

MAGNETOSTRICTION APPARATUS

TECHNICAL FIELD

5 **[0001]** The present invention relates to a
magnetostriction apparatus for generating or detecting
vibration by using a magnetostrictor.

BACKGROUND TECHNOLOGY

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[0002] Some magnetic materials undergo strain in
accordance with variation in a magnetic field outside the
materials. Stressing and deforming such a magnetic material
changes its magnetic characteristic according to the stress.

15 This phenomenon is called magnetic strain. Recently,
materials that exhibit displacement 50-100 times greater than
that of the magnetostrictors known hitherto have been
discovered. Such materials are called super magnetostrictors.

[0003] By applying an alternate magnetic field to a
20 magnetostrictor, vibration at the same frequency as that of
the alternating magnetic field can be generated. It is
envisaged that the phenomenon will be exploited in some way.
For example, a super magnetostrictor could be applied to a
bone conduction headphone or a hearing aid (see, for example,
25 patent document No. 1).
[patent document No. 1]

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[0004] It is strongly desired that a magnetostrictor-based vibration generator provided in a headphone or a hearing aid be small and lightweight. We have proposed in
5 patent document No. 1 mentioned above a technology for reducing the size and weight of a vibration generator by applying prestress to a super magnetostrictor so as to improve transducing efficiency, and by omitting a vibration plate so as to conduct the vibration by the super
10 magnetostrictor directly to a target object.

[0005] We have built upon this technology through experiments toward further reduction in size and weight of a vibration generator and have arrived at a technology capable of further reducing the size and weight of a vibration
15 generator, while maintaining the excellent characteristics of a super magnetostrictor.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

20 **[0006]** A general purpose of the present invention is to provide a technology for achieving a small and lightweight magnetostriction apparatus.

[0007] One embodiment of the present invention relates to a magnetostriction apparatus. A magnetostriction
25 apparatus comprises: a magnetostrictor which expands and contracts in accordance with a magnetic field; a magnetic

field generating means which generates the magnetic field;
and a housing which holds the magnetostrictor and the
magnetic field generating means at predetermined positions,
wherein the housing is connected to an external member so
5 that a predetermined pressure is applied to the
magnetostrictor by the external member and the housing. The
external member may include a circuit which supplies a signal
for generating the magnetic field to the magnetic field
generating means. The housing may include a yoke which
10 controls a magnetic circuit of the magnetic field generated
by the magnetic field generating means.

[0008] Another embodiment of the present invention also
relates to a magnetostriction apparatus. A magnetostriction
apparatus comprises: a magnetostrictor the magnetic
15 characteristic of which varies in accordance with variation
applied from outside; detecting means which detects variation
in the magnetic characteristic in the form an electrical
signal; a housing which holds the magnetostrictor and the
detecting means at predetermined positions, wherein the
20 housing is connected to an external member so as that a
predetermined pressure is applied to the magnetostrictor by
the external member and the housing. The external member
may include a circuit which acquires the electrical signal
from the detecting means.

25 **[0009]** The magnetostriction apparatus may not comprise a
structure which supports an end of the magnetostrictor

opposite to an end supported by the housing and applies a predetermined pressure to the magnetostrictor. By omitting a prestress cap provided in a related-art magnetostriction apparatus and causing the external member to function as a prestress cap, the weight of the magnetostriction apparatus can be reduced and the size in the height direction can be significantly reduced. Another advantage is that the external member to which the magnetostriction apparatus is fitted can be more flexibly designed than in the related art.

[0010] The housing may include a yoke for creating a closed magnetic path within the housing. The face of the housing where the magnetostriction apparatus is connected to the external member may be open, and the magnetostriction apparatus may be connected to the external member such that the end of the magnetostrictor facing the external member, or a constituting member provided in the magnetostrictor to face the external member comes into contact with the external member. The magnetostriction apparatus may further comprise a vibrating unit which conducts vibration at an end of the magnetostrictor opposite to an end facing the external member, outside the magnetostriction apparatus.

[0011] Arbitrary combinations of the aforementioned constituting elements and implementations of the invention in the form of methods, apparatuses and systems may also be practiced as additional modes of the present invention.

[0012] According to the embodiments of the present

invention, a small and lightweight magnetostriction apparatus can be achieved.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

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[0013]

Fig. 1 shows the structure of a related-art magnetostriction apparatus.

