetic flux

density of ± 0.6 millitesla and a magnetic flux resolution of ± 0.02 microtesla in the measurement range. This high sensitivity is achieved by the MI effect, in which an impedance of amorphous wire 20 sensitively changes in accordance with an external magnetic field.

[0023] The MI element measures voltage occurring in pickup coil 21 when a pulse current is passed through amorphous wire 20, thereby detecting magnetism acting on amorphous wire 20. This MI element has detection sensitivity in an axial direction of amorphous wire 20, which is a magnetically sensitive body. Note that sensor array 11 is assembled to vehicle 5 so that amorphous wires 20 of respective magnetic sensors S_n are along the vehicle-width direction.

[0024] Pulse circuit 22 (FIG. 4) incorporated in sensor chip 2 is a circuit which generates a pulse signal as a source of the pulse current to be passed through amorphous wire 20.

Signal processing circuit 24 (FIG. 4) is a circuit which takes out induced voltage of pickup coil 21 by using synchronous detector 241 which opens and closes in conjunction with the pulse signal and amplifies that induced voltage by amplifier 242. Signal processing circuit 24 takes the induced voltage after amplification as an output value of magnetic sensor S_n , and inputs that value to differential circuit D_n (FIG. 3). Note that the output value of magnetic sensor S_n is inputted also to calibration circuit 110. Amplifier 242 of signal processing circuit 24 can adjust an amplification factor of the induced voltage with control by calibration circuit 110.

[0025] Magnetic-field generation coils C_n of respective sensor chips 2 are coils each formed of a wound electric wire, and are connected so as to be electrically in series to one another. Magnetic-field generation coil C_n generates a magnetic field in accordance with energization by calibration circuit 110 to cause magnetism to act on magnetic sensor S_n . The calibration function of magnetic sensors S_n included in sensor array 11 is achieved by

using these magnetic-field generation coils Cn. Magnetic-field generation coils Cn, each of which is the coil formed of the wound electric wire, have characteristics of high linearity in a quantity of magnetism with respect to a magnitude of energizing current, and thus are suitable for calibration of magnetic sensors Sn.

[0026] Each magnetic-field generation coil Cn has common design specifications and also has common embedding specifications which define a relative positional relation with magnetic sensor Sn. Also, through respective magnetic-field generation coils Cn connected in series, current supplied from calibration circuit 110 is equally passed. Therefore, in view of design, each magnetic-field generation coil Cn can equally act on its corresponding magnetic sensor Sn with magnetism. However, variation in a magnetic output characteristic of each magnetic-field generation coil Cn is unavoidable and, moreover, variation in positional relation with magnetic sensor Sn is also unavoidable. Thus, a variation error occurs in the quantity of magnetism with which each magnetic-field generation coil Cn acts on its corresponding magnetic sensor Sn.

[0027] Calibration circuit 110 (FIG. 4) is configured to include coil driving part 114 which performs energization to magnetic-field generation coils Cn and calibration part 112 which performs a calibration process on magnetic sensors Sn and other processes. Calibration part 112 is configured to include a CPU; a ROM (read only memory), a RAM (random access memory), and a flash ROM; an I/O; and so forth. This calibration part 112 includes functions as a storage part which stores characteristic information (magnetic output characteristics) of magnetic-field generation coils Cn required for calibrating magnetic sensors Sn, and as an estimation part which estimates a magnetic differential value acting on magnetic sensor Sn due to a current differential value acting on magnetic-field generation coil Cn, and so forth. Here,

the current differential value indicates an amount of change of current to be passed to magnetic-field generation coil Cn. The magnetic differential value indicates an amount of change of magnetism acting on magnetic sensor Sn.

5 [0028] Coil driving part 114 is configured to include constant current circuit 114A which supplies current to magnetic-field generation coils Cn and current measurement circuit 114B which measures a current value of supply current. Constant current circuit 114A supplies current to magnetic-field generation coils
10 Cn in accordance with the control by calibration circuit 110. Current measurement circuit 114B inputs measured current values of magnetic-field generation coils Cn to calibration part 112.

[0029] Calibration part 112 can perform operating modes of at least two types, with the CPU processing a program read from the
15 ROM. The operating modes include a normal mode to be performed during a use period of vehicle 5 and a maintenance mode at a time of factory shipping or maintenance work. Switching between the normal mode and the maintenance mode is performed with control by, for example, externally-connected maintenance device 61 (refer to
20 FIG. 7).

[0030] The normal mode is an operating mode for calibrating each magnetic sensor Sn in the use period of vehicle 5. The maintenance mode is an operating mode for identifying a magnetic output characteristic (characteristic information) of each
25 magnetic-field generation coil Cn by using reference magnetism of Helmholtz coil 60 (refer to FIG. 7). The characteristic information (will be described further below) of each magnetic-field generation coil Cn identified in this maintenance mode is stored by a storage part such as the flash ROM configuring calibration circuit 110
30 (calibration part 112) and used in calibration of magnetic sensors Sn. Note that details of each operation mode will be described further below with reference to flow diagrams of FIG. 8 and FIG.

9 and so forth.

[0031] Here, Helmholtz coil 60 of FIG. 7 is a coil system which includes two circular coils in common specifications arranged as being separated from each other on a same axis, with a space between
5 two circular coils being equal to a radius of the coils. In this Helmholtz coil 60, with equal currents in a same orientation being passed through the two circular coils, a magnetic field with high uniformity can be generated. Magnetism generated by Helmholtz coil 60 can be used as reference magnetism, which is a reference quantity
10 of magnetism. Note that a Maxwell coil is also favorably used, in which a large-diameter coil is concentrically arranged on an outer peripheral side of Helmholtz coil 60 to further enhance uniformity of the magnetic field.

[0032] (1.2) Configuration of Detection Unit

15 Detection unit 12 is a unit, as in FIG. 5, which includes an electronic substrate (omitted in the drawings) with a CPU which performs various calculations, memory elements such as a ROM and a RAM, and so forth implemented thereon. This detection unit 12 supports collective intake of sensor signals of fourteen channels
20 outputted by sensor array 11.

