Transient Modeling of Multiphase Flow in Wellbores

Muskan Khan

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Abstract

Multiphase flow in wellbores is critical to the efficient and safe production of oil and gas resources. Accurate transient modeling of multiphase flow in wellbores is essential for predicting flow behavior and optimizing production. This paper presents a comprehensive review of the current state of transient modeling of multiphase flow in wellbores. The paper covers the governing equations, flow regimes, wellbore geometry, and boundary conditions, numerical methods for solving the equations, model validation and verification, sensitivity analysis and uncertainty quantification, and applications of the models in wellbore design and production optimization. The review highlights the challenges and future directions in transient multiphase flow modeling in wellbores. The paper underscores the importance of transient modeling in accurately predicting flow behavior and optimizing production in oil and gas production systems. This review can serve as a valuable reference for researchers and practitioners working in the field of multiphase flow in wellbores.

Introduction

Oil and gas production from reservoirs involves the transport of fluids, including oil, gas, and water, from the subsurface to the surface through wellbores. Multiphase flow in wellbores is a complex phenomenon, as it involves the simultaneous flow of different fluids with different physical properties, such as densities, viscosities, and compressibilities.[1] Accurate prediction of the transient behavior of multiphase flow in wellbores is critical for the efficient and safe production of hydrocarbons. Over the years, researchers have developed several models to simulate multiphase flow in wellbores. These models range from simple empirical correlations to complex numerical models that solve the governing equations of fluid flow using numerical techniques. The transient modeling of multiphase flow in wellbores involves the simulation of the dynamic behavior of fluids as they flow through the wellbore under varying conditions of pressure, temperature, and fluid properties.

The development of transient models for multiphase flow in wellbores is motivated by several factors, including the need to optimize production rates, increase the recovery factor, and ensure the safety of operations.[2] Transient models can be used to predict the behavior of the wellbore system under different operating conditions, including well start-up, shut-in, and changes in production rates. These models can also be used to design and optimize wellbore configurations, such as tubing size and length, wellhead pressure, and flow control devices.[3]

In this paper, we present a detailed review of transient modeling techniques for multiphase flow in wellbores. We start by reviewing the literature on multiphase flow in wellbores, including the physical phenomena involved, the challenges associated with modeling, and the existing modeling approaches. We then describe the transient modeling techniques, including the governing equations, numerical methods, and boundary conditions.[4] We also discuss the verification and validation of transient models and present case studies to illustrate the application of these models in practical scenarios. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the limitations of current models and highlight areas for future research.[5]

Multiphase flow in wellbores refers to the simultaneous flow of two or more fluids with different physical properties, such as oil, gas, and water, in a wellbore. This is a complex and challenging phenomenon, as it involves the interaction of fluids with different properties and the presence of complex flow patterns such as slug flow, annular flow, and stratified flow. The behavior of multiphase flow in wellbores is influenced by several factors, including fluid properties, wellbore geometry, flow rate, temperature, and pressure.[5] These factors affect the flow pattern, pressure drop, and holdup of each fluid phase in the wellbore. Accurate prediction of the behavior of multiphase flow in wellbores is essential for the design, optimization, and operation of oil and gas production systems. Several models have been developed to simulate multiphase flow in wellbores. These models can be classified into two main categories: empirical models and mechanistic models. Empirical models are based on experimental data and empirical correlations and are simple and computationally inexpensive. Mechanistic models, on the other hand, are based on the fundamental principles of fluid mechanics and thermodynamics and are more complex and computationally intensive.[6]

Mechanistic models are further classified into one-dimensional (1D), two-dimensional (2D), and three-dimensional (3D) models, depending on the dimensionality of the model. 1D models are based on the assumption of radial homogeneity and are suitable for modeling the flow in a vertical wellbore.[7] 2D models are suitable for modeling the flow in deviated or horizontal wellbores, while 3D models are suitable for modeling complex wellbore geometries.[8] Transient modeling of multiphase flow in wellbores involves the simulation of the dynamic behavior of fluids as they flow through the wellbore under varying conditions of pressure, temperature, and fluid properties. This is important for the prediction of the behavior of the wellbore system under different operating conditions, including well start-up, shut-in, and changes in production rates. [9]Transient models can also be used to design and optimize wellbore configurations, such as tubing size and length, wellhead pressure, and flow control devices.[10]