Fig. 2 shows a table showing the characteristics of a
10 super magnetostrictive material and a piezoelectric material.

Figs. 3A and 3B schematically show how a magnetostrictor vibrates.

Fig. 4 shows the structure of a magnetostriction apparatus in which an improvement is made.

15 Fig. 5 shows the structure of a headphone as an example of an electronic appliance provided with the magnetostriction apparatus shown in Fig. 4.

Fig. 6 shows the structure of a magnetostriction apparatus according to the embodiment.

20 Fig. 7 shows the structure of an electronic appliance according to the embodiment.

Fig. 8 shows the structure of a headphone as an example of an electronic appliance provided with the magnetostriction apparatus shown in Figs. 6 and 7.

25 Fig. 9 shows the structure of an electronic appliance according to a variation of the embodiment.

[0014]

1 super magnetostrictor, 2 bias magnet, 3 bobbin, 4 coil, 5
 electrical lead, 6 vibrating rod, 7a prestress cap, 7b case,
 8 housing, 9 elastic member, 11 bottom plate, 20

5 magnetostriction apparatus 20, a 28 vibrating pad, 29 circuit,
 30 magnetostriction apparatus 30, a 40 main body, 41 screw
 part, 42 projection, 49 circuit, 50 electronic appliance, 61
 flange part, 81 screw part, 90 magnetostriction apparatus,
 100 headphone, 110 main body, 200 headphone, 210 main body

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BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

[0015]

Fig. 1 shows the structure of a related-art
 magnetostriction apparatus. A related-art magnetostrictor 90
 15 is provided with a magnetostrictor 91, a coil 92, a bias
 magnet 93, a cap 94 and a case 95. The magnetostrictor 91
 has a substantially cylindrical shape and is displaced such
 that it expands and contracts in the direction of height in
 accordance with a magnetic field generated by the coil 92 and
 20 the bias magnet 93. The magnetostrictor 91 is provided
 substantially at the center of the case 95 so that the height
 thereof is aligned with the depth of the substantially
 cylindrical case 95. The coil 92 is provided around the
 magnetostrictor 91. An electric current supplied from an
 25 external drive generates a magnetic field around the
 magnetostrictor 91. The bias magnet 93 is provided to

provide a bias magnetic field of a predetermined intensity around the magnetostrictor 91 on a permanent basis. The cap 94 is substantially disk-shaped and is provided to seal the case 95 which contains the magnetostrictor 91, the coil 92 and the bias magnet 93 inside. An engagement groove 96 is formed toward the top of the side wall of the case 95. A latch part 97 of the cap 94 is latched by the engagement groove 96 so as to secure the cap 94 and the case 95 to each other. The magnetostrictor 91 is pressed from above and from below by the cap 94 and the case 95, respectively, so as to undergoes certain prestress.

[0016] As an alternating current is supplied to the coil 92, an alternating magnetic field is generated around the coil 92, causing the magnetostrictor 91 to expand and contract in the axis direction. The cap 94 vibrates as a result of the expansion and contraction of the magnetostrictor 91, and the vibration is conducted outside via the cap 94. For example, if the magnetostriction apparatus 90 shown in Fig. 1 is used in a headphone, the cap 94 is pressed against the neighborhood of the ear so as to conduct the vibration generated by the magnetostrictor 91 to the head via the cap 94. The cap 94 is formed so as to have larger elasticity than the bottom of the case 95. This prevents the vibration of the magnetostrictor 91 from being absorbed by the bottom of the case 95 and ensures that the vibration is efficiently conducted to a target object (e.g.,

the head of the user) via the cap 94.

[0017] Fig. 2 shows a table showing the characteristics of a super magnetostrictive material and a piezoelectric material. A super magnetostrictive material such as terbium-dysprosium-iron (TbDyFe) has superior characteristics than a piezoelectric material such as lead zirconate titanate (PZT: $\text{PbZrO}_3\text{-PbTiO}_3$) as described below. First, a super magnetostrictive material is characterized by larger stress developed therein and relatively large displacement.

