Effects of the maximum soil aggregates size and cyclic wetting-drying on the stiffness of a lime-treated clayey soil
Anh Minh Tang, M.N. Vu, Yu-Jun Cui

To cite this version:

HAL Id: hal-00589308
https://hal-enpc.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00589308
Submitted on 28 Apr 2011

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.
Effects of the maximum soil aggregates size and cyclic wetting-drying on
the stiffness of a lime-treated clayey soil

Anh Minh TANG, BEng, PhD; Minh Ngoc VU, BEng; Yu-Jun CUI, BEng, PhD

Ecole des Ponts ParisTech, U.M.R. Navier/CERMES

Corresponding author:

Prof. Yu-Jun CUI

Ecole des Ponts ParisTech
6-8 av. Blaise Pascal, Cité Descartes, Champs-sur-Marne
77455 Marne-la-Vallée cedex 2
France

Email: yujun.cui@enpc.fr
Phone: +33 1 64 15 35 50
Fax: +33 1 64 15 35 62
Abstract
Lime treatment is a well-known technique to improve the mechanical response of clayey subgrades of road pavements or clayey soils used for embankment. Several studies show that lime treatment significantly modifies the physical and hydro-mechanical properties of compacted soils. Nevertheless, studies on the scale effect under climatic changes are scarce. Actually, wetting-drying cycles might significantly modify the microstructure of treated soils, giving rise to changes in hydro-mechanical properties. This modification could be dependent on the size of soil aggregates before lime treatment. In the present work, this scale effect was studied by investigating the stiffness of a compacted lime-treated clayey soil using bender elements. The studied soil was first air-dried and ground into a target maximum soil aggregates size ($D_{\text{max}}$). For each aggregates size, the soil was humidified to reach the target water contents $w_i$, then mixed with 3% of lime powder (mass of lime divided by mass of dried soil) prior to the static compaction at a dry density of 1.60 Mg/m$^3$. Two initial water contents ($w_i = 14$ and 18%) and four maximum soil aggregates sizes ($D_{\text{max}} = 0.4$, 1.0, 2.0 and 5.0 mm) were considered. After the compaction, the soil specimen (50 mm in diameter and 50 mm in height) was covered by plastic film in order to prevent soil moisture changes. The soil stiffness was then monitored at variable time intervals until reaching stabilisation. Afterwards, the soil specimen was subjected to full saturation followed by air-drying to come back to its initial water content. The results show that: i) the soil stiffness after lime-treatment is significantly dependent on the aggregates size: the finer the aggregates the higher the soil stiffness; ii) the effect of initial water content on the stiffness is negligible and iii) the wetting-drying cycles seem to slightly increase the soil stiffness in the case of lime-treated specimens and decrease the soil stiffness in the case of untreated specimens. Furthermore, when an intensive drying was applied reducing the soil water content lower than the initial one, the soil stiffness decreased drastically after the subsequent wetting.

Keywords: Fabric/structure of soil; Laboratory tests; Soil stabilisation; Stiffness; Suction; Time dependence.
Introduction

Lime stabilisation is a well-known technique in civil engineering applications such as road construction, embankments, slab foundations and piles. After Boardman et al. (2001), adding lime to clayey soils leads to various reactions such as cation exchange, flocculation, carbonation and pozzolanic reaction. When quicklime (CaO) is added into a soil-water system, a highly exothermic hydration reaction occurs forming Ca(OH)$_2$. The water consumed in the hydration reaction (and that removed from the soil system via evaporation) can give rise to significant change in soil hydro-mechanical properties. At the same time, hydration reaction results in higher concentration of Ca$^{2+}$ and OH$^-$ ions in the soil pore water. The immediate cation exchanges induce then an apparently dried and more friable material. Beside the cation exchange, reaction also occurs between silica and some alumina of the lattices of the clay minerals. As a result, the pozzolanic reactions create hydrated cementation and flocculation by bonding adjacent soil particles together. Such pozzolanic reactions are time dependent, the strength developing gradually over a long period (Bell, 1996), with the general effect of improving the soil hydro-mechanical properties. Indeed, the treatment reduces the swelling potential (Tonoz et al., 2003; Al-Rawas et al., 2005), increases the shear strength (Bell, 1996; Osinubi & Nwaiwu, 2006; Sivapullaiah et al., 2006; Consoli et al., 2009), increases the elastic modulus (Bell, 1996; Rogers et al., 2006; Sakr et al., 2009) and modifies the compaction properties (Bell, 1996; Osinubi & Nwaiwu, 2006; Consoli et al., 2009). The water retention properties of clays can be also modified by the lime treatment (Clare & Cruchley, 1957).

