

ELIMINATION OF TOOTH INTERFERENCE IN
HARMONIC DRIVE DEVICES

Background of the Invention

Field of the Invention

5 This invention relates to strain wave gearing, and more particularly to an improved tooth profile of a flexspline and a circular spline in harmonic drive devices.

Prior Art

10 The original harmonic drive strain wave gearing was introduced by Musser in U.S. Patent 2,906,143. A harmonic drive strain wave gear comprises a rigid circular spline having "n" teeth, a flexspline having fewer than "n" teeth ("n" being a positive integer) and
15 being disposed in the circular spline, and a rotatable wave generator disposed in the flexspline to deform the flexspline into a lobed configuration, such as an oval shape, so as to force the flexspline into engagement with the circular spline at two points of the major axis
20 of the formed ovaloid. The wave generator may include an oval cam plate and a bearing snugly mounted on the outer periphery of the camplate. The outer bearing is matingly inserted into the flexspline so as to deform it to the peripheral contour of the camplate. An input
25 shaft attached to the camplate provides rotation thereto, causing the ovaloid configuration of the flexspline to be correspondingly rotated. During such rotation, the circular spline is induced to rotate relative to the flexspline by an amount proportional to
30 the difference in the number of teeth between the flexspline and the circular spline. When an output shaft is arranged on either the flexspline or the circular spline, that output shaft is rotated very

slowly in comparison to its input shaft. Such harmonic drive strain wave gearing has been utilized in machinery requiring a high reduction ratio.

5 A recent attempt at improved tooth profile design is shown in U.S. Patent 4,823,638 to Ishikawa, wherein the engagement between the flexspline and the circular spline is deemed to be an approximation to that of a rack mechanism. The tooth profile of the engaging splines is defined by a transformation of an original
10 curve by the application of a reduced $\frac{1}{2}$ scale to a corresponding similar figure, that is, a mapping curve derived by a similarity transformation from the movement locus of the crest of the flexspline relative to the circular spline.

15 The design of the '638 gear tooth is therefore based on a simplified traditional rack mechanism approximation.

In fact, the gear teeth are not located on a simple linear rack. The circular spline teeth are located on a
20 circle and the flexspline teeth are located on an oval surface formed by the wave generator. These two curved surfaces cause an inclination angle change between a tooth on the flexspline relative to the circular spline as the tooth moves into the engagement from the minor
25 axis to the major axis. Such inclination angle is ignored when it is assumed that the circular spline and the flexspline are straight racks.

More recently in the referenced U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 08/113,285 an improvement in
30 flexspline tooth profiles was obtained by taking into account precessing of the tooth angle at the front and back of the tooth lobe as the oval wave generator is rotated.

Brief Summary of the Invention

35 In accordance with the present invention extended tooth contact engagement with reduced tooth stress is

achieved by first defining the tooth face profile of one of the gears, preferably the circular spline by a simple well known geometrical arc segment such as a circular, parabolic, or elliptical arc segment. Next, the tooth

5 face profile of the other gear, preferably the flexspline is defined by a curve shape that allows several teeth to remain in contact while the wave generator is rotated. Furthermore, the transition region between tooth flank and tooth face is made

10 continuous, and thereby smoothed out, by using a straight line segment for this portion of the flexspline tooth profile. The aforesaid curve shape that allows several teeth to remain in contact is determined by establishing the movement locus of a point on the

15 flexspline tooth in relationship to a point of contact between the face profile of the flexspline teeth and face profile of the circular spline teeth and subtracting the tangential component shift due to tooth inclination as the wave generator is rotated.

20 The invention thus comprises an extended contact harmonic drive gearing apparatus for transmitting rotary motion from an input drive to an output drive, comprising: a rigid circular spline having gear teeth thereon; a flexible flexspline having gear teeth thereon

25 arranged radially adjacent the rigid circular spline. The flexspline face tooth profile for a preferred circular arc embodiment of an extended contact harmonic

drive gearing apparatus is defined by the following equations:

$$x_f = x_2 + (-a - R_i) - u \cdot h$$

$$= \frac{R_i \cdot \left| \frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right|}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right)^2}} - (x_0 + R_i) - u \cdot h$$

$$y_f = -(y_2 - b)$$

$$= - \frac{R_i \cdot \left| \frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right|}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right)^2}} + y_0$$

wherein $-u \cdot h$ is the tooth inclination correction factor

$$h = y_0 - Y_1$$

$$u = \tan^{-1} \left(-\frac{1}{r} \cdot \frac{dr}{d\phi} \right)$$

5 x_2 is the tangential axis coordinate of a point on the flexspline tooth face curve;

y_2 is the radial axis coordinate of a point on the flexspline tooth face curve; and the circular spline face tooth profile is defined by a circle with radius R_i

