

A Study of the Close Approach Between a Planet and a Cloud of Particles

VIVIAN MARTINS GOMES, ANTONIO F. B. A. PRADO
 National Institute for Space Research – INPE - DMC
 Av. Dos Astronautas 1758 – São José dos Campos – SP – 12227-010
 BRAZIL
 vivian.gomes@uol.com.br; prado@dem.inpe.br

Abstract: - In the present paper we study the close approach between a celestial body and a cloud of particles. This is the situation that occurs when a fragmented comet crosses the orbit of a planet like Jupiter, Saturn, etc. It is assumed that the dynamical system is formed by two main bodies that are in circular orbits around their center of mass and a cloud of particles that is moving under the gravitational attraction of the two primaries. The motion is assumed to be planar for all the particles and the dynamics given by the “patched-conic” approximation is used, which means that a series of two-body problems are used to generate analytical equations that describe the problem. The goal is to study the change of the orbit of this cloud of particles after the close approach with the planet. It is assumed that all the particles that belong to the cloud have semi-major axis $a \pm da$ and eccentricity $e \pm de$ before the close approach with the planet. It is desired to know those values after the close approach. In particular, we will study the effects of the periapsis distance in this maneuver.

Key-Words: - Astrodynamics, Orbital maneuvers, Swing-By, Gravity assisted maneuvers, Orbital motion.

1 Introduction

In astronautics, the close approach between a spacecraft and a planet is a very popular technique used to decrease fuel expenditure in space missions. This maneuver modifies the velocity, energy and angular momentum of a spacecraft. There are many important applications very well known, like the Voyager I and II that used successive close encounters with the giant planets to make a long journey to the outer Solar System; the Ulysses mission that used a close approach with Jupiter to change its orbital plane to observe the poles of the Sun, etc.

In the present paper we study the close approach between a planet and a cloud of particles. It is assumed that the dynamical system is formed by two main bodies (usually the Sun and one planet) that are in circular orbits around their center of mass and a cloud of particles that is moving under the gravitational attraction of the two primaries. The motion is assumed to be planar for all the particles and the dynamics given by the “patched-conic” approximation is used, which means that a series of two-body problems are used to generate analytical equations that describe the problem. The standard canonical system of units is used and it implies that the unit of distance is the distance between the two primaries and the unit of time is chosen such that the period of the orbit of the two primaries is $2p$.

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Among the several sets of initial conditions that can be used to identify uniquely one swing-by trajectory, a modified version of the set used in the papers written by [18], [19] and [20] is used here. It is composed by the following three variables: 1) V_p , the velocity of the spacecraft at periapse of the orbit around the secondary body; 2) The angle ψ , that is defined as the angle between the line M1-M2 (the two primaries) and the direction of the periapse of the trajectory of the spacecraft around M2; 3) r_p , the distance from the spacecraft to the center of M2 in the moment of the closest approach to M2 (periapse distance). The values of V_p and ψ are obtained from the initial orbit of the spacecraft around the Sun using the “patched-conics” approximation and r_p is a free parameter that is varied to obtain the results.

2 Review of the Literature for the Swing-By

The literature shows several applications of the swing-by technique. Some of them can be found in Swenson[1], that studied a mission to Neptune using

swing-by to gain energy to accomplish the mission; [2], that made a similar study for a mission to Pluto; [3], that formulated a mission to study the Earth's geomagnetic tail; [4], [5] and [6], that planned the mission ISEE-3/ICE; [7], that made the first studies for the Voyager mission; [8], that design a mission to flyby the comet Halley; [9], [10] that studied multiple flyby for interplanetary missions; [11] and [12] that design missions with multiple lunar swing-bys; [13], that studied the effects of the atmosphere in a swing-by trajectory; [14], that used a swing-by in Venus to reach Mars; [15], that studied numerically a swing-by in three dimensions, including the effects in the inclination; [16], that considered the possibility of applying an impulse during the passage by the periaapsis; [17], that classified trajectories making a swing-by with the Moon. The most usual approach to study this problem is to divide the problem in three phases dominated by the "two-body" celestial mechanics. Other models used to study this problem are the circular restricted three-body problem (like in [18], [19], and [20]) and the elliptic restricted three-body problem ([21]).