Microstructural investigations on lime-treated clays show that the treatment changes the soil fabric significantly (Cai et al., 2006; Russo et al., 2007; Shi et al., 2007; Le Runigo et al., 2009; Sakr et al., 2009). Moreover, the above studies have shown that the effects of lime treatment depend on lime content, soil water content, soil type, curing time, temperature, stress state, etc.

Even though numerous studies have been performed to analyse the effect of lime treatment, almost all works have involved soil specimens prepared in the laboratory, while investigations of the lime-treated soil specimens taken from the field still remain rare. Bozbey & Guler (2006) investigated the feasibility of using a lime-treated silty soil as landfill liner material by conducting tests on both laboratory and field scales. They found that the hydraulic conductivity measured on the specimens prepared in the laboratory was one order of magnitude lower than that of undisturbed samples taken from the field. Kavak & Akyarh (2007) investigated the improvement of road by lime treatment based on both laboratory and field CBR tests. They concluded that the soaked CBR values obtained in the laboratory increased significantly (16 – 21 times) 28 days after the treatment while that obtained from field CBR tests increased slightly (2 times). Cuisinier & Deneele (2008) performed suction-controlled oedometer tests on soil samples taken from an embankment three years after the construction. They also performed the same tests on un-treated soil and treated specimens prepared in the laboratory. The results show that the swelling potential of the lime-treated samples taken from the field is significantly larger than that prepared in the laboratory, but still remains lower than that of the un-treated samples. They attributed the loss of stabilization efficiency observed in field conditions to the effects of drying-wetting cycles related to climatic changes. Rao et al. (2001), Guney et al. (2007) and Khattab et al. (2007) also reported a reduced efficiency of lime treatment with wetting-drying cycles.
One of the main reasons explaining the difference between lime-treated soil samples prepared in the laboratory and the treated soil samples taken from the field could be the difference in soil aggregates size. Indeed, prior to compaction in the laboratory, the soil is usually ground at a few millimetres and then mixed with lime. On the contrary, in the field, the dimension of clay clods may reach several centimetres before the treatment.

The present work aims at investigating the effects of soil aggregates size on the efficiency of lime treatment under cycles of wetting and drying. For this purpose, air-dried soils were ground at four values of maximum sieve dimensions (0.4, 1.0, 2.0 and 5.0 mm) prior to lime treatment and compaction. The shear moduli of soil specimens were monitored using the bender elements method. When reaching the stabilization of the shear moduli, wetting-drying cycles were applied in order to simulate the weathering effects.

**Soil studied and experimental techniques**

The soil used in this study was taken at a site near Tours, a city in central France. Its main geotechnical properties are reported in Table 1. The grain size distribution, as obtained by dry sieving method after washing (Afnor, 1996) for elements larger than 80 µm and by hydrometer method (Afnor, 1992) for elements smaller than 80 µm, is shown in Figure 1 (curve ‘After washing’). The curve shows that washing has disaggregated the soil particles into small dimensions and almost all soil aggregates became smaller than 1 mm, with a clay fraction (< 2 µm) of 26%.

To prepare the soil samples, the air-dried soil was first ground and passed through one of the four target sieve sizes ($D_{\text{max}} = 0.4, 1.0, 2.0$ and $5.0$ mm). The soil aggregates which did not pass through the sieve were ground again. The procedure was repeated until all the soil aggregates passed through the sieve except some large stones. The grading curves (obtained by sieving) of the four soil sub-series having different maximum soil aggregates diameter are also shown in Figure 1. This procedure allows preparing the soils with the same mineral composition and various values of soil clusters $D_{\text{max}}$. Comparison between the curve ‘After washing’ and that ‘$D_{\text{max}} = 0.4$ mm’ shows that washing preserved the portion of soil aggregates larger than 0.4 mm (about 20%), while the preparation of ‘$D_{\text{max}} = 0.4$ mm’ crushed this portion.

