A note on turbulent energy dissipation in the viscous wall region

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(Received 8 June 1993; accepted 26 August 1993)

From simulation data it is shown that the difference between the true rate of dissipation of turbulent kinetic energy and the “isotropic dissipation” used by Reynolds-averaged modelers is less than 2% in a conventional viscous wall region, and negligible elsewhere. The difference is a contribution to viscous diffusion which is a small fraction of the total.

Corrsin\(^1\) reminded the community that the correct form of the viscous diffusion term in the turbulent energy equation, first derived by Reynolds\(^2\) in a paper presented in 1894, is not simply the customary \(\nu\) times the Laplacian of the diffused quantity, but contains an extra second derivative. The complete viscous term is

\[
\nu \frac{\partial^2 u_i}{\partial x_j^2} = \nu \frac{\partial}{\partial x_j} \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{\partial u_i}{\partial x_j} \right) - \nu \frac{\partial^2 u_i}{\partial x_j^2}.
\]

We describe the form on the second line as (thermodynamically) “correct” (see Lumley\(^3\)) because the last term is the exact dissipation rate (being the time- or ensemble-averaged sum of the product of each component of fluctuating viscous stress with the fluctuating strain rate in the same plane, and thus the average rate at which work is done against viscous stress by the turbulence). The last term on the first line is the quantity called “isotropic dissipation” by turbulence modelers, who use it because its exact transport equation is simpler than that for the true dissipation. The difference between the two forms of the viscous term is the unexpected contribution to the diffusion, \(\nu \frac{\partial^2 u_i}{\partial x_j^2} \frac{\partial u_j}{\partial x_i} \), note that equality of the two requires only homogeneity, not isotropy.

It is commonly and correctly argued, on the basis of order-of-magnitude arguments (e.g., Hallbläck\(^4\)), that the extra viscous diffusion term is small compared to the main, Laplacian term, but surprisingly there seems to be no quantitative estimate in the literature. In this note we use direct simulation data to show that the extra term, and therefore the difference between the true dissipation and the “isotropic” dissipation, is negligibly small.

Apart from shock waves where \(\partial^2 u_i/\partial x_i^2\) is large, the only place where viscous diffusion is significant is the viscous wall region, \(y^+ < 30\) say, where \(y^+ = \sqrt{\tau_w / \rho y / \nu}\). Here by far the largest contribution to \(\nu \partial^2 u_i/\partial x_i \partial x_j\) in flows obeying the boundary-layer approximation is \(\partial^2 \phi / \partial y^2\). Figure 1 shows \(\phi^2\) from the channel-flow simulation of Kim et al., using law-of-the-wall scaling, and Fig. 2 shows the ratio of the extra viscous diffusion term, \(\nu \partial^2 \phi / \partial y^2\), to the (exact) dissipation term. The extra contribution to viscous diffusion is everywhere less than about 2% of the dissipation rate, and this figure should apply in all flows which obey the law of the wall. The quantitative figure for the difference might change if the flow deviated from the law of the wall, but it is small enough to suggest that the difference will be negligible on any smooth solid surface. Flows with unconventional surface boundary conditions (riblets, free surfaces, or the start or end of a region

![FIG. 1. Simulation data\(^4\) for \(\nu\)-component intensity in channel flow.](image1)

![FIG. 2. \(\partial^2 \phi / \partial y^2\) in wall units.](image2)
of roughness or transpiration) would have to be considered individually.

From the turbulence modeler's viewpoint the conclusion is that the difference between the true dissipation rate and the "isotropic" dissipation rate can be ignored for all purposes of computation and discussion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

JBP acknowledges the support of the National Science Foundation.