[0033] Detection unit 12 includes filtering process circuit 125 which subjects time-series data to a filtering process based on sensor signals outputted by sensor array 11 and detection processing circuit 127 which performs a marker detection process.
25 Also, this detection unit 12 is provided with data areas M1 to M14 (denoted as Mm as appropriate) storing sensor signals outputted by sensor array 11 and data areas H1 to H14 (denoted as Hm as appropriate) storing filtered output values of filtering process circuit 125.

30 [0034] Data areas Mm are storage areas for sequentially storing data indicated by sensor signals of fourteen channels outputted by sensor array 11 in the cycle of 3 kHz as described above and storing

that data as time-series data for each channel.

Filtering process circuit 125 is a circuit which subjects time-series data of fourteen channels stored in data areas Mm to the filtering process for each channel. A filter applied to this filtering process is a high-pass filter which suppresses or cuts off low-frequency components and lets high-frequency components pass.

[0035] (2) Operation of Marker Detection Device

As the operation of marker detection device 1, (2.1) operation of detecting magnetic marker 10 is generally described, and then details about (2.2) operation of calibrating magnetic sensors Sn are described. Note that, as described above, (2.2) operation of calibrating magnetic sensors Sn includes (2.2.1) process under the maintenance mode and (2.2.2) process under the normal mode.

[0036] (2.1) Operation of Detecting Magnetic Marker

In detecting magnetic marker 10, detection unit 12 controls sensor array 11 so that magnetic measurement is performed by each magnetic sensor Sn in, for example, the cycle of 3 kHz, as in FIG. 6 (S101). Output value Rn of each magnetic sensor Sn is first inputted to differential circuit Dn (FIG. 3), and the time differential value indicating the gradient of output value Rn of magnetic sensor Sn in the time direction is obtained (S102).

[0037] The time differential value of each magnetic sensor Sn is inputted to differential circuit Gm (FIG. 3) which calculates a difference in the vehicle-width direction. For example, time differential values of differential circuits D1 and D2 are inputted to differential circuit G1, where a differential operation of subtracting the time differential value of D1 from the time differential value of D2 is performed (S103). A differential value in the vehicle-width direction, which is a differential operation value in the vehicle-width direction by differential circuit Gm, is a value of a difference between time differential values regarding

two magnetic sensors S_n adjacent to each other in sensor array 11, and indicates a gradient of the time differential value in the vehicle-width direction.

[0038] Here, the differential operations at S102 and S103 in FIG. 6 by differential circuits D_n and differential circuits G_m are very effective in removing common magnetic noise uniformly acting on each magnetic sensor S_n . It is highly probable that the common magnetic noise occurs not only from geomagnetism but also from a large-size magnetism generation source such as, for example, an iron bridge or another vehicle. In the case of a large magnetism generation source, a magnetic-field loop from the N pole to the S pole is very large, and thus the magnetic field becomes close to be uniform at an intermediate position between both poles, exhibiting a mode of the common magnetic noise in which the magnetism acting on each magnetic sensor S_n is close to be uniform. According to the differential operations at S102 and S103 described above, this common magnetic noise can be efficiently removed.

[0039] Sensor array 11 collectively outputs sensor signals of fourteen channels formed of differential values in the vehicle-width direction by differential circuits G_m . Detection unit 12 stores time-series data for each channel based on these sensor signals in data areas M_m (FIG. 5). When acquiring new sensor signals, detection unit 12 deletes the most obsolete data among data stored in data area M_m and progressively sends each piece of data in data area M_m to provide a free area, and stores data indicated by a newly-acquired sensor signal in that free area. This generates, in data areas M_m , time-series data of differential values in the vehicle-width direction by differential circuits G_m over a previous predetermined period.

[0040] Detection unit 12 inputs the time-series data for each channel stored in data area M_m to filtering process circuit 125. Filtering process circuit 125 performs the filtering process for

cutting off low-frequency components and letting high-frequency components pass through (high-pass filtering process) (in FIG. 6, S104), and stores filtered output values in data areas Hm. Then, detection unit 12 performs the marker detection process for
5 detecting magnetic marker 10 by using the filtered output values stored in data areas Hm (S105).

[0041] Detection unit 12 which performs this marker detection process extracts filtered output values derived from magnetic marker 10 by, for example, threshold process or the like regarding
10 the filtered output values stored in data areas Hm, thereby detecting magnetic marker 10. Furthermore, a relative position of magnetic marker 10 in the vehicle-width direction is identified based on, for example, which data area among data areas H1 to H14 a filtered output value exceeding a threshold belongs to, or the like.

15 [0042] For example, in the case of the large magnetism generation source such as a bridge or a tunnel, as described above, a certain effect can be achieved in which the differential operations at S102 and S103 of FIG. 6 can suppress external magnetism such as uniformly-acting common magnetic noise or the like. However, even
20 in the large magnetism generation source, a magnetic field with magnetic lines of forces forming a loop-shaped route is formed on a periphery of end parts serving as magnetic poles to cause a magnetic gradient to occur. If the magnetic gradient occurs, it is difficult to remove magnetism only with the differential operations at S102
25 and S103.

[0043] A peripheral magnetic field of the large magnetism generation source and a peripheral magnetic field of a small magnetism generation source have different change ratios of the magnetic gradient depending on a difference in distance between the
30 magnetic poles. That is, in the peripheral magnetic field of the large magnetism generation source with a long distance between the magnetic poles, a distance until a magnetic gradient of one magnetic

pole makes a transition to a magnetic gradient of the other magnetic pole is long, and the magnetic gradient mildly changes even on the peripheries of the end parts serving as the magnetic poles. On the other hand, in the peripheral magnetic field of the small magnetism generation source with a short distance between the magnetic poles, the magnetic gradient abruptly changes to increase its change ratio.

[0044] According to the filtering process for cutting off low-frequency components (S104), it is possible to remove or suppress components of the magnetic gradient with mild changes in the peripheral magnetic fields at the end parts of the large magnetism generation source such as a bridge or a tunnel. On the other hand, the components of the magnetic gradient with abrupt changes derived from magnetic marker 10 as the small magnetism generation source are not suppressed by the filtering process at S104 but can pass through. In this manner, based on the filtered output values of the filtering process (S104) including many components of the magnetic gradient derived from magnetic marker 10 as the small magnetism generation source can be detected with high reliability.