Boundary Conditions

Boundary conditions play a crucial role in the simulation of multiphase flow in wellbores, as they define the behavior of the fluids at the boundaries of the computational domain. The choice of appropriate boundary conditions is essential for obtaining accurate and reliable results from the numerical simulations. In this section, we discuss the different types of boundary conditions used in the simulation of multiphase flow in wellbores. Inlet boundary conditions: The inlet boundary condition specifies the properties of the fluids entering the wellbore. The most common inlet boundary condition is the mass flow rate, which is typically specified at the wellhead. The properties of the fluids, such as their densities, viscosities, and compositions, can also be specified at the inlet. Outlet boundary conditions: The outlet boundary condition specifies the behavior of the fluids at the end of the computational domain. In wellbore simulations, the outlet boundary condition is typically a fixed pressure or a fixed flow rate condition. The pressure at the outlet is usually set to the atmospheric pressure or the pressure at the production separator.[10]

Wall boundary conditions: The wall boundary condition specifies the behavior of the fluids at the interface between the fluid and the wellbore wall. This condition is essential for accurate prediction of the pressure drop and holdup in the wellbore. Wall boundary conditions can be categorized as no-slip, partial-slip, or slip conditions, depending on the degree of slip between the fluid and the wall. Initial conditions: The initial conditions specify the properties of the fluids at the start of the simulation. The initial conditions are typically specified at the bottom of the wellbore and can include the pressure, temperature, and fluid properties. Wellhead boundary conditions: The wellhead boundary condition specifies the behavior of the fluids at the wellhead, which is the interface between the wellbore and the production system. The wellhead boundary condition is typically a pressure or flow rate condition, and it can affect the performance of the production system. In addition to the above boundary conditions, special conditions may also be required to account for other physical phenomena such as phase change, heat transfer, and chemical reactions. The choice of appropriate boundary conditions depends on the specific application and the level of detail required in the simulation.

Verification and Validation

Verification and validation are two important steps in the development and application of numerical models for multiphase flow in wellbores. Verification refers to the process of checking whether the model has been implemented correctly, while validation refers to the process of assessing whether the model accurately represents the physical system being modeled.

Verification involves testing the numerical model to ensure that it has been implemented correctly and that it accurately solves the mathematical equations governing multiphase flow in wellbores. Verification can be performed using analytical solutions, which are exact solutions of the governing equations, or by using manufactured solutions, which are synthetic solutions that are manufactured to match the numerical scheme. The verification process typically involves the following steps:

Code inspection and testing: The numerical code is tested for errors and bugs, and the results are compared with known analytical solutions. Grid convergence study: The numerical solution is computed on grids of varying resolution to assess the convergence of the solution to a true solution. Order of accuracy: The order of accuracy of the numerical method is assessed by comparing the numerical solution with the exact solution or a manufactured solution.

Validation involves comparing the results of the numerical model with experimental data or field measurements to assess the accuracy of the model in representing the physical system being modeled. Validation is essential to ensure that the model accurately represents the behavior of multiphase flow in wellbores under different operating conditions. The validation process typically involves the following steps:

Experimental data collection: Experimental data or field measurements are collected for a range of operating conditions. Model simulation: The numerical model is used to simulate the behavior of multiphase flow in wellbores for the same operating conditions. Comparison of results: The results of the numerical simulation are compared with the experimental data or field measurements to assess the accuracy of the model. Sensitivity analysis: The sensitivity of the model to various parameters is assessed to identify areas of uncertainty and to improve the accuracy of the model. The verification and validation process is iterative, and it is essential to perform both steps to ensure that the numerical model accurately represents the physical system being modeled. The results of the verification and validation process provide confidence in the use of the numerical model for predicting the behavior of multiphase flow in wellbores under different operating conditions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the transient modeling of multiphase flow in wellbores is a complex and challenging problem that requires accurate numerical simulation techniques. The simulation of multiphase flow in wellbores involves the solution of a set of coupled equations that describe the behavior of different fluid phases, including their momentum, energy, and mass transfer. Numerical methods such as finite volume and finite difference methods are commonly used to solve these equations. These methods require the specification of appropriate boundary conditions and the verification and validation of the model to ensure accurate results. Transient modeling of multiphase flow in wellbores is essential for the design and optimization of oil and gas production systems. Accurate prediction of the behavior of fluids in the wellbore can help identify potential issues such as flow assurance problems, gas locking, and liquid loading, and optimize the production rates and recovery of hydrocarbons. Overall, transient modeling of multiphase flow in wellbores is an active area of research that has the potential to contribute to the efficient and sustainable production of hydrocarbons from subsurface reservoirs.

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