3 Orbital Change of a Single Particle

This section will briefly describe the orbital change of a single particle subjected to a close approach with the planet under the "patched-conics" model. It is assumed that the particle is in orbit around the Sun with given semi-major axis (a) and eccentricity (e). The swing-by is assumed to occur in the planet Jupiter for the numerical calculations shown below, but the analytical equations are valid for any system of primaries. The periaapse distance (r_p) is assumed to be known. As an example, for the numerical calculations, the following numerical values are used: a = 1.2 canonical units, e = 0.3, μ_J = 0.00094736, r_p = 0.0001285347 (100000 km = 1.4 Jupiter's radius), where μ_J is the gravitational parameter of Jupiter in canonical units (total mass of the system equals to one).

The first step is to obtain the energy (EB) and angular momentum (CB) of the particle before the swing-by. They are given by:

$$EB = -\frac{(1 - \mu_J)}{2a} = -0.4162,$$

$$CB = \sqrt{(1 - \mu_J)a(1 - e^2)} = 1.0445$$

Then, it is possible to calculate the magnitude of the velocity of the particle with respect to the Sun in the moment of the crossing with Jupiter's orbit (V_i),

as well as the true anomaly of that point (q). They come from:

$$V_i = \sqrt{(1 - \mu_J) \left(\frac{2}{r_{SJ}} - \frac{1}{a} \right)} = 1.0796$$

and

$$\theta = \cos^{-1} \left[\frac{1}{e} \left(\frac{a(1 - e^2)}{r_{SJ}} - 1 \right) \right] = 1.2591,$$

using the fact that the distance between the Sun and Jupiter (r_{SJ}) is one and taking only the positive value of the true anomaly.

Next, it is calculated the angle between the inertial velocity of the particle and the velocity of Jupiter (the flight path angle γ), as well as the magnitude of the velocity of the particle with respect to Jupiter in the moment of the approach (V_∞). They are given by (assuming a counter-clock-wise orbit for the particle):

$$\gamma = \tan^{-1} \left[\frac{e \sin \theta}{1 + e \cos \theta} \right] = 0.2558$$

and

$$V_\infty = \sqrt{V_i^2 + V_2^2 - 2V_i V_2 \cos \gamma} = 0.2767,$$

using the fact that the velocity of Jupiter around the Sun (V₂) is one. Fig. 1 shows the vector addition used to derive the equations.

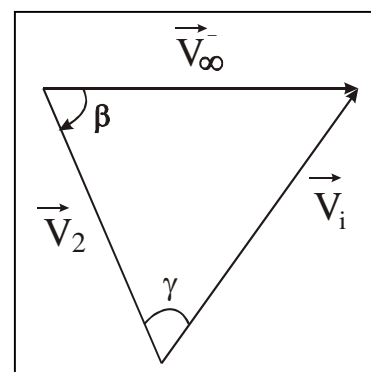


Fig. 1 – Vector addition during the close-approach.

The angle b shown is given by:

$$\beta = \cos^{-1} \left[-\frac{V_i^2 - V_2^2 - V_\infty^2}{2V_2 V_\infty} \right] = 1.7322$$

Those information allow us to obtain the turning angle (2d) of the particle around Jupiter, from:

$$\delta = \sin^{-1} \left(1 / \left(1 + \frac{r_p V_\infty^2}{\mu_J} \right) \right) = 1.4272$$

The angle of approach (ψ) has two values, depending if the particle is passing in front (when we call Solution 1) or behind (when we call Solution 2) the planet. These two values will be called ψ_1 and ψ_2 . They are obtained from:

$$\psi_1 = \pi + \beta + \delta = 6.3011$$

and

$$\psi_2 = 2\pi + \beta - \delta = 6.5882$$

The correspondent variations in energy and angular momentum are obtained from the equation $\Delta C = \Delta E = -2 V_2 V_\infty \sin \delta \sin \psi$, (since $w = 1$). The results are:

$$\Delta C_1 = \Delta E_1 = -0.009811$$

$$\Delta C_2 = \Delta E_2 = -0.1644$$

By adding those quantities to the initial values we get the values after the swing-by. They are: $E_1 = -0.4260$, $C_1 = 1.0346$, $E_2 = -0.5806$, $C_2 = 0.8801$.

Finally, to obtain the semi-major axis and the eccentricity after the swing-by it is possible to use the equations:

$$a = -\frac{\mu}{2E}$$

and

$$e = \sqrt{1 - \frac{C^2}{\mu a}}$$

The results are: $a_1 = 1.1723$, $e_1 = 0.2937$, $a_2 = 0.8603$, $e_2 = 0.3144$.

