

Influence of confining and pore-fluid pressures on velocity and conductivity of a fluid-saturated rock

SEMA, Fumie^{1*} ; MAKIMURA, Miho¹ ; HIGUCHI, Akiyoshi¹ ; WATANABE, Tohru¹

¹Department of Earth Sciences, University of Toyama

Pore-fluid pressure in seismogenic zones can play a key role in the occurrence of an earthquake (e.g., Sibson, 2009). Its evaluation via geophysical observation can lead to a good understanding of seismic activities. It is critical to understand how pore-fluid pressure affects seismic velocity and electrical conductivity. We have studied the influence of pore-fluid pressure on elastic wave velocity and electrical conductivity of water-saturated rocks.

Measurements have been made using a 200 MPa hydrostatic pressure vessel, in which confining and pore-fluid pressures can be separately controlled. An aqueous pore-fluid is electrically insulated from the metal work by using a specially designed device (Watanabe and Higuchi, 2013). Elastic wave velocity was measured with the pulse transmission technique (PZT transducers, $f=2$ MHz), and electrical conductivity the four-electrode method (Ag-AgCl electrodes, $f=100$ mHz-100 kHz) to minimize the influence of polarization on electrodes.

Berea sandstone (OH, USA) was used for its high porosity (19.1%) and permeability ($\sim 10^{-13}$ m²). It is mainly composed of subangular quartz grains. Microstructural examinations show clay minerals (e.g., kaolinite) and carbonates (e.g., calcite) fill many gaps between quartz grains. A small amount of feldspar grains are also present. The grain size is 100-200 micrometers. Cylindrical samples have dimensions of 25 mm in diameter and 30 mm in length. Their axes are perpendicular to sedimentation bed. Elastic wave velocity is slightly higher in the direction perpendicular to the axis than in that parallel to the axis.

Confining and pore-fluid pressures work in opposite ways. Increasing confining pressure closes pores, while increasing pore-fluid pressure opens them. For a given pore-fluid pressure, both compressional and shear velocities increase with increasing confining pressure, while electrical conductivity decreases. When confining pressure is fixed, velocity decreases with increasing pore-fluid pressure while conductivity increases. The closure and opening of pores can explain observed changes of velocity and conductivity.

Effective confining pressure is defined by the difference between confining and pore-fluid pressures. Velocity increases with increasing effective confining pressure, while conductivity decreases. However, neither velocity nor conductivity is unique function of the effective confining pressure. For a given effective confining pressure, conductivity significantly increases with increasing confining pressure. Velocity also increases with increasing confining pressure, though it is not so significant. Increasing pore-fluid pressure can compress clay minerals to increase pore space. This might explain observed conductivity change.

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