



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***IMPROVED CRITERIA DETERMINATION OF AN AUTOMATED  
NEGATIVE LIGHTNING RETURN STROKES CHARACTERISATION  
USING BRUTE-FORCE SEARCH ALGORITHM***

**FARANADIA BINTI ABDUL HARIS**

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**By**

**FARANADIA BINTI ABDUL HARIS**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy**

**November 2021**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**FARANADIA BT ABDUL HARIS**

**November 2021**

**Chair : Mohd Zainal Abidin Ab. Kadir, PhD**  
**Faculty : Engineering**

Over the years, many studies have been conducted to measure, analyse and characterise (i.e. mainly on the negative return strokes) the lightning-generated electric field waveform for a better understanding and conception of the lightning phenomenon and processes. The characterisation also contributes to the lightning protection system and lightning location system development as these systems require measured and validated data of the negative lightning return stroke characteristics. Previous studies mostly performed the characterisation of the negative return strokes using a conventional method, namely manual observations. Nevertheless, this traditional method could compromise data analysis accuracy due to human errors. The processing time to analyse the data would also be longer, especially for larger sample sizes. Therefore, this study proposed an automated negative lightning return strokes characterisation using a Brute-Force search algorithm, mainly on seven parameters, i.e. on zero-to-peak rise time, 10-to-90% rise time, zero-crossing time, slow front time, slow front amplitude relative to peak, fast transition 10-to-90% rise time, and width  $dE/dt$  pulse at half peak value. For this purpose, the lightning-generated electric field measurement under different seasonal periods, was conducted at the College of Engineering, Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN), Selangor, Malaysia using a previously researched small-scale parallel-plate antenna. The criteria for each of the negative lightning return strokes parameters were established and defined based on specific mathematical equations. Accordingly, the proposed Brute-Force search algorithm characterised the negative lightning return strokes parameters based on the seven parameters. A total of 206 negative lightning return strokes waveforms were analysed and automatically characterised using the proposed algorithm. Comparisons of different data,

including the manual data (i.e. obtained through the conventional method), data (automated) from a previous study, and the automated data (i.e. obtained using the proposed algorithm), were also carried out by evaluating the percentage difference, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation. The statistical analysis showed a good agreement between manual and automated data on each parameter, with a percentage difference observed between 0.08% and 6.88%. Bland-Altman plots analysis also showed that most of the plotted data were within the threshold limits. The results suggest that the proposed algorithm can provide an efficient structure and procedure by reducing the processing time, minimising human error, and eliminating the nonuniformity among users while characterising the lightning negative return strokes. Furthermore, the small-scale parallel-plate antenna that has been tested under real lightning condition can be operated as a portable, lightweight, and easy-to-install device for a lightning measurement system.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PENENTUAN KRITERIA YANG DIPERBAIKI BALIK KILAT NEGATIF  
AUTOMATIK PERCIRIAN MENGGUNAKAN ALGORITMA PENCARIAN  
BRUTE-FORCE**