10 $= \sqrt{(x_c - a)^2 + (y_c - b)^2}$ in which a, b are the center coordinates of a circle.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The objects and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent when viewed in conjunction

15 with the following drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a front partial view of a harmonic drive gearing assembly constructed according to the principles of the present invention;

5 Figure 2 is a view of a quadrant of the teeth of a flexspline and a circular spline shown in Figure 1, showing the progressive points of tooth engagement therebetween;

10 Figure 3 is a frontal enlarged view of a flexspline tooth engaging a pair of teeth of the circular spline, showing the tooth engagement of the present invention and superimposed thereon are geometric expressions useful in explaining how the curve equations for the various tooth profiles were determined; and

15 Figure 4 is a drawing illustrating the coordinate systems used in drawing the geometric expressions for the profile curve equations of the present invention.

Description of the Preferred Embodiments

Referring to the drawings, and particularly to Figures 1 and 2, there is shown in an enlarged frontal
20 view, a harmonic drive gearing assembly 10, having a tooth profile which is the subject of the present invention.

The harmonic drive gearing assembly 10 comprises a planar generally oval shaped wave generator (cam plate)
25 12 having a bore 14 for attachment to a drive shaft, not shown.

The wave generator 12 has an outer periphery 18 with a bearing assembly 16 pressed thereabout. The bearing assembly 16 consists of an inner race 20, an
30 outer race 22, and a plurality of roller members 24 rotatively distributed therebetween. A deformable flexspline 26 is disposed outwardly of and snugly engaged with the outer race 22 of the bearing assembly 16. A rigid fixed circular spline 28 is disposed
35 radially outwardly of the deformable flexspline 26. An array of gear teeth 30 (as shown in Figure 2) is

arranged on the outer periphery of the flexspline 26, and another array of gear teeth 32 is arranged on the inner periphery of the circular spline 28 in a matable relationship therebetween.

5 The major axis of the wave generator 12 and the flexspline 26 is represented, in Figure 2, at the 12 o'clock position (35), and likewise, the minor axis in Figure 2 is at the 9 o'clock position (36). The maximum inclination of the teeth 30 of the flexspline 26 are
10 found at the mid-point (37) between the major and minor axes 35 and 36.

Referring now to Figures 3 and 4, the derivation of the curves defining the tooth profiles of the flexspline 26 and the circular spline 28 will now be explained in
15 connection therewith. Figure 3 depicts one tooth 60 of the flexspline 26 at a point of contact $P'(x_1, y_1)$ with the face 62A of a tooth 62 of the circular spline 28. The tooth 60 has an upper face profile curve at 60A and a lower flank profile curve at 60B joined by a straight
20 line transitional profile at 60C. The movement locus of the flexspline 26 describes the path of a point on the flexspline neutral surface 68 as it is rotated by a wave generator (not shown). The movement locus is designated 54 and is shown by dotted lines. Dashed lines 68
25 delineate the neutral surface of the flexspline 26 which does not change length as the flexspline is distorted by the waveform generator (not shown). When the origin of the flexspline is moved from $q(0,0)$ to a point $q'(x_0, y_0)$ on its movement locus; the point $P(x_2, y_2)$ on the tooth
30 profile face 60A moves to the contact point $P'(x_1, y_1)$ with the face 62A of circular spline 28.

The curve equations for the face of tooth 60 are derived as follows:

The movement locus for the point q the flexspline
35 tooth 60 is:

$$r = r_c - \frac{d}{2} (1 - \cos 2 \phi) \quad 1(a)$$

$$x = r \cdot \sin (\phi - \theta) \quad 1(b)$$

$$y = r_c - r \cdot \cos (\phi - \theta) \quad 1(c)$$

wherein $-\frac{\pi}{2} \leq \theta \leq 0$; and

wherein x is a coordinate in the tangential direction;

y is a coordinate in the radial direction;

5 r_c is the flexspline major axis radius as shown in Fig. 4;

$d/2$ is one-half of the displacement d of the deformed flexspline;

θ is the angle of rotation of the wave generator;

10 (ϕ, r) are the polar coordinates of the neutral surface of the flexspline.