[0045] (2.2) Operation of Calibrating Magnetic Sensors

In the above-described operation of detecting magnetic marker 10, common magnetic noise is removed by obtaining temporal differences and differences in the vehicle-width direction of output values of magnetic sensors S_n , thereby trying to enhance accuracy of detection of magnetic marker 10. However, differential operations have characteristics of amplifying an error. In particular, a differential operation between different magnetic sensors has a problem of expanding an adverse effect of a variation error due to individual differences in magnetic sensors S_n . To suppress the adverse effect by the differential operations before it happens, calibration of magnetic sensors S_n is important.

[0046] Processes to be performed by calibration circuit 110

(FIG. 3) to calibrate magnetic sensors S_n include (2.2.1) process under the maintenance mode at the time of factory shipping or maintenance work and (2.2.2) process under the normal mode, which is an operation mode to be performed during a vehicle's use period.

5 [0047] (2.2.1) Process Under Maintenance Mode

The process under the maintenance mode is a process for identifying a magnetic output characteristic (characteristic information) of magnetic-field generation coil C_n by using reference magnetism of Helmholtz coil 60. Since magnetic-field generation coil C_n has high linearity between a current value and a quantity of magnetism, if the magnetic output characteristic is obtained, the quantity of magnetism acting on magnetic sensor S_n can be quantitatively controlled or estimated. For example, a case is described in which, as a magnetism output characteristic of magnetic-field generation coil C_n , quantity of magnetism H is grasped when current with certain current value I is passed. Here, if current with a current value of $0.5I$ is passed through magnetic-field generation coils C_n , a quantity of magnetism of $0.5H$ can be acted on the corresponding magnetic sensor S_n from magnetic-field generation coil C_n .

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[0048] The process under the maintenance mode is performed by using dedicated maintenance device 61 which performs, for example, power supply, operating-mode switching, or the like; magnetic-field generation device 6 which generates a uniform magnetic field; and so forth, as in FIG. 7. Magnetic-field generation device 6 is, for example, a magnetic device including Helmholtz coil 60. Maintenance device 61 is connected to both of sensor array 11 and magnetic-field generation device 6. Maintenance device 61 supplies operating power to sensor array 11, and also intermediates between sensor array 11 and magnetic-field generation device 6 for transmission and reception of status information indicating an operating status.

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[0049] The process under the maintenance mode is performed in a state in which sensor array 11 is held in a uniform magnetic-field space formed by magnetic-field generation device 6 (FIG. 7). When acquiring status information indicating a standby state in which
5 preparation for energization from magnetic-field generation device 6 to Helmholtz coil 60 has been completed, maintenance device 61 transfers that status information to sensor array 11.

[0050] When the status information of magnetic-field generation device 6 indicating the standby state is received,
10 calibration circuit 110 of sensor array 11 causes each magnetic sensor S_n to perform magnetic measurement. With this magnetic measurement, calibration circuit 110 acquires sensor output value R_{1n} when magnetism by Helmholtz coil 60 does not act (FIG. 8, S201). Calibration circuit 110 stores sensor output value R_{1n} as a sensor
15 output of each magnetic sensor S_n in a non-energization state of Helmholtz coil 60 and magnetic-field generation coils C_n . In general, this sensor output value R_{1n} is often not zero, because of external magnetism in nature, offset of the sensor output value, or the like.

[0051] Receiving a status information indicating completion
20 of magnetic measurement from sensor array 11, magnetic-field generation device 6 starts energization to Helmholtz coil 60 (S202). Magnetic-field generation device 6 controls an energizing current of Helmholtz coil 60 so that reference magnetism H_k , which is the
25 reference quantity of magnetism, acts on each magnetic sensor S_n of sensor array 11.

[0052] A magnetic field generated by Helmholtz coil 60 acts
on each magnetic sensor S_n as a bias magnetic field to be superposed on the external magnetic field. Therefore, when reference
30 magnetism H_k of Helmholtz coil 60 is acted on each magnetic sensor S_n , the quantity of magnetism acting on magnetic sensor S_n changes by reference magnetism H_k . That is, reference magnetic

differential value (one example of magnetic differential value C) ΔH_s , which is an amount of change of magnetism acting on each magnetic sensor S_n when energization to Helmholtz coil 60 starts, becomes $\Delta H_s = H_k$. After becoming in a state of acting on each magnetic sensor S_n with reference magnetism H_k , magnetic-field generation device 6 transmits, via maintenance device 61 to calibration circuit 110, status information indicating that energization is being performed.

[0053] When receiving the status information of magnetic-field generation device 6 indicating that energization is being performed, calibration circuit 110 causes each magnetic sensor S_n to perform magnetic measurement, thereby acquiring sensor output value R_{2n} (S203). Furthermore, maintenance device 61 calculates, for each magnetic sensor S_n , reference output differential value ΔR_{sn} ($=R_{2n}-R_{1n}$, one example of output differential value C), which indicates an amount of change of a sensor output of magnetic sensor S_n when energization to Helmholtz coil 60 starts (S204, sensor characteristic acquiring step).

[0054] Calibration circuit 110 stores, for each magnetic sensor S_n , a numerical combination ($\Delta H_s \leftrightarrow \Delta R_{sn}$) of reference magnetic differential value ΔH_s (common for each magnetic sensor S_n) stored at step S202 described above and reference output differential value ΔR_{sn} calculated at step S204, as a sensor output characteristic indicating characteristic information of each magnetic sensor S_n (S205, sensor characteristic acquiring step). This combination represents the sensor output characteristic that an output differential value of magnetic sensor S_n when the quantity of magnetism acting on magnetic sensor S_n changes by ΔH_s is ΔR_{sn} .

[0055] When receiving from sensor array 11 status information indicating that the sensor output characteristic (characteristic information) of every magnetic sensor S_n has been completely stored, magnetic-field generation device 6 stops energization to Helmholtz coil 60 (FIG. 7) (S206). When receiving status information

indicating that energization to Helmholtz coil 60 has been stopped, sensor array 11 starts energization to magnetic-field generation coils Cn (S207).