10 Accordingly, vibration generated in a super magnetostrictor can be efficiently conducted outside. Further, since the drive voltage is lower, the power consumption is smaller. Moreover, since the Curie point is higher, it can be used in a high temperature. Since the super magnetostrictor vibrates in the presence of a magnetic field, the driven part is not in contact with a power supply. As such, the material is highly safe to use.

[0018] Moreover, a super magnetostrictive material is characterized by large stress developed therein and so can properly conduct low-frequency, high-energy vibration outside. An additional benefit of high response speed enables the material to properly follow a high-frequency input signal to generate vibration. Thus, a flat characteristic is achieved over a wide frequency range. This is particularly advantageous in a headphone or a speaker in which the material is used. A related-art headphone using a

piezoelectric material can only generate sound up to about 5-20 kHz. By using a super magnetostrictive material, sound at 50 kHz or higher can be generated. It is said that humans can hear sound with a frequency of up to about 20 kHz. Some theories say that humans can hear ultrasound. Auditory perception through bone conduction has not been studied as extensively as auditory perception through an eardrum. Perception of sound in an ultrasonic range through bone conduction has yet to be explored. We envisaged to develop a headphone and a speaker using a super magnetostrictive material capable of reproducing sound in an ultrasonic range with a high fidelity, instead of using a piezoelectric material not capable of generating high-frequency sound, taking into consideration the fact that equipment has been developed recently capable of recording sound in an ultrasonic range.

[0019] We came to be aware of challenges we face in using the excellent frequency characteristic of a super magnetostrictive material to best advantage. Figs. 3A and 3B schematically show how a magnetostrictor vibrates. As shown in Fig. 3A, if one end (hereinafter, referred to as a "fixed end") 98 of the magnetostrictor 91 is fixed, the magnetostrictor 91 expands and contracts only toward or away from the other end (hereinafter, referred to as an "output end"). Therefore, vibration occurring when the magnetostrictor 91 expands or contracts is efficiently

conducted outside via the output end 99. If the fixed end 98 vibrates due to the fact that the member supporting the fixed end 98 of the magnetostrictor 91 is elastic or lightweight, displacement of vibration or stress occurring conducted from the output end 99 outside is attenuated accordingly. As the cap 94 of the magnetostriction apparatus 90 shown in Fig. 1 is pressed against the target object to conduct the vibration of the magnetostrictor 91 to the target object, a force is generated whereby the fixed end 98 of the magnetostrictor 91 presses the bottom of the case 95 due to reaction to the force with which the cap 94 presses the target object. If the case 95 does not have enough inertial mass as shown in Fig. 3B, vibration at the output end 99 is attenuated, preventing vibration of the magnetostrictor 91 from being properly conducted to the target object. The phenomenon will be particularly noticeable in a low-frequency range characterized by high vibration energy, with the result that, for example, bass sound is difficult to hear with a headphone which uses the magnetostriction apparatus 90.

[0020] We have come to realize that the member in contact with the fixed end 98 of the magnetostrictor 91 (e.g., the case 95 of the magnetostriction apparatus 90 of Fig. 1) must have enough inertial mass and hardness in order to prohibit degradation in the frequency characteristic of the magnetostrictor 91 over a wide frequency range. It will be noted that the challenge is quite unique to a magnetostrictor,

which is characterized by greater stress developed therein than in a piezoelectric device. Such a challenge has not even been aware of by developers of sound conduction apparatuses that use piezoelectric devices. It will further
5 be noted that the challenge was identified strictly as a result of pursuing a sound conduction apparatus capable of reproducing the entirety of human audible sound with a high fidelity and persistence in covering a barely audible sound range. As described later, our experiments show that, in
10 order to efficiently drive a super magnetostriction apparatus as a vibration generator over a wide frequency range, an inertial mass 13.8 times or larger -- or, preferably, 21 times or larger, or, more preferably, 69 times or larger -- than the moving mass should be provided at the fixed end 98
15 of the magnetostrictor 91.

[0021] Fig. 4 shows the structure of a magnetostriction apparatus improved in view of the above-mentioned challenge. A magnetostriction apparatus 20 includes a super magnetostrictor 1, a bias magnet 2 (an upper bias magnet 2a
20 and a lower bias magnet 2b), a bobbin 3, a coil 4, electrical leads 5a and 5b, a vibrating rod 6, a prestress cap 7a, a case 7b and an elastic member (helical spring) 9.