4 Orbital Change of a Cloud of Particles

The algorithm just described can now be applied to a cloud of particles passing close to Jupiter and Saturn. The idea is to simulate a cloud of particles that have orbital elements given by: $a \pm da$ and $e \pm de$. The goal

is to map this cloud of particles to obtain the new distribution of semi-major axis and eccentricities after the swing-by. Fig. 2 shows some results for Jupiter, for the case $da = de = 0.001$, $r_p = 1.1$ and $5.0 R_J$ and Fig. 3 shows the equivalent results for Saturn.

Those figures allow us to get some conclusions. The solution called "Solution 1" has a larger amplitude than the Solution 2 in both orbital elements, but it concentrates the orbital elements in a line, while the so called "Solution 2" generates a distribution close to a square. The area occupied by the points is smaller for "Solution 1". Both vertical and horizontal lines are rotated and become diagonal lines with different inclinations. The effect of increasing the periapsis distance is to generate plots with larger amplitudes, but with the points more concentrated, close to a straight line.

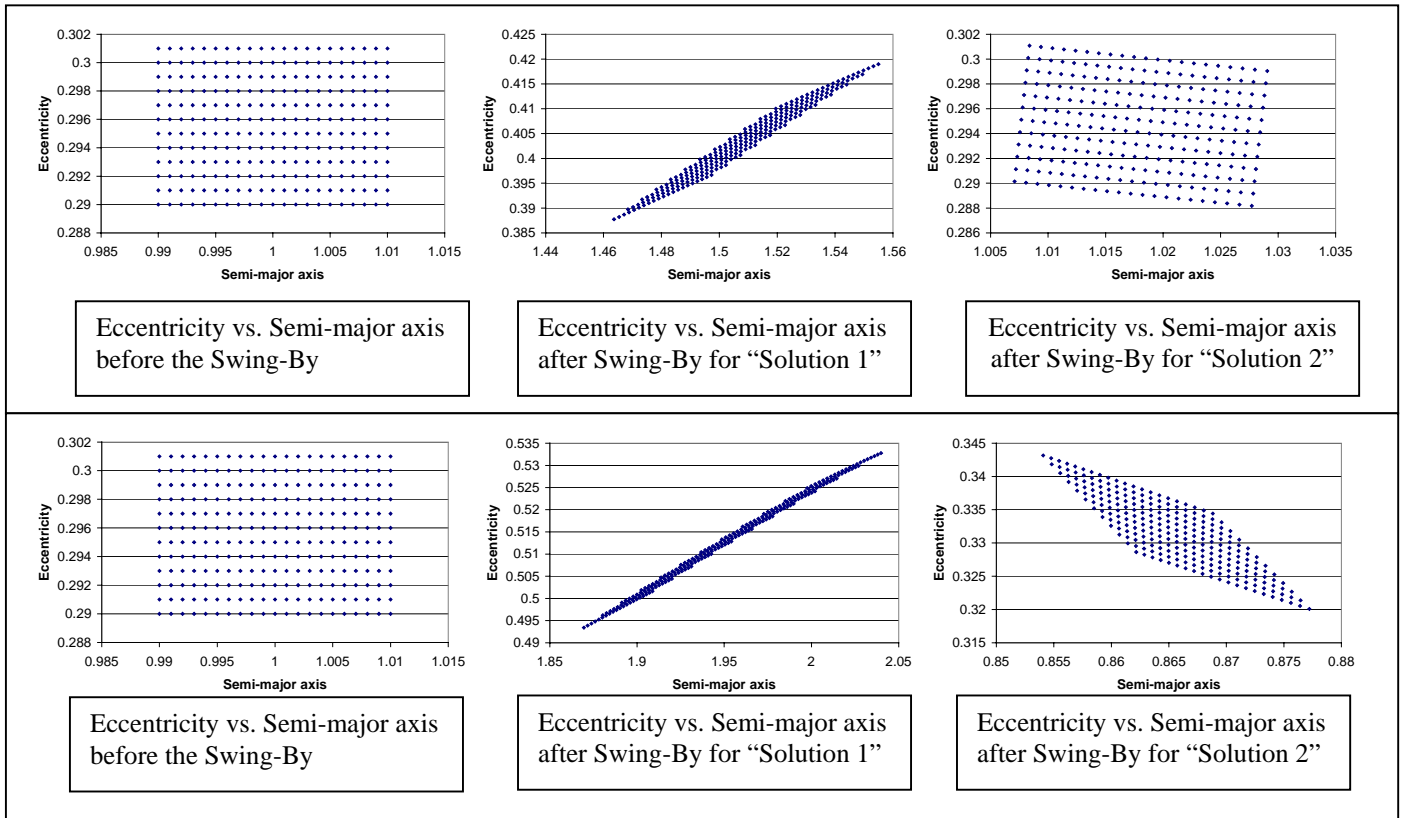


Fig. 2 – Swing-by for a cloud of particles with Jupiter for $r_p = 1.1$ (above) and 5.0 (below) R_J .

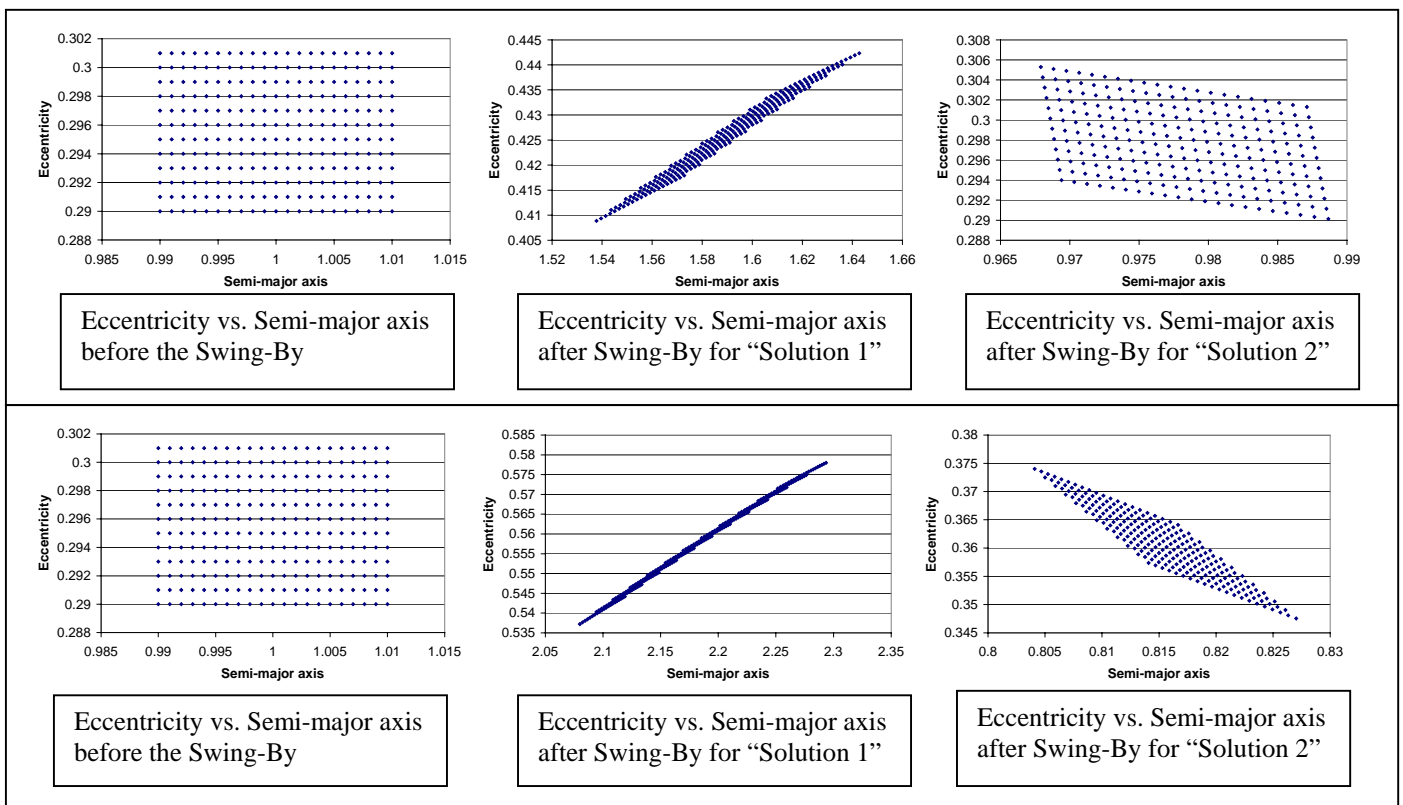


Fig. 3 – Swing-by for a cloud of particles with Saturn for $r_p = 1.1$ (above) and 5.0 (below) R_J .