[0056] Note that since magnetic-field generation coils Cn are connected to be in series, the magnitude of an energization current of each magnetic-field generation coil Cn is equal. As current value I1 to be passed through magnetic-field generation coil Cn, a current value that can act on magnetic sensor Sn with a quantity of magnetism close to reference magnetism Hk by Helmholtz coil 60 is preferably set, based on the design specifications of magnetic-field generation coil Cn such as a number of winding or a coil diameter. If the energization current to magnetic-field generation coil Cn is switched from a current value of zero to current value I1, a current differential value indicating an amount of change of the current value to be passed through magnetic-field generation coil Cn becomes $\Delta I_a = I_1$. Note that since magnetic-field generation coils Cn are mutually connected to be in series, current differential value ΔI_a , which is one example of current differential value B, is common for each magnetic-field generation coil Cn. On the other hand, since the magnetic output characteristic varies for each magnetic-field generation coil Cn, the quantity of magnetism with which each magnetic-field generation coil Cn acts on magnetic sensor Sn is not constant but variation occurs.

[0057] During a period in which current value I1 is passed to each magnetic-field generation coil Cn, calibration circuit 110 performs magnetic measurement by each magnetic sensor Sn, and acquires sensor output value R3n for each magnetic sensor Sn (S208, magnetic measurement step). Then, calibration circuit 110 performs, for each magnetic sensor Sn, a calculation of subtracting sensor output value R1n (sensor output value at S201 described above) when magnetism from magnetic-field generation coil Cn and Helmholtz coil 60 does not act from sensor output value R3n when magnetism of

magnetic-field generation coil C_n acts. With this, output differential value ΔR_{cn} ($=R_{3n}-R_{1n}$, one example of output differential value B), which is an amount of change of the sensor output of magnetic sensor S_n in accordance with current differential value ΔI_a , which is an amount of change of the energization current to magnetic-field generation coil C_n , is acquired for each magnetic sensor S_n (S209, magnetic measurement step).

[0058] To estimate magnetic differential value ΔH_{an} (one example of magnetic differential value B) corresponding to output differential value ΔR_{cn} of each magnetic sensor S_n , calibration circuit 110 first refers to the sensor output characteristic ($\Delta H_s \Leftrightarrow \Delta R_{sn}$) of magnetic sensor S_n stored at step S205 described above (S210, magnetic output characteristic acquiring step). Then, by a proportional calculation based on a sensor output characteristic of magnetic sensor S_n that output differential value ΔR_{sn} is generated due to magnetic differential value ΔH_s , magnetic differential value ΔH_{an} ($= (\Delta R_{cn} / \Delta R_{sn}) \times \Delta H_s$) corresponding to output differential value ΔR_{cn} (S209 described above) of each magnetic sensor S_n is obtained (S211, magnetic output characteristic acquiring step). Then, calibration circuit 110 stores, as a magnetic output characteristic of magnetic-field generation coil C_n , magnetic differential value ΔH_{an} and current differential value ΔI_a in association with each other, thereby storing a numerical combination of both (S212, magnetic output characteristic acquiring step).

[0059] With the process under the maintenance mode in the procedure as described being performed, reference magnetism H_k of Helmholtz coil 60 is caused to be measured by magnetic sensor S_n , the sensor output characteristic of each magnetic sensor S_n can be grasped (sensor characteristic acquiring step). Furthermore, if magnetism with which magnetic-field generation coil C_n acts is measured by each magnetic sensor S_n whose sensor output

characteristic has been grasped (magnetic measurement step), the magnetic output characteristic of that magnetic-field generation coil Cn can be grasped (magnetic output characteristic acquiring step).

5 [0060] In general, magnetic-field generation coil Cn with an electric wire wound therearound has high linearity in the magnitude of magnetism with respect to a magnitude of current to be passed, and a quantity of magnetism changes substantially in proportion to a current value of energization current. Therefore, according to
10 magnetic-field generation coil Cn whose magnetic output characteristic has been grasped, the quantity of magnetism acting on corresponding magnetic sensor Sn can be quantitatively controlled, and calibration of magnetic sensors Sn is helped.

[0061] (2.2.2) Process Under Normal Mode

15 In a vehicle's use period, various types of magnetism act on each magnetic sensor Sn from inside and outside of vehicle 5. In particular, vehicle 5 has various electronic components on board that can serve as magnetism generation sources. Magnetism from these electronic components may act on magnetic sensors Sn to make
20 their quantity of magnetism larger than a quantity of magnetism acting from magnetic marker 10. Also, since a structure in an RC construction such as a tunnel or a bridge configuring a road can serve as the large magnetism generation source, a magnitude of external magnetism acting from outside on vehicle 5 fluctuates in
25 accordance with a traveling environment.

[0062] In general, a sensitivity of a magnetic sensor, that is, a ratio of an amount of change ΔR of the sensor output value when a quantity of acting magnetism changes by ΔH , can be handled as being constant if ΔH is small. On the other hand, the sensitivity
30 of magnetic sensor Sn may greatly change in accordance with a level of an absolute value of a quantity of magnetism of a measurement target, that is, a level of a fluctuation range of the quantity of

magnetism. Furthermore, this degree of fluctuations of the sensitivity varies for each magnetic sensor S_n due to the individual difference. Thus, if the range of fluctuations of the quantity of magnetism acting on each magnetic sensor S_n is shifted in the use
5 period of vehicle 5, there is a high possibility of occurrence of variation in the sensitivity of each magnetic sensor S_n . If variation occurs in the sensitivity for each magnetic sensor S_n , an error occurs in the time differential value by each differential circuit D_n . And, this error in the time differential value is
10 further enlarged by differential operation by differential circuit G_m , and thus may become a factor in decreasing accuracy of detecting magnetic marker 10.

[0063] The process under the normal mode by calibration circuit 110 is performed to enhance uniformity of sensitivity of each
15 magnetic sensor S_n to suppress an error in time differential value during the use period of vehicle 5. This process under normal mode is preferably performed in a situation in which external magnetism acts almost uniformly on each magnetic sensor S_n of sensor array 11. For example, a situation is suitable in which magnetism derived
20 from a relatively small magnetism generation source such as magnetic marker 10 or a manhole, or an end part of the large magnetism generation source such as a bridge in an RC construction does not act on sensor array 11.