After grinding, the soil was humidified by spraying distilled water to reach prescribed initial moisture contents and sealed in plastic box for at least 48 h for moisture content homogenization. For each $D_{\text{max}}$, 14% and 18% water contents were considered. Prior to compaction, the moist soil was thoroughly mixed with lime and then poured into a mould of 50 mm in diameter. The lime content studied was 3% (mass of lime divided by mass of dried soil). Static compaction was then carried out to reach a dry density of 1.60 Mg/m$^3$ with a final height of the soil specimen of 50 mm. After the compaction, the soil specimen was taken out of the mould and wrapped by plastic film in order to avoid any moisture exchange between soil and atmosphere. The initial dimensions and the basic properties of the compacted soil specimen are presented in Table 2.
In Figure 2 the Standard Proctor compaction curves of lime treated and untreated soils are presented. The after-compaction conditions studied are also shown in the figure. It can be observed that the compaction curve of lime-treated soil is quite different from the untreated one. The dry density chosen for the present study (1.60 Mg/m$^3$) corresponds to the maximum dry density of lime-treated soil obtained by the Standard Proctor compaction. The mentioned water content values (14 and 18%) both correspond to the dry side of the compaction curve and were chosen in order to preserve the soil aggregates. Indeed, Delage et al. (1996) showed that compaction on dry side leads to a microstructure characterised by an assembly of aggregates whereas compaction on wet side leads to a more homogeneous microstructure without apparent aggregates.

The bender element was used to monitor the small strain shear modulus. The experimental set-up is shown in Figure 3. The soil specimen was put in contact with two bender elements: the transmitter one embedded in the top base and the receiver one embedded in the bottom base. Both bender elements were connected to a control and data logging system. A triggered sinusoidal signal was then sent to the transmitter, recording the response of the receiver at the specimen base. An example of the time-domain records collected is reported in Figure 4, together with the indication of travel time ($\Delta t$). Considering the travel length, $l$, assumed equal to the specimen height (50 mm) minus the protrusions of the bender transmitter and receiver into the soil specimen (2 mm), the shear wave velocity was then calculated as $V_s = l/\Delta t$. The soil mass density ($\rho$) was verified after each $V_s$ measurement by weighing the soil specimen and was used for the determination of the small strain shear modulus: $G_{\text{max}} = \rho V_s^2$. This experimental technique is similar to that recently used by Puppalal et al. (2006) when monitoring the shear modulus of chemically treated sulphate-bearing expansive soils and previously used by several other authors.

Once the stabilization of $G_{\text{max}}$ was reached, the soil specimen was first wetted. Adding water with a sprayer and monitoring the change in the specimen weight until a water content of 21% (corresponding to a degree of saturation $S_r = 82\%$) was obtained. Adding more water to the soil specimen would lead to water drainage from its bottom, indicating that the water content of 21% corresponds to the maximum value that the soil specimen can retain. After reaching the target water content value and prior to the $G_{\text{max}}$ measurements, the soil specimen was wrapped by plastic film (for at least 24 h) for moisture Homogenisation. To achieve drying, the soil specimen was air-dried until the target water content was reached. Afterwards, it was wrapped by plastic film to achieve ‘water content’ equalisation. During wetting and drying, the water content of the soil specimen ($w$) was controlled by monitoring the changes of its mass ($m$) by the equation $w = (1+w_i)\times m/m_i-1$, where $w_i$ and $m_i$ are respectively the initial water content and the initial mass of the soil specimen. The changes in the dimensions of the specimen, as measured by calliper after wetting and drying stages, were found negligible and for this reason were ignored when calculating both $V_s$ and the mass density. Five wetting-drying cycles were applied for each treated soil specimen. For the untreated specimens, the number of cycles was varied from two to five. The soil specimen was removed systematically from the testing device after each measurement of $V_s$. The bender elements were always installed in the same slots during the measurement of $V_s$. 