[0022] The super magnetostrictor 1 is used as a vibration transducer for converting a signal derived from
25 sound into vibration. The super magnetostrictor 1 has a substantially cylindrical shape and is provided with the

upper bias magnet 2a on its top and the lower bias magnet 2b on its bottom. The super magnetostrictor 1 is sandwiched between the upper bias magnet 2a and the lower bias magnet 2b and accommodated in the case 7b. The super magnetostrictor 1 is permanently exposed to a bias magnetic field generated by the upper bias magnet 2a and the lower bias magnet 2b (i.e., the bias magnetic field permanently penetrates the super magnetostrictor 1). In addition to that, it is ensured that prestress is permanently exerted on the super magnetostrictor 1 by accommodating it in the case 7b, supporting the bottom thereof by the case 7b, and pressing a vibrating rod 6 against the top thereof with the elastic force of the elastic member 9. The super magnetostrictor 1 is subjected to a variable magnetic field generated by the coil 4 disposed around the super magnetostrictor 1, while also being permanently exposed to a bias magnetic field and prestress as described above. As a result, the super magnetostrictor 1 generates vibration in response to an input electric signal.

[0023] The coil 4 is formed by wrapping a conductor line around the body of the bobbin 3 as a shaft. The bobbin 3 is made of a material such as glass substrate or polycarbonate. As an electrical signal is input to the conductor line via the electrical lead, the coil 4 generates a magnetic field 4 accordingly. By allowing the variable magnetic field generated by the coil 4 to penetrate the super magnetostrictor 1, the super magnetostrictor 1 expands or

contracts in accordance with the intensity of the variable magnetic field, resulting in an output of vibration.

[0024] One end of the vibrating rod 6 is mechanically connected to the super magnetostrictor 1 via the upper bias

5 magnet 2a so as to conduct the vibration output from the super magnetostrictor 1 outside. The vibrating rod 61 is provided with a flange part 61. The flange part 61 is urged by the elastic member 9 so as to be pressed against the upper bias magnet 2a. The pressing force is applied to the super
10 magnetostrictor 1 via the upper bias magnet 2a. The flange part 61 and the elastic member 9 prevent the entirety of the vibrating rod 6 from slipping out of the case 7b and the prestress cap 7a.

[0025] The case 7b is a container (or a body) which

15 accommodates the super magnetostrictor 1, the upper bias magnet 2a, the lower bias magnet 2b, the bobbin 3, the coil 4, the vibrating rod 6 and the elastic member 9 assembled in a predetermined configuration. The prestress cap 7a is fixed to the case 7a by a spring mechanism, welding, caulking,
20 resin cure or the like. In the process of fixing the prestress cap 7a to the case 7b, prestress is applied to the super magnetostrictor via the elastic member 9. By applying prestress to the super magnetostrictor 1, efficiency of
25 transducing between an electric signal and vibration is improved. The prestress cap 7a and the case 7b are preferably formed of a magnetic material so as not to leak

the internal magnetic field outside and to generate the magnetic field inside efficiently.

[0026] Fig. 5 shows the structure of a headphone as an example of an electronic appliance provided with the

5 magnetostriction apparatus 20 as a vibration generator. A

headphone 100 is provided with a main body 110, a magnetostriction apparatus 20 and a vibrating pad 28. The

main body 10 includes a circuit 29 for transmitting an electric signal input from a player or the like outside the

10 appliance to the coil of the magnetostriction apparatus 20.

The vibrating pad 28 is fitted to the vibrating rod 6 of the magnetostriction apparatus 20 and conducts the vibration

conducted from the vibrating rod 6 to the skull bone in the vicinity of the user's ear. The user can recognize the

15 vibration conducted from the surface of the vibrating pad 28

as sound through bone conduction. We built a prototype of

the bone-conduction headphone 100 shown in Fig. 5 and found

that a wide tonal range from bass to treble is reproduced

with a high fidelity, resulting in excellent acoustic

20 property.