[0064] As in FIG. 9, first, in a state of non-energization to
25 magnetic-field generation coils C_n , calibration circuit 110 measures magnetism acting almost uniformly from outside to each magnetic sensor S_n , and sequentially stores sensor output value R_{4n} of each sensor S_n (S301). Subsequently, calibration circuit 110 starts energization to magnetic-field generation coils C_n (S302).
30 As current value I_2 at this time, current value I_1 equal to that at step S207 described above under the maintenance mode may be set, or a different current value may be set. In the present embodiment,

current value I2 equal to current value I1 is passed to each magnetic-field generation coil Cn. Thus, current differential value ΔI_b (one example of current differential value A), which is an amount of change of current to be passed to each magnetic-field generation coil Cn, becomes $\Delta I_b = I_2 = I_1$.

[0065] Calibration circuit 110 causes each magnetic sensor Sn to perform magnetic measurement during energization to each magnetic-field generation coil Cn to acquire sensor output value R5n (S303). Then, output differential value ΔR_{cn} ($=R_{5n}-R_{4n}$, one example of output differential value A) of each magnetic sensor Sn in accordance with the change of current by current differential value ΔI_b at a start of energization to magnetic-field generation coil Cn is obtained by calculation (S304).

[0066] Calibration circuit 110 refers to the magnetic output characteristic ($\Delta H_{an} \Leftrightarrow \Delta I_a$) of magnetic-field generation coil Cn stored at step S212 described above under the maintenance mode (S305). Then, by using this magnetic output characteristic, magnetic differential value ΔH_{bn} (one example of magnetic differential value A), which is a change in the quantity of magnetism acting on each magnetic sensor Sn, is estimated by current differential value ΔI_b when current value I2 is passed through magnetic-field generation coil Cn at step S302 (S306, magnetic estimation step).

[0067] A method of estimating this magnetic differential value ΔH_{bn} assumes that the magnetic differential value changes almost linearly with respect to the current differential value and that a proportional relation between ΔH_{an} and ΔI_a in magnetic output characteristic ($\Delta H_{an} \Leftrightarrow \Delta I_a$) referred to at step S305 is held even if an external environment fluctuates. Magnetic differential value ΔH_{bn} when current differential value ΔI_b is acted on magnetic-field generation coil Cn can be estimated by an operation expression of $\Delta H_{bn} = (\Delta I_b / \Delta I_a) \times \Delta H_{an}$. In the present embodiment, since current differential value $\Delta I_a = \Delta I_b$, magnetic differential value ΔH_{bn} is

equal to ΔH_{an} .

[0068] Calibration circuit 110 obtains an amplification ratio of output differential value ΔR_{cn} so that a ratio between output differential value ΔR_{cn} of magnetic sensor S_n according to step S304 and magnetic differential value ΔH_{bn} estimated as step 306 becomes a predetermined value (S307, calibration step). Then, calibration circuit 110 calibrates each magnetic sensor S_n by setting the amplification ratio of each magnetic sensor S_n obtained by calculation to its corresponding amplifier 242 (S308, calibration step).

[0069] Here, the predetermined value at step S307 described above represents the sensitivity of magnetic sensor S_n with respect to acting magnetic differential value ΔH_{bn} . Therefore, if step S307 described above is performed for each magnetic sensor S_n , the sensitivity of every magnetic sensor S_n can be made close to be uniform. Details of this are described with reference to FIGs. 10(a) and 10(b) exemplarily depicting sensor output characteristics of any two magnetic sensors S_α and S_β (α and β are different natural numbers of 1 to 15) of magnetic sensors S_n . A horizontal axis in the drawings represents quantity of magnetism H acting on the magnetic sensor, and a vertical axis represents sensor output value R of the magnetic sensor.

[0070] For example, when an acting quantity of magnetism changes by ΔH (that is when the magnetic differential value is ΔH), if there is a difference in sensitivity in any two magnetic sensors S_α and S_β , a difference occurs between output differential values ΔR_α and ΔR_β , which are amounts of change of output values, as in FIG. 10(a). If the above-described steps S307 and S308 of individually setting the amplification ration for each of magnetic sensors S_α and S_β are performed, as in FIG. 10(b), amount of change $\Delta R_\alpha'$ and amount of change $\Delta R_\beta'$ corresponding to the magnetic sensors S_α and S_β , respectively can be made equal.

[0071] By a line of thinking similar to that in the case of
FIGS. 10(a) and 10(b), if each magnetic sensor S_n is calibrated so
that amount of fluctuation ΔR_n of output value R_n of each magnetic
sensor S_n when the quantity of magnetism changes by ΔH becomes
5 uniform, it is possible to suppress an error due to variation for
each magnetic sensor S_n in the time differential value by
differential circuit D_n . If a variation error in the time
differential value for each magnetic sensor S_n is suppressed, it
is possible to avoid a possibility before it happens that the error
10 is amplified to become excessive when differential circuit G_m
obtains a differential value in the vehicle-width direction for a
time differential value. By using the differential value in the
vehicle-width direction with less error, magnetic marker 10 can be
detected with high accuracy by a subsequent filtering process or
15 the like.

[0072] Note that calibration circuit 110 repeatedly performs
the above-described process under the normal mode when the range
of fluctuations of the quantity of magnetism acting magnetic sensors
 S_n is shifted due to fluctuations in the magnitude of external
20 magnetism or the like, when a regular calibration period comes, and
so forth, and performs calibration of magnetic sensors S_n as occasion
arises. According to this method of operating marker detection
device 1, even if magnetic environmental changes, changes with time,
changes of environments such as temperature and humidity, and so
25 forth occur, an error in the time differential value for each
magnetic sensor S_n can be avoided, and high detection accuracy can
be kept. Also, it is not required to take the vehicle into a
maintenance facility or the like for every occasion of maintenance
including calibration of magnetic sensors S_n , thereby allowing
30 reduction in time and effort, expense, and so forth on a vehicle
user side. A threshold value may be set for a level of the range
of fluctuations of the quantity of magnetism. For example, it is

also preferable that when the quantity of magnetism when magnetism of the magnetic marker does not act fluctuates by more than the threshold value, it is determined that the range of fluctuations of the quantity of magnetism is shifted and the process under the normal mode is performed.

[0073] As described above, marker detection device 1 of the present embodiment is a device including a function of calibrating magnetic sensors Sn. In this marker detection device 1, a state in which each magnetic sensor Sn is favorably calibrated can be kept, and it is thus possible to detect magnetic marker 10 with high accuracy.