The addendum arc (circle) equation for the circular spline tooth profile is:

$$(x_c - a)^2 + (y_c - b)^2 = R_i^2 \quad 2$$

for a circle with radius R_i in which a and b are the
15 center coordinates of the circle.

The point q' is located on the movement locus, q' 's coordinates are as follows:

$$r_0 = r_c - \frac{d}{2} (1 - \cos 2 \phi_0) \quad 1(a)'$$

$$x_0 = r_0 \cdot \sin (\phi_0 - \theta_0) \quad 1(b)'$$

$$y_0 = r_c - r_0 \cdot \sin (\phi_0 - \theta_0) \quad 1(c)'$$

The coordinates of the contact points P' have the following relationship with points q' of the locus movement:

$$X_1 = X_2 + X_0 \quad 3(a)$$

$$Y_1 = Y_2 + Y_0 \quad 3(b)$$

ϕ and θ are related by equation 4 below:

$$\begin{aligned} r_c \cdot \theta &= \int r \cdot d\phi \\ &= (r_c - \frac{d}{2}) \phi + \frac{d}{4} \sin 2\phi \end{aligned} \quad 4$$

5 Since P' is located on the circular arc of the tooth face of tooth 62 of circular spline 28, X_c and Y_c in equation 2 can be replaced by X_1 and Y_1 .

10 Since P comes in contact with P', the tangent angle of the flexspline face curve at point P should be the same as the circular spline curve at P';
or:

$$\frac{dY_1}{dX_1} = \frac{dY_2}{dX_2} \quad 5$$

Coordinates X_2 and Y_2 can therefore be replaced with equations 3a and 3b respectively:

$$\frac{dY_2}{dX_2} = \frac{d(Y_1 - Y_0)}{d(X_1 - X_0)} \quad 6$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 \frac{dY_1}{dX_1} &= \frac{dY_2}{dX_2} \\
 &= \frac{d(Y_1 - y_0)}{d(X_1 - x_0)} \\
 &= \frac{d(Y_1 - y_0)}{d\theta} \bigg/ \frac{d(X_1 - x_0)}{d\theta} \\
 &= \left(\frac{dY_1}{d\theta} - \frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right) \bigg/ \left(\frac{dX_1}{d\theta} - \frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right) \\
 \frac{dY_1}{d\theta} \bigg/ \frac{dX_1}{d\theta} &= \left(\frac{dY_1}{d\theta} - \frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right) \bigg/ \left(\frac{dX_1}{d\theta} - \frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right) \\
 \frac{dY_1}{d\theta} \left(\frac{dX_1}{d\theta} - \frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right) &= \frac{dX_1}{d\theta} \left(\frac{dY_1}{d\theta} - \frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right) \text{ therefore} \\
 \frac{dY_1}{d\theta} \cdot \frac{dx_0}{d\theta} &= \frac{dX_1}{d\theta} \cdot \frac{dy_0}{d\theta}
 \end{aligned}$$

7(a)

or

$$\frac{dY_1}{dX_1} = \frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \bigg/ \frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \tag{7(b)}$$

Here, y_0 and x_0 have only one function θ . Note: ϕ can be represented by θ by adapting the Newton-Raphson method (see text "Advanced Engineering Mathematics" 2nd Ed. Peter V. O'Neil © 1987, Wadsworth, Inc., pp. 1062-1065 incorporated herein by reference) to equation 4.

So that X_1 has two functions: Y_1 and θ . Y_1 needs to be replaced by an equation about X_1 and θ as follows:

First we differentiate Equation 2' about coordinate

10 X_1 , and solve for $\frac{dY_1}{dX_1}$, as follows:

$$(X_1 - a)^2 + (Y_1 - b)^2 = R_i^2 \tag{2'}$$

$$2(X_1 - a) + 2(Y_1 - b) \cdot \frac{dY_1}{dX_1} = 0$$

8

$$\frac{dY_1}{dX_1} = - \frac{(X_1 - a)}{(Y_1 - b)}$$

$(Y_1 - b)$ can be replaced by Eq 2'.

$$Y_1 - b = \sqrt{R_i^2 - (X_1 - a)^2}$$

$$\frac{dY_1}{dX_1} = - \frac{X_1 - a}{\sqrt{R_i^2 - (X_1 - a)^2}}$$

9

$\frac{dY_1}{dX_1}$ can be replaced by Eq. 7(b). Making an equation

about $X_1 - a$.