[0027] A magnetostriction apparatus capable of

generating vibration efficiently over a wide frequency range

was thus achieved. At the same time, we were also aware of

the need for further reduction in size and weight of the

25 magnetostriction apparatus as it is used in a headphone, a

hearing aid, a speaker of a cell phone, etc. In the case of

products such as headphones and cell phones which owe their popularity to small size and lightweight, it has been demonstrated in the market that a slight difference in size or weight affects the sales of the product severely. We are
5 aware that, even if a product is superior to a similar, prior product in its characteristics, a slight increase in size or weight over the prior product may negatively affect consumers' desired to purchase the product. This is partly demonstrated by the fact that headphones that use
10 piezoelectric devices are commercialized in advance of those with magnetostrictors, which is superior in performance.

[0028]

Since the super magnetostrictor 1 is of a cylindrical shape and is displaced in the height direction, it is necessary to connect moving components and the height
15 of the super magnetostrictor 1 in series. Further, in order to impart necessary vibration to a target object, the super magnetostrictor 1 should have a certain height. Therefore, a constraint is imposed in reducing its size in the height direction. Accordingly, the size and weight of the case 7b
20 and the prestress cap 7a, which occupy a large portion of the total weight of the magnetostriction apparatus 20, need to be reduced. However, the case 7b should also have a certain inertial mass in order to maintain the low-frequency characteristic. We have arrived at a technology capable of
25 meeting these incompatible requirements through various experiments, trials and errors.

[0029] Fig. 6 shows the structure of a magnetostriction apparatus according to the embodiment. Unlike the magnetostriction apparatus 20 shown in Fig., 4, a magnetostriction apparatus 30 according to the embodiment is provided with a housing 8 in place of the prestress cap 7a and the case 7b. The housing 8 is provided with a screw part 81, which is an example of a connecting mechanism fitting the magnetostriction apparatus 30 to the main body of the electronic appliance in which the magnetostriction apparatus 30 is provided. That is, the components of the magnetostriction apparatus 30 are accommodated in the housing 8 before being fitted to the main body of the electronic appliance through the screw part 81. The housing 8 includes a yoke formed of, for example, a soft iron plate in order to control a magnetic circuit of a magnetic field generated by the bias magnet 2, the coil 4 and the electrical leads 5a and 5b and to amplify a magnetic field. The bias magnet 2, the coil 4 and the electrical leads 5a and 5b constitute a magnetic field generating means. The yoke creates a closed magnetic path within the housing 8 and prevents a magnetic field from leaking outside.

[0030] Fig. 7 schematically shows the structure of an electronic appliance provided with the magnetostriction apparatus 30 shown in Fig. 6. A main body 40 of an electronic appliance 50 is provided with a screw part 41, which is an example of a connecting mechanism for attaching

the magnetostriction apparatus 30. By screwing the screw part 81 of the magnetostriction apparatus 30 and the screw part 41 of the main body 40 together, the magnetostriction apparatus 30 is fitted to the main body 40. The connecting mechanism may connect the magnetostriction apparatus 30 to the main body 40 by welding, caulking, resin cure or the like. The end of the housing 80 facing the main body 40 is open. When the magnetostriction apparatus 30 is fitted to the main body 40, the lower bias magnet 2b comes into direct contact with the main body 40. A projection 42 is provided in a position of the main body 40 which comes into contact with the lower bias magnet 2b. By tightening the screw, the super magnetostrictor 1 is pressed by the projection 42 via the lower bias magnet 2b, applying predetermined prestress to the super magnetostrictor 1. The electrical leads 5a and 5b are connected to a circuit 49 of the main body 40 so that an electrical signal supplied from the circuit 49 is transmitted to the coil 4.

[0031] In the magnetostriction apparatus 20 shown in Fig. 4, the case 7b is assigned the function of supporting the fixed end of the super magnetostrictor 1. In the magnetostriction apparatus 30 shown in Figs. 6 and 7, the main body 40 of the electronic appliance 50, which includes, for example, a circuit to provide an electric signal to the magnetostriction apparatus 30, is assigned that function. That is, the housing 8 is provided to accommodate components

such as the super magnetostrictor 1, the coil 4, the bias magnet 2 and the elastic member 9 and is not assigned the function of supporting the fixed end of the super magnetostrictor 1 or the function of applying prestress to the super magnetostrictor 1. This eliminates the need to provide a member with a large inertial mass in the magnetostriction apparatus 30 and allows the prestress cap for applying prestress to the super magnetostrictor 1 to be omitted. Consequently, this reduces the size and weight of the magnetostriction apparatus 30 and, ultimately, of the electronic appliance 50 as a whole.