[0074] In a configuration of the present embodiment according to sensor array 11 including fifteen magnetic sensors, as described above, a configuration is adopted in which respective magnetic-field generation coils Cn are electrically connected in series. When magnetic-field generation coils Cn are connected in series, an equal current can be simultaneously passed through each magnetic-field generation coil Cn, and each magnetic sensor Sn can be efficiently calibrated.

In the process under the maintenance mode, it is preferable that a calibration process is performed in which the sensitivity of each magnetic sensor Sn is made uniform by using reference magnetism Hk with which Helmholtz coil 60 acts on each magnetic sensor Sn. In this calibration process, it is required that the amplification ratio of each amplifier 242 be set so that the output differential value, which is an amount of change of a sensor output outputted by magnetic sensor Sn becomes uniform with respect to magnetic differential value ΔH_s with which Helmholtz coil 60 acts on each magnetic sensor Sn. In this case, at step S205 in FIG. 8, a sensor output characteristic after this calibration process is performed is preferably stored.

[0075] Note that differential circuits Dn may be omitted based

on the configuration of sensor array 11 of the present embodiment. In this case, a time subtraction is not performed for sensor output value R_n of each magnetic sensor S_n , and a subtraction between sensor output values is performed with another magnetic sensor. Therefore, in this case, magnetic sensors S_n are preferably calibrated so that output value R_n of each magnetic sensor S_n is made close to be uniform. To make output value R_n of each magnetic sensor S_n close to be uniform, it is preferable to appropriately set an amplification ratio and an offset value of each amplifier 242 so that output value R_n of each magnetic sensor S_n becomes uniform when magnetism of magnetic marker 10 does not act on sensor array 11.

[0076] Note that when the current to be passed to act on magnetic-field generation coils C_n is changed by switching from a non-energization state to an energization state, a current value before the change is zero, and thus a current value after switching to the energization state itself becomes a current differential value. The current differential value in this case corresponds to a current value after switching when magnetic-field generation coils C_n are switched from the non-energization state to the energization state.

[0077] As characteristic information indicating a magnetic output characteristic of magnetic-field generation coil C_n forming one example of the magnetic-field generation part, information of a combination of the current differential value acting on magnetic-field generation coil C_n and the magnetic differential value acting on corresponding magnetic sensor S_n is exemplarily described. As characteristic information of magnetic-field generation coil C_n , a combination of the current value to be passed through the magnetic-field generation coil and the quantity of magnetism acting on the magnetic sensor may be used, or a ratio of the magnitude of magnetism acting on magnetic sensor S_n with respect to the current to be passed, that is, sensitivity, may be used. The

characteristic information is any information indicating a relation between the current to be passed through magnetic-field generation coil Cn and the magnetism acting on magnetic sensor Sn.

[0078] Regarding characteristic information indicating a sensor output characteristic of magnetic sensor Sn, information of a combination of the magnetic differential value acting on magnetic sensor Sn and the output differential value, which is an amount of change of the sensor output outputted by magnetic sensor Sn is exemplarily described. As characteristic information of magnetic sensor Sn, a combination of the quantity of magnetism acting on the magnetic sensor and the sensor output value outputted by the magnetic sensor may be used, or a ratio of the sensor output value with respect to the acting quantity of magnetism may be used. The characteristic information is any information indicating a relation between the magnetism acting on magnetic sensor Sn and the sensor output by the magnetic sensor.

[0079] While a configuration provided with differential circuit Gm on a downstream side of differential circuits Dn is exemplarily depicted in the present embodiment, instead of this, a configuration may be adopted in which a differential value in the time direction is calculated by targeting differential values in the width-direction between the output values of magnetic sensors Sn. Note that a process when an order of differential circuits Dn and differential circuits Gm is reversed is equivalent to a process of sensor array 11 of the present embodiment, as will be described further below.

[0080] The reversal of the order of the difference circuits is described by assuming, for example, that output values of magnetic sensor S1 at different timings T1 and T2 are R1[T1] and R1[T2] and output values of magnetic sensor S2 in a similar situation are R2[T1] and R2[T2]. Time differential values regarding the output values of magnetic sensors S1 and S2 are (R1[T1]-R1[T2]) and

(R2[T1]-R2[T2]), respectively. Thus, a differential value in the vehicle-width direction for these two time differential values is $(R2[T1]-R2[T2])-(R1[T1]-R1[T2])=(R2[T1]-R2[T2]-R1[T1]+R1[T2])$.

On the other hand, differential values in the vehicle-width direction at timings T1 and T2 regarding the output values of magnetic sensors S1 and S2 are $(R2[T1]-R1[T1])$ and $(R2[T2]-R1[T2])$, respectively. Therefore, a time differential value for these differential values in the vehicle-width direction is $(R2[T1]-R1[T1])-(R2[T2]-R1[T2])=(R2[T1]-R1[T1]-R2[T2]+R1[T2])$.

This operation expression is equivalent to the above-described operation expression for calculating time differential values and then calculating a differential value in the vehicle-width direction.

[0081] While magnetic sensors Sn with sensitivity to the vehicle-width direction are adopted in the present embodiment, magnetic sensors with sensitivity to a forwarding direction may be adopted, or magnetic sensors with sensitivity to a vertical direction may be adopted. Furthermore, for example, magnetic sensors with sensitivity in two axis directions of the vehicle-width direction and the forwarding direction or two axis directions of the forwarding direction and the vertical direction may be adopted and, for example, magnetic sensors with sensitivity in three axis directions of the vehicle-width direction, the forwarding direction, and the vertical direction may be adopted. If magnetic sensors with sensitivity in a plurality of axis directions are used, the magnitude of magnetism and an acting direction of magnetism can be measured, and magnetic vectors can be generated. By using a difference between magnetic vectors or a change ratio of the difference in the forwarding direction, distinction between magnetism of magnetic markers 10 and disturbance magnetism is preferably performed.

[0082] While magnetic-field generation coils Cn are exemplarily described as the magnetic-field generation part, the

magnetic-field generation part may be any which generates a magnetic field in response to energization, and a simple electric wire may be used. Also, while magnetic-field generation coil Cn is wound around amorphous wire 20 in the present embodiment, amorphous wire
5 may not be arranged to be inserted in magnetic-field generation coil Cn.