Oleh

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Selama bertahun-tahun, banyak kajian telah dijalankan untuk mengukur, menganalisis dan mencirikan (iaitu terutamanya pada pukulan pulangan negatif) bentuk gelombang medan elektrik yang dijana kilat untuk pemahaman dan konsep yang lebih baik tentang fenomena dan proses kilat. Pencirian juga menyumbang kepada sistem perlindungan kilat dan pembangunan sistem lokasi kilat kerana sistem ini memerlukan data yang diukur dan disahkan bagi ciri-ciri strok pulangan kilat negatif. Kajian terdahulu kebanyakannya melakukan pencirian pukulan pulangan negatif menggunakan kaedah konvensional iaitu pemerhatian manual. Namun begitu, kaedah tradisional ini boleh menjejaskan ketepatan analisis data akibat kesilapan manusia. Masa pemrosesan untuk menganalisis data juga akan menjadi lebih lama, terutamanya untuk saiz sampel yang lebih besar. Oleh itu, kajian ini mencadangkan pencirian kilat pulangan kilat negatif automatik menggunakan algoritma carian brute-force, terutamanya pada tujuh parameter, iaitu pada masa kenaikan sifar hingga puncak, masa naik 10 hingga 90%, masa lintasan sifar, perlahan. masa hadapan, amplitud hadapan perlahan berbanding puncak, masa naik 10 hingga 90% peralihan pantas, dan nadi  $dE/dt$  lebar pada separuh nilai puncak. Untuk tujuan ini, pengukuran medan elektrik janaan kilat di bawah tempoh bermusim yang berbeza, telah dijalankan di Kolej Kejuruteraan, Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN), Selangor, Malaysia menggunakan antena prallel-plat berskala kecil yang telah dikaji sebelum ini. Kriteria bagi setiap parameter sambaran kilat negatif telah ditetapkan dan ditakrifkan berdasarkan persamaan matematik tertentu. Sehubungan itu, algoritma carian brute-force yang dicadangkan mencirikan parameter pukulan pulangan kilat negatif berdasarkan tujuh parameter. Sebanyak 206 bentuk gelombang kilat pulangan kilat negatif telah dianalisis dan dicirikan secara automatik menggunakan algoritma yang dicadangkan. Perbandingan data yang berbeza, termasuk data manual (iaitu diperolehi melalui kaedah konvensional), data (automatik) daripada kajian terdahulu, dan data automatik (iaitu diperolehi menggunakan algoritma yang dicadangkan), juga dijalankan dengan menilai

perbezaan peratusan, min aritmetik, dan sisihan piawai. Analisis statistik menunjukkan persetujuan yang baik antara data manual dan automatik pada setiap parameter, dengan perbezaan peratusan diperhatikan antara 0.08% dan 6.88%. Analisis plot Bland-Altman juga menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan data yang diplot berada dalam had ambang. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa algoritma yang dicadangkan boleh menyediakan struktur dan prosedur yang cekap dengan mengurangkan masa pemprosesan, meminimumkan ralat manusia, dan menghapuskan ketidakseragaman di kalangan pengguna sambil mencirikan strok pulangan negatif kilat. Tambahan pula, antena plat selari berskala kecil yang telah diuji dalam keadaan kilat sebenar boleh dikendalikan sebagai peranti mudah alih, ringan dan mudah dipasang untuk sistem pengukuran kilat.



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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- the research and the writing of this thesis were done under our supervision;
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## LIST OF SYMBOLS

|              |                                       |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| $E$          | Electric Field                        |
| $F$          | Flux Density                          |
| $Q$          | Charge                                |
| $\lambda$    | Wavelength                            |
| $V$          | Wave velocity                         |
| $f$          | Frequency                             |
| $d$          | Distance                              |
| $V_g$        | Input Voltage                         |
| $V_m$        | Output/transient Recorder System      |
| $R$          | Resistor                              |
| $C$          | Capacitor                             |
| $C_b$        | Bypass Capacitor                      |
| $C_v$        | Variable Capacitance                  |
| $t_{z1p}$    | Zero-to-Peak Rise Time                |
| $t_z$        | Zero-Crossing Time                    |
| $t_{r10-90}$ | 10-to-90% Rise Time                   |
| $m$          | Gradient                              |
| $\theta$     | Angle                                 |
| $P_{sf}$     | Slow Front Amplitude Relative to Peak |
| $t_{f10-90}$ | Fast Transition 10-to-90% Rise Time   |
| $P$          | Peak Amplitude                        |

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|      |   |
|------|---|
| AC   | Alternating Current                     |
| AM   | Arithmetic Mean                         |
| BNC  | Bayonet Neill–Concelman                 |
| CG   | Cloud-to-Ground                         |
| DC   | Direct Current                          |
| DFT  | Discrete Fourier Transform              |
| FFT  | Fast Fourier Transform                  |
| LDS  | Lightning Detection System              |
| LPS  | Lightning Protection System             |
| MEMS | Micro-Electro-Mechanical System         |
| NBP  | Narrow Bipolar Pulses                   |
| OL   | Open Loop                               |
| PC   | Personal Computer                       |
| PCB  | Printed Circuit Board                   |
| SAT  | State-of-the-art Boolean Satisfiability |
| SD   | Standard Deviation                      |
| SMGT | Meteorological Gradient Tower           |
| TOA  | Time of Arrival                         |
| TNB  | Tenaga Nasional Berhad                  |
| TNBR | Tenaga Nasional Berhad Research         |