[0032] A related-art approach requires a magnetostriction apparatus as a prerequisite, with a case and a prestress cap being built in and building the magnetostriction apparatus in, for example, an electronic appliance. In contrast, the magnetostriction apparatus 30 of the embodiment can be fitted to any main body 40 so long as the main body 40 has sufficient mass and hardness. Accordingly, electronic appliances using the magnetostriction apparatus 30 can be designed flexibly.

[0033] Insomuch as the related-art magnetostriction apparatus 90 shown in Fig. 1 requires a mechanism to apply prestress to the magnetostrictor 91, it can be said that designers have been unwittingly caught by the preconceived idea that the mechanism shall be inherently provided in the magnetostriction apparatus 90. The mechanism for supporting

the fixed end of the super magnetostrictor 1 to suppress its vibration is also necessary in the magnetostriction apparatus 20 shown in Fig. 4. The mechanism is provided within the magnetostriction apparatus 20. Failure to be free from this concept has resulted in failure to reduce the size and weight of the magnetostriction apparatuses 90 and 20 and has represented a fundamental factor inhibiting wide acceptance of magnetostrictors, which far surpass piezoelectric devices in performance.

10 **[0034]** We have changed the way of thinking and have arrived at an idea of letting the main body 40 of the electronic appliance 50 to operate to apply prestress to the super magnetostrictor 1 and suppress vibration at the fixed end of the super magnetostrictor 1. This approach frees us of the preconceived idea that the magnetostriction apparatus 30 itself should have an inertial mass sufficient to suppress vibration at the fixed end of the super magnetostrictor 1 and allows us to reduce the size and weight significantly. The approach also permits omitting some of the members for sandwiching the super magnetostrictor 1 from above and below and applying prestress thereto, which successfully resulted in reduction in height. This means that a trade off between maintenance of frequency characteristic and reduction in size and weight is established. It will therefore be appreciated that the present invention overcomes challenges that prohibited commercial use of magnetostrictors, which are

superior in characteristics, and represents a major breakthrough that facilitates wide acceptance of equipment using a magnetostrictor.

[0035] As described below, an inertial mass 13.8 times

5 or larger than the moving weight should be provided at the fixed end in order to suppress vibration at the fixed end of the super magnetostrictor and efficiently conduct the vibration at the fixed end outside. For this purpose, the main body 40 should have mass approximately 13.8 times or
10 larger -- or, preferably, 21 times or larger, or, more preferably, 69 times or larger -- than the total mass of the super magnetostrictor 1, the bias magnet 2, the elastic member 9 and the vibrating rod 6. If an additional part vibrated by the vibrating rod 6 (e.g., a vibrating pad for
15 fitting the headphone close to the ear of the user) is provided, the mass of such a part shall be included in the mass of the vibrating rod 6. The mass of constituent members that can be regarded as being mechanically integral with the main body 40 may be included in the mass of the main body 40.

20 **[0036]** The member (in the example of Fig. 7, the projection 42) in the main body 40 with which the structure of the fixed end comes into contact desirably has sufficient hardness to suppress vibration at the fixed end of the super magnetostrictor 1. The housing 8 is preferably made of a
25 magnetic material. In case the magnetostriction apparatus 30 is used in a headphone or the like, however, the housing 8

may not be formed of a magnetic material because the magnetic field generated is not so intense. In this case, the housing 8 may be formed of a light material to achieve lightweight.

[0037] Fig. 8 shows the structure of a headphone as an example of the electronic appliance 50 provided with the magnetostriction apparatus 30 shown in Fig. 6. A headphone 200 is provided with the magnetostriction apparatus 30 of an open type shown in Fig. 6 instead of the magnetostriction apparatus 20 of a closed type provided in the headphone 100 shown in Fig. 5. We built a prototype of the headphone 200 shown in Fig. 8 and found that a wide tonal range, bass and treble, is reproduced with a high fidelity as in the headphone 100 shown in Fig. 5 and that excellent acoustic property is achieved.