Note that the present embodiment is an example of configuration with sensor array 11 and detection unit 12 as separate bodies, a configuration for integrating both may be adopted.

10 [0083] (SECOND EMBODIMENT)

The present embodiment is an example in which, based on the configuration of the first embodiment, magnetic-field generation coils Cn are formed with a method similar to that of pickup coil 21 of sensor chip 2. Details of this are described with reference
15 to FIG. 11 and FIG. 12.

In sensor chip 2 of the present embodiment, pickup coil 21 and magnetic-field generation coil Cn are arranged in parallel with respect to amorphous wire 20 forming a magnetically sensitive body.

[0084] In sensor chip 2, as depicted in FIG. 11 and FIG. 12,
20 magnetic sensor Sn is formed by using electrode wiring substrate 2A with recessed-groove-shaped extending groove 25 provided to extend. In this sensor chip 2, amorphous wire 20 is buried in an insulator made of epoxy resin or the like with which extending groove 25 is filled. And, with conductive patterns 28 and 29 formed along
25 an outer periphery of the insulator, pickup coil 21 and magnetic-field generation coil Cn are formed.

[0085] Conductive patterns include first conductive patterns 28 formed on an inner peripheral surface of extending groove 25 and second conductive patterns 29 formed on an outer side surface of
30 the insulator facing to a front surface side of electrode wiring substrate 2A.

First conductive patterns 28 are patterns formed on the inner

peripheral surface of extending groove 25 so as to be substantially orthogonal to a groove direction of extending groove 25 and having both ends provided to extend to a front surface of electrode wiring substrate 2A. First conductive patterns 28 are configured of patterns 282 formed on a bottom surface of extending groove 25 and patterns 281 formed on an inner side surface of extending groove 25. These first conductive patterns 28 are arranged plurally in a row in the groove direction like a ladder.

[0086] Second conductive patterns 29 are conductive patterns obliquely going with respect to the groove direction along the outer side surface of the insulator exposed on the front surface side of electrode wiring substrate 2A. As with first conductive patterns 28, second conductive patterns 29 are arranged plurally in a row in the groove direction. Obliquely going with respect to the groove direction, each pattern of second conductive patterns 29 connects two first conductive patterns 28 adjacent to each other in the groove direction in series.

[0087] Pickup coil 21 of sensor chip 2 is formed to take a shape of a spiral-like electrical route as a whole with a combination of first and second conductive patterns 28 and 29. In sensor chip 2, amorphous wire 20 is longer than a full length of pickup coil 21. And, magnetic-field generation coil Cn is provided at an end part of amorphous wire 20 extending from pickup coil 21. As with pickup coil 21, this magnetic-field generation coil Cn is formed by a combination of first conductive patterns 28 and second conductive patterns 29, and is different from pickup coil 21 only in the number of winding.

[0088] Here, a method of forming first and second conductive patterns 28 and 29 are described. To form first conductive pattern 28, first, a conductive metal thin film is vapor-deposited on an entire inner peripheral surface of extending groove 25 and an edge part of the front surface of electrode wiring substrate 2A adjacent

to extending groove 25 before an insulator is formed. Then, a part of the metal thin film is selectively removed by using a selective etching scheme, thereby forming first conductive patterns 28 with plurality of patterns in parallel in a ladder shape. Then, extending groove 25 is filled with epoxy resin or the like so that amorphous wire 20 is buried, thereby forming the insulator.

[0089] To form second conductive patterns 29, first, of the front surface of electrode wiring substrate 2A with the insulator formed in extending groove 25, the conductive metal thin film is vapor-deposited on the front surface of the insulator and at an edge part outside extending groove 25. Then, by removing a part of the metal thin film by using the selective etching scheme, second conductive patterns 29 connecting end parts of first conductive patterns 28 adjacent to each other can be formed.

[0090] As described above, specifications of magnetic-field generation coil Cn formed by the method similar to that for pickup coil 21 configuring magnetic sensor Sn are identical to those of pickup coil 21, except the number of winding. This magnetic-field generation coil Cn can be made by a similar process to a process when magnetic sensor Sn is made, and thus has less possibility of inducing a cost increase. Also, as magnetic-field generation coil Cn is incorporated in and integrated with magnetic sensor Sn, there is no possibility of fluctuations in clearance distance or the like from magnetic sensor Sn.

[0091] With a configuration in which magnetic-field generation coil Cn is wound around amorphous wire 20 of magnetic sensor Sn, it is possible to cause magnetism to efficiently act on magnetic sensor Sn. In case of this configuration, there is less possibility of fluctuations, due to an external factor or the like, in a ratio of the magnetism supplied to magnetic sensor Sn to the magnetism with which magnetic-field generation coil Cn acts. A configuration as described above in which magnetic-field generation coil Cn is

wound around amorphous wire 20 is effective in improving accuracy of calibration using magnetic-field generation coils Cn.

[0092] Note that it is not imperative that amorphous wire 20 is arranged to be inserted in magnetic-field generation coil Cn.

5 A length of amorphous wire 20 may be made approximately equivalent to the full length of pickup coil 21 to reduce a portion extending from pickup coil 21. In this case, a state is such that amorphous wire 20 is not arranged to be inserted in magnetic-field generation coil Cn.

10 Note that other configurations and operations and effects are similar to those of the first embodiment.

[0093] In the foregoing, specific examples of the present invention are described in detail as in the embodiments, these specific examples merely disclose examples of technology included
15 in the scope of the claims. Needless to say, the scope of the claims should not be restrictively construed based on configurations, numerical values, and so forth of the specific examples. The scope of the claims includes techniques acquired by variously modifying, changing, or combining as appropriate the above-described specific
20 examples by using known techniques, knowledge of a person skilled in the art, and so forth.