5
Summarising, in this study two moulding water contents (14 and 18%) and four maximum soil aggregates size \( (D_{\text{max}} = 0.4, 1.0, 2.0 \text{ and } 5.0 \text{ mm}) \) were considered. In each case, both treated and untreated specimens were tested. Moreover, for each test three identical specimens were investigated for replicate. That corresponds to 48 soil specimens in total.

**Experimental results**

**Changes of small strain shear modulus \( (G_{\text{max}}) \) after compaction**

After compaction, the small strain shear modulus \( G_{\text{max}} \) was monitored in order to follow its changes versus time. In Figure 5, the mean value of \( G_{\text{max}} \) (measured on three identical specimens) is plotted against time. For the untreated soil passed through 0.4 mm sieve (Figure 5a), immediately after the compaction \( G_{\text{max}} \) was equal to 65 MPa and 44 MPa for an initial water content of 14% and 18% respectively. The values increased slightly with time and stabilized after 100 h at 73 MPa and 50 MPa, respectively. In the case of treated specimens, \( G_{\text{max}} \) was equal to 108 MPa for \( w_i = 14\% \) and 80 MPa for \( w_i = 18\% \).

Comparison with the values of untreated specimens shows that the lime treatment has a significant effect on \( G_{\text{max}} \) immediately after the compaction. With time, \( G_{\text{max}} \) increased and stabilized after 200 h at about 120 MPa for both values of \( w_i \). The time increase of \( G_{\text{max}} \) was more significant in the case of the higher water content \( (w_i = 18\%) \).

Interestingly, the stabilized \( G_{\text{max}} \) value has been found independent of the initial water content.

Similar observation can be made from the results of soil ground to 1.0 mm (Figure 5b), 2.0 mm (Figure 5c) and 5.0 mm (Figure 5d) in terms of: (i) immediate effect of lime treatment after compaction, characterised by a significant increase of \( G_{\text{max}} \); (ii) slight increase of \( G_{\text{max}} \) with time for untreated specimens; (iii) increase of \( G_{\text{max}} \) with time for treated specimens especially in the case of the higher water content \( (w_i = 18\%) \) and (iv) stabilization of \( G_{\text{max}} \) about 200 h after the treatment, with similar final values for both water contents.

In order to analyse the effect of maximum soil aggregates size on \( G_{\text{max}} \), the mean final values of \( G_{\text{max}} \) and the range measured on three identical specimens are compared in Figure 6 as a function of \( D_{\text{max}} \). For the treated soil compacted at \( w_i = 14\% \) (Figure 6a), \( G_{\text{max}} \) was found to be decreasing with \( D_{\text{max}} \), showing the highest value of 120 MPa for \( D_{\text{max}} = 0.4 \) mm and the lowest of 103 MPa for \( D_{\text{max}} = 5.0 \) mm. Similar observation can be made for the treated soil compacted at \( w_i = 18\% \) (Figure 6b), indicating that the larger is the maximum soil aggregate size the lower is the value of \( G_{\text{max}} \). For the untreated specimens, the \( G_{\text{max}} \) versus \( D_{\text{max}} \) data show a less clear trend for the \( w_i = 14\% \) case and indicates almost constant \( G_{\text{max}} \) for the \( w_i = 18\% \) case.

**Changes of small strain shear modulus \( G_{\text{max}} \) under cyclic wetting-drying**

Cyclic wetting-drying was carried out by controlling the water content of the soil specimen. In Figure 7, the \( G_{\text{max}} \) versus time data of the soil aggregates ground to 0.4 mm
are presented. The corresponding water content at each measurement is also indicated. The starting points \((t = 0)\) correspond to the last points shown in Figure 5. At the initial water content \(w_i = 14\%\) (the corresponding degree of saturation is \(S_r = 55\%\)), \(G_{\text{max}}\) was equal to 73 MPa (Figure 7a) for the untreated specimen. Wetting to a water content of 21\% \((S_r = 82\%)\) decreased \(G_{\text{max}}\) to 28 MPa. The subsequent drying to the water content of 14\% (at \(t = 100\) h) increased \(G_{\text{max}}\) to 50 MPa. On subsequent wetting and drying cycles, cracks progressively developed until the bender elements signal was no longer transmitted through the soil sample. The soil may be then considered as profoundly fissured after two wetting-drying cycles. The two following parameters are proposed to characterise the changes of \(G_{\text{max}}\) under cyclic wetting-drying for untreated soils: (i) the decrease of \(G_{\text{max}}\) during the first wetting path, \(\Delta G_{\text{max1}}\); (ii) the number of wetting-drying cycles causing cracking, \(N_f\). Note that another parameter \(\Delta G_{\text{max1}}/G_{\text{max i}}\) alternative to \(\Delta G_{\text{max1}}\) can be used, where \(G_{\text{max i}}\) is the initial value obtained in the wetting-drying tests.