[0038] We built prototypes of the headphone 100 of Fig. 5, which is equipped with the magnetostriction apparatus 20 of a closed cylinder type shown in Fig. 4, and of the headphone 200 of Fig. 8, which is equipped with the magnetostriction apparatus 30 of an open type shown in Fig. 6. The ratio between the moving mass and the inertial mass supporting the fixed end is examined in relation to the frequency characteristic of sound output from the headphones, by rating audio perception by the same person being tested wearing the headphones. Since it is difficult to numerically determine the frequency characteristic of sound perceived by humans through bone conduction, a difference in frequency

characteristic is checked by audio perception by the person being tested.

[0039] An experiment using the magnetostriction apparatus 20 of a closed type shown in Fig. 4 demonstrated that the prototype magnetostriction apparatus 20, which has a movable part weighing 1.3 g, an inertial mass of 17.9 g supporting the fixed end and a total mass of 22.2 g, is superior to the related-art bone-conduction headphone using, for example, a piezoelectric device. That is, it was demonstrated that the inventive apparatus is capable of outputting sound of a wider frequency range. Thus, the experiment showed that the inertial mass supporting the fixed end is preferably 13.8 times or larger than the moving mass. If we include in the moving mass the mass of the vibrating pad for conducting vibration of the super magnetostrictor 1 of the magnetostriction apparatus 20 to the head of a person being tested, the inertial mass is preferably about 3.4 or larger than the moving mass. In the prototype headphone 100 equipped with the magnetostriction apparatus 20, the inertial mass of the fixed end, including the mass of the main body, is about 90 g, which is about 69 times (9 times, if the vibrating pad is included) larger than the moving mass. This demonstrates that the headphone 100 has a characteristic superior to the bone-conduction headphone according to the related art.

[0040] Meanwhile, replacing the prestress cap 7a and the

case 7b by the housing 8 resulted in the magnetostriction apparatus 30 of an open type shown in Fig. 6 weighing as little as 12.8 g. Since the mass of prototype magnetostriction apparatus 20 is 22.2 g, the mass of the magnetostriction apparatus is reduced to almost half. It is known from the experiment already mentioned that an excellent frequency characteristic is obtained by providing at the fixed end an inertial mass 13.8 times or larger -- or, more preferably, 69 times or larger -- than the moving mass. This shows that the main body to which the magnetostriction apparatus 30 is attached is required to have the mass. Since the moving mass of the prototype magnetostriction apparatus 30 is 1.3 g, the mass of the main body may be 17.9 g or greater. We built a prototype of the headphone 200 in which the magnetostriction apparatus 30 that weighs 12.8 g is attached to the body 40 that weighs 27 g (21 times as heavy as the moving mass) and confirmed that the headphone achieves an excellent acoustic characteristic. The headphone 200 is significantly lighter than the headphone 100, while offering excellent acoustic property as the headphone 100. The housing 8 of the prototype is formed of a metal. If the coil is contained in a yoke formed of Permalloy or the like to create a closed magnetic path, the housing 8 may be formed of a light material such as resin. This can further reduce the mass of the magnetostriction apparatus 30 and, ultimately, the mass of the apparatus like a headphone as a whole.

[0041] Fig. 9 shows the structure of the electronic appliance 50 according to a variation of the embodiment. The magnetostriction apparatus 30 shown in Fig. 9 is further provided with a bottom plate 11 in addition to the components of the magnetostriction apparatus 30 shown in Fig. 7. The bottom plate 11 may be formed of a plate with waterproof finish for preventing drops of water from invading the magnetostriction apparatus 30 or the main body 40.

Alternatively, the bottom plate 11 may be formed of a magnetic material to prevent leakage of magnetic field to the main body 40. Since the magnetostriction apparatus 30 of this variation is provided with the bottom plate 11 facing the main body 40, the apparatus is of a closed type instead of an open type. However, the bottom 11 need not have an inertial mass necessary to suppress vibration at the fixed end of the super magnetostrictor 1. The bottom plate 11 is not provided to suppress vibration at the fixed end of the super magnetostrictor 1. The inertial mass necessary to suppress vibration may be in the main body 40 of the electronic appliance 50.