REFERENCE SIGNS LIST

[0094]

25 1 marker detection device (marker detection system)
10 magnetic marker
11 sensor array (sensor unit)
110 calibration circuit
112 calibration part (storage part, estimation part)
30 12 detection unit (detection part)
125 filtering process circuit
127 detection processing circuit

2 sensor chip

20 amorphous wire (magnetic wire)

21 pickup coil (coil)

Sn magnetic sensor

5 Cn magnetic-field generation coil (magnetic-field generation
part, coil)

5 vehicle

6 magnetic-field generation device

60 Helmholtz coil

CLAIMS

1. A marker detection system which detects a magnetic marker laid in a road by using a sensor unit in which a plurality of magnetic sensors which measure strength of magnetism are arranged, each
5 of the magnetic sensors of the sensor unit being individually provided with a magnetic-field generation part which generates a magnetic field in accordance with a current passed, the system comprising:

a storage part which stores characteristic information of each
10 of a plurality of the magnetic-field generation parts indicating a magnetic output characteristic, which is a relation between the current passed to the magnetic-field generation part and magnetism with which the magnetic-field generation part acts on a corresponding magnetic sensor of the magnetic sensors;

15 an estimation part which estimates a magnetic differential value A, which is an amount of change of the magnetism acting on the corresponding magnetic sensor due to a current differential value A, which is an amount of change of the current passed to the magnetic-field generation part, by referring to the characteristic
20 information of each of the magnetic-field generation parts stored by the storage part; and

a calibration part which calibrates the each of the magnetic sensors so as to enhance uniformity in sensitivity, which is a ratio
25 of a sensor output outputted by the corresponding magnetic sensor in accordance with a change of the current by the current differential value A acting on the magnetic-field generation part, and the magnetic differential value A estimated by the estimation part for the current differential value A.

30 2. The marker detection system according to claim 1, wherein the characteristic information of each of the magnetic-field generation

parts stored by the storage part is information of a combination of a current differential value, which is the amount of change of the current passed to the magnetic-field generation part, and a magnetic differential value, which is the amount of change of the magnetism with which the magnetic-field generation part acts on the corresponding magnetic sensor of the magnetic sensors.

3. The marker detection system according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the magnetic-field generation parts individually provided to the plurality of magnetic sensors are connected to form a relation electrically in series to each other.

4. The marker detection system according to any one of claims 1 to 3, further comprising a detection part which detects the magnetic marker via a calculation process with a differential value between the magnetic sensors as an input value, the differential value being a difference between a sensor output value of one of the magnetic sensors or an operation value based on the sensor output value, and a sensor output value of an other of the magnetic sensors or an operation value based on the sensor output value of the other of the magnetic sensors.

5. The marker detection system according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the magnetic-field generation part includes a coil with an electric wire wound therearound to generate the magnetic field in accordance with energization to the coil.

6. The marker detection system according to claim 5, wherein the magnetic sensors each includes a magnetic wire as a magnetically sensitive body and a coil with an electric wire wound around the magnetic wire, and

the coil of the each of the magnetic sensors and the coil of

the magnetic-field generation part have common specifications except a number of winding.

7. A method of operating a marker detection system which detects
5 a magnetic marker laid in a road by using a sensor unit in which
a plurality of magnetic sensors which measure strength of magnetism
are arranged, each of the magnetic sensors of the sensor unit being
individually provided with a magnetic-field generation part which
generates a magnetic field in accordance with a current passed, and
10 the marker detection system including a storage part which stores
characteristic information of each of a plurality of the
magnetic-field generation parts indicating a magnetic output
characteristic, which is a relation between the current passed to
the magnetic-field generation part and magnetism with which the
15 magnetic-field generation part acts on a corresponding magnetic
sensor of the magnetic sensors,

the method comprising:

a magnetic estimation step of estimating a magnetic
differential value A , which is an amount of change of the magnetism
20 acting on the corresponding magnetic sensor due to a current
differential value A , which is an amount of change of the current
passed to the magnetic-field generation part, based on the
characteristic information of each of the magnetic-field generation
parts stored by the storage part; and

25 a calibration step of calibrating the each of the magnetic
sensors so as to enhance uniformity in sensitivity, which is a ratio
between an output differential value A , which is an amount of change
of a sensor output outputted by the corresponding magnetic sensor
in accordance with a change of the current by the current
30 differential value A acting on the magnetic-field generation part,
and the magnetic differential value A estimated at the magnetic
estimation step for the current differential value A .

8. The method of operating the marker detection system according to claim 7, wherein the characteristic information of each of the magnetic-field generation parts stored by the storage part is information of a combination of a current differential value, which is the amount of change of the current passed to the magnetic-field generation part, and a magnetic differential value, which is the amount of change of the magnetism with which the magnetic-field generation part acts on the corresponding magnetic sensor of the magnetic sensors.

9. The method of operating the marker detection system according to claim 7 or 8, further comprising:

a sensor characteristic acquiring step of acquiring characteristic information of the each of the magnetic sensors indicating a sensor output characteristic, which is a relation between the magnetism acting on the each of the magnetic sensors and the sensor output outputted by the each of the magnetic sensors, by measuring an amount of change serving as a reference of the sensor output of the each of the magnetic sensors when the magnetism acting on the sensor unit is changed by a reference amount;

a magnetic measurement step of measuring the magnetism acting on the corresponding magnetic sensor corresponding to the magnetic-field generation part when the current passed to the magnetic-field generation part is changed and acquiring an output differential value B, which is an amount of change of the sensor output outputted by the corresponding magnetic sensor in accordance with a current differential value B, which is an amount of change of the current passed to the magnetic-field generation part; and

a magnetic output characteristic acquiring step of estimating a magnetic differential value B corresponding to the output differential value B acquired at the magnetic measurement step with

reference to the characteristic information indicating the sensor output characteristic of the corresponding magnetic sensor, acquiring a combination of the magnetic differential value B and the current differential value B as the characteristic information
5 indicating a magnetic output characteristic of the magnetic-field generation part, and storing the combination in the storage part.

10. The method of operating the marker detection system according to claim 9, wherein the characteristic information of the
10 corresponding magnetic sensor is information of a combination of a magnetic differential value C corresponding to the reference amount and an output differential value C, which is an amount of change serving as a reference of the sensor output outputted by the corresponding magnetic sensor, and

15 the sensor characteristic acquiring step includes a magnetic sensor calibration process of making a ratio between the magnetic differential value C and the output differential value C of the each of the magnetic sensors closer to be uniform.

20 11. The method of operating the marker detection system according to any one of claims 7 to 10, wherein the marker detection system is the marker detection system described in any one of claims 1 to 6.