In the case of the untreated samples having \(D_{\text{max}} = 0.4\) mm, these parameters are \(\Delta G_{\text{max1}} = 45\) MPa \((\Delta G_{\text{max1}}/G_{\text{max i}} = 62\%)\), \(N_f = 2\).

For the specimen treated at the initial water content of 14\% (Figure 7a), wetting to a water content of 21\% decreased slightly \(G_{\text{max}}\) from 121 to 114 MPa. Nevertheless, when this high value of water content was maintained, \(G_{\text{max}}\) was increasing and reached 127 MPa after 100 h. The subsequent wetting and drying only induced slight changes of \(G_{\text{max}}\). For the last drying stage (at \(t = 580\) h), the water content was finally reduced to 11\%. This intensive drying resulted in a significant decrease of \(G_{\text{max}}\) when the soil was wetted again to a water content of 21\%; \(G_{\text{max}}\) decreased from 134 to 97 MPa. This can be explained by the development of micro-cracks observed on the specimen surface. Beside the parameter \(\Delta G_{\text{max1}}\) described above, the decrease of \(G_{\text{max}}\) during the last wetting path \((\Delta G_{\text{maxf}})\) can be also proposed to describe the behaviour of treated soils under wetting-drying path. In the case of the treated samples having \(D_{\text{max}} = 0.4\) mm, these parameters are \(\Delta G_{\text{max1}} = 7\) MPa \((\Delta G_{\text{max1}}/G_{\text{max i}} = 6\%)\) and \(\Delta G_{\text{maxf}} = 37\) MPa.

For the soil specimen compacted at the initial water content of 18\%, micro-cracks appeared on the untreated specimens after three wetting-drying cycles, leading to no bender elements vibration transmission (Figure 7b). For the treated specimens, the phenomena were similar to that observed for a water content of 14\%: i) slight increase after the first wetting; ii) small changes upon cyclic wetting-drying; iii) drastic decrease due to development of micro-cracks after an intensive drying with the water content decreased to 11\%.

The changes of \(G_{\text{max}}\) upon wetting-drying for other maximum soil aggregate sizes show similar trends. The main parameters of all samples are reported in Table 3, including \(\Delta G_{\text{max1}}/G_{\text{max i}}\). The untreated specimens compacted at a drier state (initial water content of 14\%) also show diffused cracking after three wetting-drying cycles. This is not the case for the untreated specimens compacted at a wetter state (i.e., \(w_i = 18\%)\) except the specimens having \(D_{\text{max}} = 0.4\) mm (Figure 7b). For the lime-treated specimens, wetting-drying cycles only induced small changes of \(G_{\text{max}}\), becoming significant only on wetting stage following an intensive drying. This effect seems to be more significant for the drier specimen (i.e., \(w_i = 14\%)\). The effect of \(D_{\text{max}}\) upon cyclic wetting-drying was found insignificant as the behaviour of the soil specimens having different \(D_{\text{max}}\) was quite similar. Comparison of the \(\Delta G_{\text{max1}}/G_{\text{max i}}\) data with the \(\Delta G_{\text{max1}}\) data indicates that the wetting-drying effect is more clearly evidenced by the \(\Delta G_{\text{max1}}/G_{\text{max i}}\) parameter with...
∆₇_max/G₉_max_i ≥ 38% for untreated specimens and ∆₇_max/G₉_max_i ≤ 12% for treated specimens.