[0042] In this case, too, the main body 40 shall have the weight 16.8 times or larger -- or, preferably, 21 times or larger, or, more preferably, 69 times or larger -- than the moving mass. The mass of the bottom plate 11 may be included in the mass of the main body 40. If there is some member provided between the main body 40 and the super

magnetostrictor 1 in addition to the bottom plate 11, the mass of that member may be included in the mass of the main body 40. What is essential is that the fixed end of the super magnetostrictor 1 be provided with sufficient mass and hardness to suppress vibration at the fixed end. With this, vibration of the super magnetostrictor 1 is efficiently conducted outside. Also, the magnetostriction apparatus 30 is allowed to exhibit its excellent frequency characteristic in this way. A particular benefit of the magnetostriction apparatus 30 used in the headphone 200 is that sound quality is improved.

[0043] The description of the invention given above is based upon the embodiment. The embodiment is illustrative in nature and various variations in constituting elements and processes involved are possible. Those skilled in the art would readily appreciate that such variations are also within the scope of the present invention.

[0044] In the embodiment, one super magnetostrictor 1 is provided in the magnetostriction apparatus 30. Alternatively, multiple super magnetostrictors may be provided so long as the main body 40 has enough inertial mass. The size of the super magnetostrictor 1 is as desired.

[0045] An electronic appliance using the magnetostriction apparatus 30 as a vibration generator was described in the embodiment. Alternatively, the magnetostriction apparatus 30 may be used as a vibration

detector. In this case, the vibrating rod 6 has the function of conducting vibration applied from outside to the super magnetostrictor 1. The coil 4 functions as a detecting means for detecting variation in magnetic characteristic of the super magnetostrictor 1 in accordance with the vibration applied from outside, in the form of an electrical signal. In this case, too, the housing 8 is provided with a screw part 81 functioning as a connecting means for connecting the apparatus to the main body 40. The hardness and mass of main body 40 is sufficient to suppress vibration at the end of the main body 40 as the super magnetostrictor 1 is vibrated due to the vibration applied from outside. With this, vibration over a wide frequency range can be accurately detected. By eliminating the need to provide the magnetostriction apparatus 30 with a prestress cap or enough inertial mass, the size and weight of the apparatus can be reduced.

INDUSTRIAL USABILITY

[0046] The present invention is applicable to an electronic appliance for generating or detecting vibration by using a magnetostrictor.

CLAIMS

1. A magnetostriction apparatus comprising:

a magnetostrictor which expands and contracts in
5 accordance with a magnetic field;

a magnetic field generating means which generates the
magnetic field; and

a housing which holds the magnetostrictor and the
magnetic field generating means at predetermined positions,
10 wherein

the housing is connected to an external member so that
a predetermined pressure is applied to the magnetostrictor by
the external member and the housing.

15 2. The magnetostriction apparatus according to claim 1,
wherein

the external member includes a circuit which supplies a
signal for generating the magnetic field to the magnetic
field generating means.

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3. The magnetostriction apparatus according to claim 1
or claim 2, wherein the housing includes a yoke which
controls a magnetic circuit of the magnetic field generated
by the magnetic field generating means.

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4. A magnetostriction apparatus comprising:

a magnetostrictor the magnetic characteristic of which varies in accordance with variation applied from outside;

detecting means which detects variation in the magnetic characteristic in the form an electrical signal;

5 a housing which holds the magnetostrictor and the detecting means at predetermined positions, wherein

the housing is connected to an external member so that a predetermined pressure is applied to the magnetostrictor by the external member and the housing.

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5. The magnetostriction apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the external member includes a circuit which acquires the electrical signal from the detecting means.

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6. The magnetostriction apparatus according to any one of claims 1 through 5, not comprising a structure which supports an end of the magnetostrictor opposite to an end supported by the housing and applies a predetermined pressure to the magnetostrictor.

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7. The magnetostriction apparatus according to any one of claims 1 or claim 6, wherein the housing includes a yoke for creating a closed magnetic path within the housing.

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8. The magnetostriction apparatus according to any one of claims 1 through 7, wherein

the face of the housing where the magnetostriction apparatus is connected to the external member is open, and

the magnetostriction apparatus is connected to the external member such that the end of the magnetostrictor
5 facing the external member, or a constituting member provided in the magnetostrictor to face the external member comes into contact with the external member.

9. The magnetostriction apparatus according to any one
10 of claims 1 through 8, further comprising a vibrating unit which conducts vibration at an end of the magnetostrictor opposite to an end facing the external member, outside the magnetostriction apparatus.