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Background

In many cultures, lightning has been regarded as part of a deity or even deified [1]-[3]. In physics and engineering, lightning is defined as a transient high-current electric discharge, and its path length is measured in kilometres. Thunderstorms clouds (cumulonimbus) are mainly the source of lightning. Lightning is also referred to as sudden electrostatic discharge caused by an imbalance between electrically charged cloud regions [4]. The imbalance may have occurred between the storm cloud and the ground or within the clouds themselves. Colliding particles of rain, ice, or snow inside storm clouds further increase this imbalance phenomenon. Usually, the lower part of the cloud contains the negative charge that seeks the positive charge from the object on the ground or earth. As the conductive pathway builds up, the surrounding air becomes extremely hot, at almost 20,000 degrees Celsius. As a result, the surrounding air expands, causing the sound of thunder and eventually creates a sonic boom.

The effect of lightning strikes has received considerable critical attention from the electricity industry because of the significant impact of the electrical discharge on the power transmission line. The damage to a power plant is almost certain if lightning struck the transmission line near the station, as the ordinary lightning arrester probably could not divert such a powerful discharge to earth. Apart from that, the lightning disruption could cause propagation of voltage surges in both directions from the strike point, mainly on the overhead phase-conductor [5]. There would be a potential difference between the top and bottom of the transmission tower due to the direct lightning strike. In this situation, if the value of the potential difference exceeded the basic insulation level, there would be a back flashover as the flashover occurred from the transmission tower to the transmission line.

This lightning disturbance can also result in significant human fatalities. According to Jacob D.Jensen et al. [6], there are approximately 24,000 fatalities with 10 times as many injuries annually worldwide due to lightning strikes - estimated from worldwide/global statistics. There are several categories of lightning injuries, but the most common injury is superficial burns on the human body due to the conversion of electrical to thermal energy. A direct lightning strike may also cause nervous system damages to human beings due to respiratory and cardiac arrest, and worse, death. There are also animal fatalities discovered due to the step voltage from a lightning strike [7].

These lightning implications, especially to the electricity industry, could reduce the reliability of distribution network performance in providing continuous power

to consumers and consequently affect human society. Tenaga Nasional Berhad, the largest electricity utility company in Malaysia, reported that lightning incidents cause 70% transient tripping and power interruptions in the transmission and distribution network [11]. Therefore, the electric field characteristic generated from lightning flashes should be assessed and analysed. Furthermore, the characterisation - mainly on the parameters of negative return strokes - should be appropriately identified to maximise the life span and efficiency of power system equipment for the well-being of society. Moreover, the effect from the magnitude of the vertical electric field has been observed to be significantly higher than the horizontal component, which is also difficult to measure [8].

The lightning implications are also significant for countries located in the tropical region, including Malaysia. Due to its location, Malaysia experiences many thunderstorms and lightning activities every year due to frequent rainfall, particularly in Selangor - one of the 13 states of the country [9]. The above concerns indicate that it is crucial to perform research works that cover the lightning electric field measurement and the characterisation of the parameters of negative return strokes by using proper and efficient methods. Therefore, this study developed an automated negative return strokes parameters characterisation, subjected to Malaysia seasonal variation, using the Brute-Force search algorithm. Before commencing this study, field test measurement on the lightning electric field was first carried out using previously researched small-scale parallel-plate antenna.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Power distribution parties require lightning location detection to select a new safe power grid site for their system protection. The evaluation of a lightning location is one of the critical issues for lightning mapping and considers the level of lightning risk for power systems protection. Several studies have evaluated lightning locations, usually based on the time of arrival of a measured electric field [10]. The lightning activity produced by thunderstorms can be detected using a lightning detection system (LDS), which can be ground-based, mobile-based as well as space-based (satellite) [11]. Meanwhile, a lightning protection system (LPS) works by providing a path of electric discharge to the ground. The LPS can be operated based on the measured and validated data obtained by the LDS. Developing such systems (i.e. LDS and LPS) requires an understanding of the theoretical background of lightning physics, which is related to technical and engineering matters. Apart from the modern and sophisticated equipment requirement, a proper detection network is also vital in LDS, which is dependent on the characteristic and features of lightning due to its very complex nature/atmospheric phenomenon.