$$\frac{dy_0}{d\theta} / \frac{dx_0}{d\theta} = - \frac{X_1 - a}{\sqrt{R_i^2 - (X_1 - a)^2}}$$

10

$$X_1 - a = \frac{R_i \cdot \left| \frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right|}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right)^2}}$$

Making an equation about $Y_1 - b$ with Eq. 2' and 10
5 yields:

$$Y_1 - b = \frac{R_i \cdot \left| \frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right|}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right)^2}}$$

11

$\frac{dx_0}{d\theta}$ and $\frac{dy_0}{d\theta}$ are determined by differentiation of Eq. 1'

by θ :

$$\frac{dr_0}{d\theta} = -d \cdot \sin 2\phi_0 \cdot \frac{d\phi}{d\theta} \quad 12(a)$$

$$\frac{dx_0}{d\theta} = \frac{dr_0}{d\theta} \cdot \sin(\phi_0 - \theta_0) + r_0 \cos(\phi_0 - \theta_0) \cdot \left(\frac{d\phi}{d\theta} - 1\right) \quad 12(b)$$

$$\frac{dy_0}{d\theta} = -\frac{dr_0}{d\theta} \cdot \cos(\phi_0 - \theta_0) + r_0 \sin(\phi_0 - \theta_0) \cdot \left(\frac{d\phi}{d\theta} - 1\right) \quad 12(c)$$

$\frac{d\phi}{d\theta}$ is obtained from Eq. 4.

$$\frac{d\phi}{d\theta} = \frac{r_c}{r_c - \frac{d}{2}(1 - \cos 2\phi)} = \frac{r_c}{r_0} \quad 13$$

The coordinates of a point P on the face 60A of the tooth profile of the flexspline 26 which maintains contact with a circular profile of tooth 62 on the face 5 of the circular spline 28 throughout a portion of the movement locus 54 are obtained from Eqs. 10, 11, 12, 3 and 1 as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} X_2 &= X_1 - x_0 \\ &= \frac{R_i \cdot \left| \frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right|}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right)^2}} + a - x_0 \end{aligned} \quad 14$$

$$\begin{aligned} Y_2 &= Y_1 - y_0 \\ &= \frac{R_i \cdot \left| \frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right|}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right)^2}} + b - y_0 \end{aligned} \quad 15$$

P's coordinate system has its origin on point q.
Changing the origin to point O in the diagram on Fig. 3.
Then, adding a tooth inclination correction of minus $u \cdot h$ yields:

$$\begin{aligned} x_f &= X_2 + (-a - R_1) - u \cdot h \\ &= \frac{R_1 \cdot \left| \frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right|}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right)^2}} - (x_0 + R_1) - u \cdot h \end{aligned} \quad 16$$

$$\begin{aligned} y_f &= - (Y_2 - b) \\ &= - \frac{R_1 \cdot \left| \frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right|}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{dx_0}{d\theta} \right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy_0}{d\theta} \right)^2}} + y_0 \end{aligned} \quad 17$$

5 wherein

$$h = y_0 - Y_1 \quad 18$$

and

$$u = \tan^{-1} \left(-\frac{1}{r} \cdot \frac{dr}{d\phi} \right) \quad 19$$

Equations 16 and 17 define the face curve of a flexspline tooth profile which will stay in substantial contact with a face of a tooth of a fixed circular spline throughout a substantial portion of the movement locus of the flexspline provided the profile of the face of the circular spline is defined by a circular segment. The remainder of the flexspline tooth profile i.e. the

flank profile is preferably a circular segment matching the circular spline face segment. A short transition region is also necessary to join the flank and face segments and this should be a smooth linear curve or a
5 straight line segment.

Equivalents

Those skilled in the art will recognize, or be able to ascertain using no more than routine experimentation, many equivalents to specific embodiments of the
10 invention described specifically herein. For example, while the invention has been explained in connection with a simple circular arc, other arcs, such as, a parabola or an ellipse are contemplated, in which the equation for an ellipse or parabola would be substantial
15 for equation 2 above. Such equivalents are intended to be encompassed in the scope of the following claims.