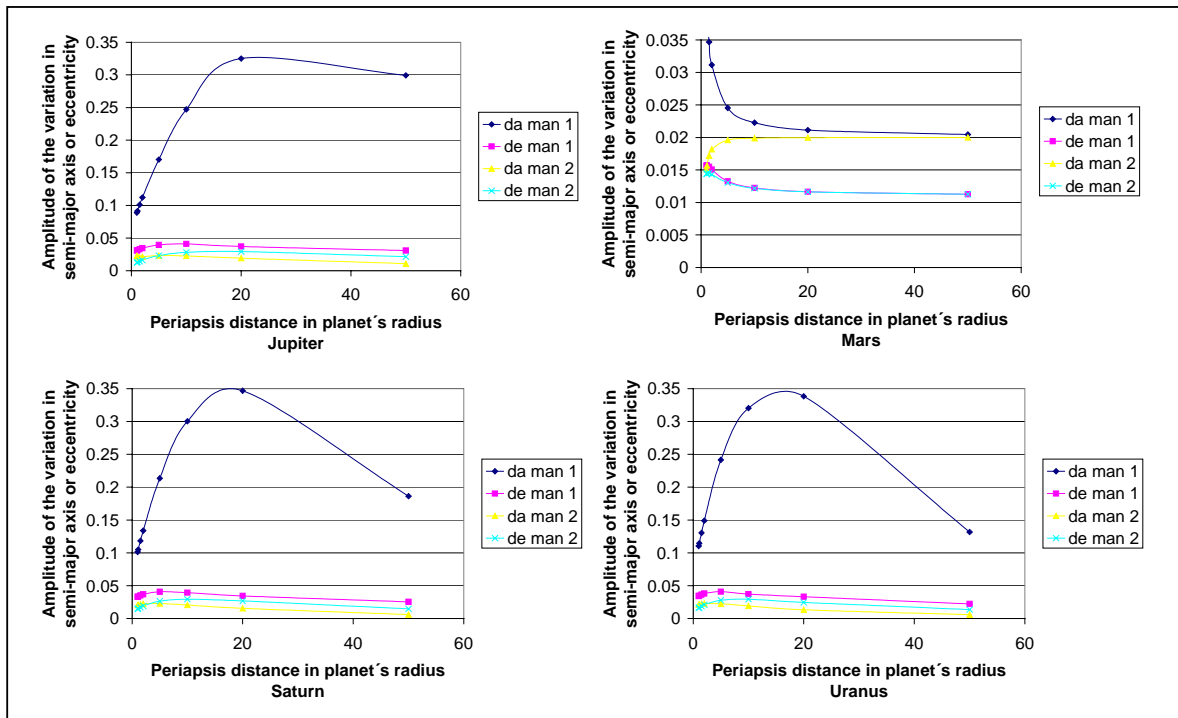


Fig. 4 – Effects of the periapsis distances for Jupiter, Mars, Saturn and Uranus.

After performing a large number of simulations using different values for the periapsis distance, it is possible to study the effects of this parameter in the whole maneuver. In Fig. 4, Man1 refers to the solution 1 and Man2 refers to the solution 2.

From those results we can see that different planets show different behaviors regarding this maneuver. For the large planets, the amplitude has a sharp maximum for the variation in amplitude. It means that there is a specific value for the periapsis distance that maximizes the dispersion of the particles. This information can be used for practical applications, like in the case that you can control the periapsis distance (like a satellite that will explode, but that you can control its trajectory before the explosion), and then you can choose the position that causes larger amplitudes. For Mars the behavior shows a decreasing amplitude, so if you want to maximize the amplitude you need to send the spacecraft as close as possible to the planet.

5 Conclusion

The figures above allow us to get some conclusions. The solution called “Solution 1” has a larger amplitude than the Solution 2 in both orbital elements, but it concentrates the orbital elements in a line, while the so called “Solution 2” generates a distribution close to a square. The area occupied by

the points is smaller for “Solution 1”. Both vertical and horizontal lines are rotated and become diagonal lines with different inclinations. The effect of increasing the periapse distance is to generate plots with larger amplitudes, but with the points more concentrated, close to a straight line. In general, results like those ones shown here can be used to understand better the effects of the periapsis distance.

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