For research purposes, many studies have carried out the lightning-generated electric field measurement and lightning characterisation using a parallel-plate antenna to assess the electrical discharge features [12]–[14]. In most of the studies, the characterisation of negative lightning return strokes based on

parameters such as the zero-to-peak rise time, 10-to-90% rise time, zero-crossing time, slow front time, slow front amplitude relative to peak, fast transition 10-to-90% rise time, and width  $dE/dt$  pulse at half peak value was performed using a conventional approach [57-59] & [96-97] which is the manual inspection from the eye observation. The output waveform was examined manually one by one through zooming in and out features from the transient recorder system. Nevertheless, the manual approach could compromise the data analysis accuracy due to potential human error in which the nonuniformity among users might affect the assessment during the characterisation process. Furthermore, the processing time to analyse the data would be longer, especially for larger sample sizes. The dataset of a measured output waveform of lightning electric field could be as large as thousands of sample sizes. Besides, no attempts have been made to develop an automated negative lightning return strokes characterisation using a specific algorithm to provide a more feasible analysis approach. From the previous work in [57], the parameters of each negative return stroke were defined by looking into the range from the published literature based on the generic approach.

It is evident from the preceding discussion that the parameters of negative lightning return strokes should be analysed and identified distinctly through a suitable characterisation technique for an effective LDS operation. Apart from that, the existing parallel-plate antennas that have been used for lightning-generated electric field measurement are too bulky, with a minimum height and diameter of 1.5 m and 0.3 m, respectively [15], [16]. Due to the inconvenient size, they are not easily carried or moved for field installation. Therefore, this study proposed to measure the lightning-generated electric field using a new small-scale parallel-plate antenna under seasonal variations in Malaysia and characterise the negative lightning return strokes automatically using the Brute-Force search algorithm. The automated data under Malaysia's climate variations were then compared with the conventional approach characterisation data to validate the efficiency of the proposed algorithm.

### **1.3 Research Objective**

This study mainly aimed to develop a small-scale parallel-plate antenna and automate the negative lightning return strokes characterisation using the Brute-Force search algorithm. Specifically, the developed Brute-Force search algorithm should automatically analyse and characterise the negative lightning return strokes according to the seven parameters: zero-to-peak rise time, 10-to-90% rise time, zero-crossing time, slow front time, slow front amplitude relative to peak, fast transition 10-to-90% rise time, and width  $dE/dt$  pulse at half peak. To achieve these aims, the objectives of this study were formulated as follows:

- i) To conduct lightning-generated electric field measurement at a selected site under seasonal variations in Malaysia using a previously researched small-scale parallel plate antenna for lightning-generated electric field measurement.



- ii) To establish a set of criteria for each negative lightning return strokes parameters.
- iii) To develop new searching algorithm for automated characterisation of negative lightning return strokes using Brute-Force method.

#### **1.4 Scope and Limitation**

This study consisted of four essential parts as the main elements: small-scale antenna development, lightning-generated electric field measurement, criteria establishment, and characterisation algorithm development.

1. The antenna development focused on the parallel-plate type of sensor to measure lightning, mainly on the electric field. Further, the antenna development and modification involved reducing the two main dimensions of parallel-plate antennas: height and diameter.
2. The lightning-generated electric field measurement focused on the radiation or fast field measurement using the proposed small-scale parallel-plate antenna and recorded by the transient recorder system of the Picoscope (PC Oscilloscope) 4000 Series with a sampling rate of 25 MS/s (Mega samples per second). The electric field measurement was performed under seasonal variations in Malaysia, which covered the northeast monsoon, first inter-monsoonal period, southwest monsoon, and second inter-monsoonal period. Based on the seasonal variations, the measurement was conducted from August 2019 to March 2020, on the rooftop of the College of Engineering building at UNITEN, Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia.
3. The negative lightning return strokes criteria were established based on each parameter's mathematical equations developed in this study. The algorithm development to automate the negative lightning return strokes characterisation used the Brute-Force search algorithm, which adopted several search concepts: comparative, time-reversal, and time forward. The negative lightning return strokes were characterised according to the earlier mentioned seven main parameters using MATLAB software. This study evaluated the proposed algorithm by using a few statistical performance indicators such as arithmetic mean (AM), standard deviation (SD), percentage difference, and Bland-Altman plot analysis to compare the manual data from the conventional approach with the automated data.