**Discussion**

The bender elements method is often used to monitor the changes in shear wave velocity in triaxial cell under stress confined conditions. In this case, good contact between the bender elements and the soil specimen can be ensured (Leong et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2009). Application of this method is much more difficult in the case of the present study where the evolution of G_max needs to be monitored during several days and on a large number of soil specimens. For this reason, in this work the bender elements were put in contact with the soil specimen only during the measurement and no confining pressure was applied. In order to analyse the test scattering, three specimens were tested for each D_max and w_i. The results showed a good repeatability of the procedure used (see Figure 7).

The changes of G_max with time of the compacted soil specimens were monitored until reaching the stabilization. A slight increase of G_max with time was observed for the untreated specimens and is attributed to aging effects of compacted clay soils. It is worth noting that Delage et al. (2006) observed significant changes in microstructure of a compacted expansive soil after compaction. These authors attributed the mentioned changes to increase in the intra-aggregate porosity caused by exchange of water between the inter-aggregate and intra-aggregate pores. Tang et al. (2008) also observed this phenomenon characterised by a slight increase of soil suction after compaction. The effect of suction on G_max was also evidenced in the present study as untreated specimens compacted at lower water contents (higher suction) have higher G_max. Such behaviour was also observed by Sawangsuriya et al. (2008).

For the treated specimens, G_max obtained immediately after the compaction has been found to be significantly higher than that of untreated specimens prepared at the same moulding water content. The values of G_max of treated specimens range between 80 and 130 MPa. This result is similar to that obtained by Rogers et al. (2006) from cyclic triaxial tests on compacted clay treated with 2.5% of lime. The immediate increase of G_max with lime-treatment can be partly explained by the increase of suction caused by decrease of water content after treatment due to hydration and evaporation (Boardman et al., 2001), and to the cation exchanges which increase the flocculation of mineral particles.

It is worth noting that the final values of G_max after compaction are independent of the initial values of water content considered (14% and 18%) despite the above-mentioned effect of initial water content immediately after the treatment (Figure 5). As described by Bell (1996), pozzolanic reactions, which take place over a long period, induce bonding between adjacent soil particles. The different evolution over time of G_max at different water contents (shown in Figure 5) can be then explained as follows: the small-strain shear modulus (G_max) of compacted soil is mainly governed by the contacts between adjacent soil particles; immediately after the compaction, the contacts are mainly governed by the capillary suction: the higher the suction (or the lower the water content) the higher the G_max; over a long period, due to pozzolanic reactions in lime-treated soil, cementation develops increasing gradually G_max; when stabilization is reached, G_max is
governed mainly by the cementation bonds and the effect of suction (or water content) becomes less significant. The evolution of the $G_{\text{max}}$ with time can be also explained from a microstructural point of view. Russo et al. (2007) studied the time-dependency of the microstructure of lime-stabilised soil samples by means of Mercury Intrusion Porosimetry (MIP) tests. The results show significant effects of moulding water content on the pore size distribution immediately after the compaction. Nevertheless, after a curing time of 28 days the lime-stabilized samples show a very similar pore size distribution, irrespective of the moulding water content adopted. This evolution of microstructure is also similar to that observed on $G_{\text{max}}$ in the present study.

As far as the effect of the maximum soil aggregate size ($D_{\text{max}}$) is concerned, the results of the treated specimens showed a lower value of $G_{\text{max}}$ for a larger value of $D_{\text{max}}$. This effect was not observed for the untreated specimens. Actually, for a smaller $D_{\text{max}}$, the total surface of aggregates was larger and therefore more soil-lime reaction can be expected. Note that this observation is of importance from a practical point of view, since laboratory tests are usually performed on small soil aggregates size (less than few millimetres) while in the field they may reach several centimetres. As a consequence, particular attention should be paid when using the parameters determined in laboratory for field application design.