CLAIMS

We Claim:

1. A harmonic drive gearing apparatus for transmitting rotary motion from an input drive to an output
5 drive, comprising:
a circular spline having gear teeth thereon
said circular spline gear teeth having a face
profile and a flank profile;
a flexspline having gear teeth thereon
10 arranged radially adjacent said circular spline,
said flexspline gear teeth having a face profile
and a flank profile and a transition region
therebetween;
a non-circular wave generator having a major
15 axis and a minor axis arranged radially adjacent
said circular spline, and adapted to deform said
flexspline when rotated, to generate relative
motion between the flexspline and the circular
spline; and
20 wherein at least a face profile of the
circular spline gear teeth is defined by an arc
segment of known curvature while a face profile of
the flexspline gear teeth is defined by a curve
which allows several flexspline teeth to remain in
25 contact with the teeth on the circular spline.
2. The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein the transition
region profile is a straight line.
3. The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein the arc segment
curvature is from the group of curves comprising
30 circles, ellipses, or parabolas.



4. The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein the face tooth profile of the circular spline is a circular arc segment and the face tooth profile of the flexspline is defined by the equations:

$$x_f = \left[R_i \cdot \left| \frac{dy_o}{d\theta} \right| + \sqrt{\left(\frac{dx_o}{d\theta} \right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy_o}{d\theta} \right)^2} \right] - (x_o + Ri) - u \cdot h$$

5 and

$$y_f = \left[R_i \cdot \left| \frac{dx_o}{d\theta} \right| + \sqrt{\left(\frac{dx_o}{d\theta} \right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy_o}{d\theta} \right)^2} \right] + y_o$$

and

$$h = y_o - Y_1 \text{ and } u = \tan^{-1} \left(- \frac{1}{r} \cdot \frac{dr}{d\phi} \right)$$

5. A harmonic drive gearing apparatus for transmitting rotary motion from an input drive to an output drive, comprising:
- 10 a circular spline having gear teeth thereon said circular spline gear teeth having a face profile and a flank profile;
- a flexspline having gear teeth thereon arranged radially adjacent said circular spline,
- 15 said flexspline gear teeth having a face profile and a flank profile;
- a wave generator having a major axis and a minor axis arranged radially adjacent said circular spline, and adapted to deform said flexspline when
- 20 rotated, to generate relative motion between the flexspline and the circular spline; and
- wherein at least a face profile of the circular spline gear teeth is defined by a circular arc segment while a face profile of the flexspline gear teeth is defined by a curve which allows
- 25



several flexspline teeth to remain in contact with the teeth on the circular spline.

- 5 6. The apparatus of Claim 1 including a transition region between the face and flank profile of the flexspline gear teeth.
7. The apparatus of Claim 5 wherein the arc segment curvature is from the group of curves comprising circles, ellipses, or parabolas.
- 10 8. The apparatus of Claim 7 wherein the tooth profile of the flank of the flexspline is a circular arc segment.
9. The apparatus of Claim 8 further including a smooth transition region aligning the flank and face of the flexspline.
- 15 10. A method of making a harmonic drive gearing apparatus for transmitting rotary motion from an input drive to an output drive, comprising the steps of:
 - 20 a) forming a circular spline with gear teeth thereon and a face profile and a flank profile;
 - b) forming a flexspline with gear teeth thereon and a face profile and a flank profile;
 - 25 c) forming a wave generator having a major axis and a minor axis for deforming said flexspline when rotated, to generate relative motion between the flexspline and the circular spline; and



wherein at least a face profile of the circular spline gear teeth is defined by an arc segment of known curvature while a face profile of the flexspline gear teeth is defined by a curve which allows several flexspline teeth to remain in contact with the teeth on the circular spline.

11. The method of Claim 10 wherein a transition region is formed between the face and flank of the flexspline teeth.
- 10 12. The method of Claim 10 wherein the arc segment curvature is from the group of curves comprising circles, ellipses, or parabolas.
13. The method of Claim 10 wherein the face tooth profile of the circular spline is a circular arc segment and the face tooth profile of the flexspline is defined by the equations:

$$x_f = \left[Ri \cdot \left| \frac{dy_o}{d\theta} \right| + \sqrt{\left(\frac{dx_o}{d\theta} \right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy_o}{d\theta} \right)^2} \right] - (x_o + Ri) - u \cdot h$$

and

$$y_f = \left[Ri \cdot \left| \frac{dx_o}{d\theta} \right| + \sqrt{\left(\frac{dx_o}{d\theta} \right)^2 + \left(\frac{dy_o}{d\theta} \right)^2} \right] + y_o$$

and

$$h = y_o - y_1 \text{ and } u = \tan^{-1} \left(- \frac{1}{r} \cdot \frac{dr}{d\phi} \right)$$