#### **1.5 Significance of Study**

The main significances of this study are as follows:

- i) Development of a small-scale parallel-plate antenna that is convenient for lightning measurement installation, mainly for research purposes.
- ii) Provides an assessment of the features and characteristics of the negative lightning return strokes based on the tropical region, which focuses on Malaysia. The evaluation also involves the details of comparison between the features from the tropical and non-tropical areas.

- iii) Establishment of the criteria on each of the negative lightning return strokes parameters.
- iv) Development of a suitable technique or algorithm for automated characterisation of negative lightning return strokes using the Brute-Force search algorithm.

The proposed small-scale parallel-plate antenna is beneficial for a lightning-generated electric field measurement setup. With a physical height of 0.555 m, the antenna can be easily carried from one place to another compared to the existing parallel-plate antennas of bigger dimensions. Therefore, it can be operated as a portable, lightweight, and easy-to-install device for a measurement system. The assessment and evaluation provide a better technical understanding and conception of lightning features and phenomena, mainly on the negative lightning return strokes in the tropical and non-tropical regions. Apart from that, the criteria establishment and determination based on the mathematical equations can concisely express /define the seven parameters of negative lightning return strokes. These equations play an important role in the working principle of the algorithm to determine the desired component. The equations can also improve the information accuracy and instruction for any specific algorithm to execute a task, particularly the Brute-Force search algorithm.

Meanwhile, the proposed characterisation method using the Brute-Force search algorithm provides an effective way to identify/search all combinations based on the criteria that have been defined and established on each parameter of negative lightning return strokes. The proposed algorithm also works by considering all the combinations one by one with no limitation on the sample size without missing data from the measured output lightning electric field waveform. Besides, the proposed algorithm also accommodates an essential technique for automated characterisation for negative lightning return strokes parameters, mainly on the zero-to-peak rise time, 10-to-90% rise time, zero-crossing time, slow front time, slow front amplitude relative to peak, fast transition 10-to-90% rise time, and width  $dE/dt$  pulse at half peak value. The development of automated characterisation for these parameters using the Brute-Force search algorithm also contributes to the lightning protection system (LPS) and lightning detection system (LDS) as these systems require the measured and validated data of lightning negative return strokes. Apart from that, the processing time to characterise and analyse all the parameters of negative lightning return strokes will be reduced significantly with optimum accuracy by minimising human error. Through this contribution, it is possible to explore and develop advanced lightning protection and detection system on an interconnected network in the future.

## 1.6 Thesis Structure

This thesis is organised as below:

- i) **Chapter 1** gives an overview of the lightning definition and phenomenon from different backgrounds. This chapter also presents a brief discussion of the effect of lightning strikes on power system networks and society. Other topics covered in this chapter include research problem, research objective, scope, limitation, and significance of this study.
- ii) **Chapter 2** summarises the literature review on recent studies related to lightning-generated electric field measurement and characterisation. Topics discussed in this chapter include the lightning return stroke phenomenon - mainly on the lightning electric field; the lightning-generated electric field measurement and characterisation based on different geographical backgrounds - tropical and non-tropical regions; and the Brute-Force search algorithm working principle and application.
- iii) **Chapter 3** describes the methodology that is associated with the research objectives, with a focus on four essential parts: small-scale parallel-plate antenna fabrication, field test measurement under Malaysia's climate, the establishment of negative lightning return strokes criteria, and Brute-Force search algorithm development for automated characterisation of the negative lightning return strokes parameters.
- iv) **Chapter 4** presents the negative lightning return strokes data obtained using the proposed small-scale parallel-plate antenna and data comparisons based on the seven parameters of negative lightning return strokes. These comparisons include between the manual data (of this study) and that of a previous study under the same country as well as studies from different countries, between the manual data and the automated data (i.e. using the proposed algorithm), and between the automated data and that of a previous study.
- v) **Chapter 5** concludes the results and performance of the proposed small-scale parallel-plate antenna and the proposed Brute-Force search algorithm. The recommendation to improve the proposed algorithm for future works is also presented in this chapter.

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