As far as the effects of cyclic wetting-drying on $G_{\text{max}}$ are concerned, data presented indicate that wetting induced a decrease and drying induced an increase of $G_{\text{max}}$. This can be explained by the effect of suction: wetting decreased the soil suction thus the soil stiffness while drying increase the soil suction thus the soil stiffness. The same phenomenon was observed by Ng et al. (2009) when performing measurements of $G_{\text{max}}$ in a suction-controlled triaxial cell. Vassallo et al. (2007a) used suction-controlled resonant column torsional shear cell to study the effect of net stress and suction history on $G_{\text{max}}$ of a compacted clayey silt. The experimental results show that $G_{\text{max}}$ depends significantly on mean net stress and matric suction as well as stress history. Modelling criteria were proposed by Vassallo et al. (2007b) to describe the observed soil behaviour. In the present work, comparison between the treated specimens and untreated specimens shows that the effect of suction change on $G_{\text{max}}$ of treated specimens is less significant than that of untreated specimens. This shows that lime-treatment reinforces the soil and makes it less sensitive to ‘weathering’.

The significant decrease of $G_{\text{max}}$ during the last wetting path after an intensive drying (up to a water content of 11%) observed in this work could be explained within the framework of unsaturated soil mechanics where the soil suction is usually considered as a stress variable. Actually, after the lime treatment, cementation bonds were progressively created under a humidity condition corresponding to the initial water content (14% or 18%). During the first wetting-drying cycle, the water content was varied in the range from $w_i$ to the maximum value (21%). Thus, the soil suction remains lower than its maximum value (reached after the stabilization of $G_{\text{max}}$). The soil state moves inside the ‘elastic’ zone (see Alonso et al., 1990; Cui & Delage, 1996) and the bonds between particles are relatively well preserved. On the contrary, on intensive drying (water content decreased to 11%), the soil suction exceeded its maximum value: large elasto-plastic deformations and significant damage of bonds are thus induced as for the case of Pinyol et al. (2007). This damage of bonds would result in micro-cracking and therefore in decrease of $G_{\text{max}}$. On the other hand, the drying increased the soil suction thus increasing
The fact that a slight increase of $G_{\text{max}}$ was observed during the drying shows that the suction effect prevailed on the bonds damages. During the subsequent wetting, as the suction effect was removed, the damage effect was finally evidenced. It is also interesting to note that the decrease of $G_{\text{max}}$ for treated samples during the last wetting path is similar to the decrease observed on untreated samples from the beginning of wetting-drying cycles. This seems to confirm the onset of severe bonds damages of the treated samples on intensive drying.

For the untreated specimens, it has been observed that wetting-drying cycles resulted in a decrease of $G_{\text{max}}$, especially for drier specimens (see Figure 7 and Table 3). This can be explained by the generation of micro-cracks by cyclic wetting-drying under unconfined conditions (Yesiller et al., 2000). In the works of Vassallo et al. (2007a) and Ng et al. (2009), the generation of micro-cracks was avoided as the tests were performed under confined conditions. For the treated specimens, the first wetting path equally induced a decrease of $G_{\text{max}}$. Nevertheless, after this decrease, the value of $G_{\text{max}}$ increased slightly. The immediate decrease of $G_{\text{max}}$ can be explained by the effect of suction, while the subsequent increase of $G_{\text{max}}$ after wetting can be attributed to the onset of various reactions by water addition. This explains why Kavak & Akyarh (2006) recommended watering the lime-treated soil one week after the treatment.

**Conclusion**

The small strain shear modulus $G_{\text{max}}$ of compacted lime-treated soil was investigated using bender elements. The following conclusions can be drawn:

- i) the lime treatment significantly increases $G_{\text{max}}$ of the soil, giving rise to $G_{\text{max}}$ values independent of the moulding water content about 200 h after lime treatment;
- ii) for the four maximum soil aggregates sizes $D_{\text{max}}$ considered, it has been observed that the larger is the value of $D_{\text{max}}$ the lower is the value of $G_{\text{max}}$. This observation is interesting from a practical point of view for earthworks involving lime-treated soils. Indeed, the results obtained show that designing earthworks based on the parameters determined from laboratory tests can be misleading, because the maximum aggregate size of the soil tested in the laboratory is usually less than few millimetres while clay aggregates in the field may reach the dimension of several centimetres;
- iii) due to the appearance of micro-cracks, cyclic wetting-drying induced significant decrease of $G_{\text{max}}$ of untreated specimens. For treated specimens, the changes of $G_{\text{max}}$ during wetting-drying cycles are less significant. Only an intensive drying to water content very much lower than the initial one can induce micro-cracks and thus decrease of $G_{\text{max}}$;
- iv) for the treated specimens, only the first wetting induced a decrease of $G_{\text{max}}$. On the contrary, the subsequent cycles induced a slight increase of $G_{\text{max}}$. If the decrease due to wetting can be explained by the suction effect, the slight increase by further wetting-drying cycle should be attributed to the onset of various physico-chemical reactions within the soil.

**Acknowledgement**

The authors address their deep thanks to the French National Research Agency for funding the present study which is part of the project - Terdouest “Sustainable earthworks
involved with treated soils”. The technical support of Mr Dong Jucai is also greatly acknowledged.

References


List of Tables

Table 1. Geotechnical properties of the studied soil
Table 2. Dimensions and basic properties of soil specimens
Table 3. Results obtained during the wetting-drying cycles (\( \Delta G_{max1} \): decrease of \( G_{max} \) during the first wetting path; \( \Delta G_{max}/G_{max} \): ratio of \( \Delta G_{max1} \) to the initial value of \( G_{max} \) during the wetting-drying tests; \( N_f \): number of cycles inducing failure; \( \Delta G_{maxf} \): decrease of \( G_{max} \) during the last wetting path)

List of Figures

Figure 1. Grain size distributions of the studied soil prepared by various methods
Figure 2. Standard Proctor compaction curves and conditions studied
Figure 3. Experimental setup – bender elements test
Figure 4. Response of shear wave for the soil sample treated with 3% of lime, \( D_{\text{max}} = 5 \) mm, \( w_i = 14\% \), 886 h after the treatment
Figure 5. Small strain shear modulus versus time after compaction
Figure 6. Small strain shear modulus after stabilization versus maximum aggregates diameter
Figure 7. Changes in small strain shear modulus upon cyclic wetting/drying for \( D_{\text{max}} = 0.4 \) mm (the corresponding water content is given above each point)
Table 1. Geotechnical properties of the studied soil

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soil properties</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liquid limit, $w_L$ (%)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic limit, $w_p$ (%)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plasticity Index, $I_p$ (%)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of blue of methylene, $VBS$</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbonates content (%)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific gravity, $G_s$</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Dimensions and basic properties of soil specimens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions/Basic properties</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height (mm)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diameter (mm)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry density (Mg/m$^3$)</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial water content (%)</td>
<td>14 and 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lime content (%)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum soil aggregates size (mm)</td>
<td>0.4; 1.0; 2.0; and 5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Results obtained during the wetting-drying cycles ($\Delta G_{\text{max1}}$: decrease of $G_{\text{max}}$ during the first wetting path; $\Delta G_{\text{maxi}}/G_{\text{maxi}}$: ratio of $\Delta G_{\text{max1}}$ to the initial value of $G_{\text{max}}$ during the wetting-drying tests; $N_f$: number of cycles inducing failure; $\Delta G_{\text{maxf}}$: decrease of $G_{\text{max}}$ during the last wetting path)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$D_{\text{max}}$ (mm)</th>
<th>$w_i$ (%)</th>
<th>Lime-treatment</th>
<th>$\Delta G_{\text{max1}}$ (MPa)</th>
<th>$\Delta G_{\text{maxi}}/G_{\text{maxi}}$ (%)</th>
<th>$N_f$</th>
<th>$\Delta G_{\text{maxf}}$ (MPa)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>&gt; 5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>&gt; 3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>&gt; 3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Grain size distributions of the studied soil prepared by various methods

Figure 2. Standard Proctor compaction curves and conditions studied
Figure 3. Experimental setup – bender elements test

Figure 4. Response of shear wave for the soil sample treated with 3% of lime, $D_{max} = 5$ mm, $w_i = 14\%$, 886 h after the treatment
Figure 5. Small strain shear modulus versus time after compaction
Figure 6. Small strain shear modulus after stabilization versus maximum aggregates diameter
Figure 7. Changes in small strain shear modulus upon cyclic wetting/drying for $D_{max} = 0.4$ mm (the corresponding water content is given above each point)