

# **BDDC preconditioners for a space-time finite element discretization of parabolic problems**

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# BDDC preconditioners for a space-time finite element discretization of parabolic problems

Ulrich Langer and Huidong Yang

**Abstract** This paper deals with balanced domain decomposition by constraints (BDDC) method for solving large-scale linear systems of algebraic equations arising from the space-time finite element discretization of parabolic initial-boundary value problems. The time is considered as just another spatial coordinate, and the finite elements are continuous and piecewise linear on unstructured simplicial space-time meshes. We consider BDDC preconditioned GMRES methods for solving the space-time finite element Schur complement equations on the interface. Numerical studies demonstrate robustness of the preconditioners to some extent.

## 1 Introduction

Continuous space-time finite element methods for parabolic problems have been recently studied, e.g., in [1, 9, 10, 13]. The main common features of these methods are very different from those of time-stepping methods. Time is considered to be just another spatial coordinate. The variational formulations are studied in the full space-time cylinder that is then decomposed into arbitrary admissible simplex elements. In this work, we follow the space-time finite element discretization scheme proposed in [10] for a model initial-boundary value problem, using continuous and piecewise linear finite elements in space and time simultaneously.

It is a challenge task to efficiently solve the large-scale linear system of algebraic equations arising from the space-time finite element discretization of parabolic problems. In this work, as a preliminary study, we use the balanced domain decomposition by constraints (BDDC [2, 11, 12]) preconditioned GMRES method to

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solve this system efficiently. We mention that robust preconditioning for space-time isogeometric analysis schemes for parabolic evolution problems has been reported in [3, 4].

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Sect. 2 deals with the space-time finite element discretization for a parabolic model problem. In Sect. 3, we discuss BDDC preconditioners that are used to solve the linear system of algebraic equations. Numerical results are shown and discussed in Sect. 4. Finally, some conclusions are drawn in Sect. 5.

## 2 The space-time finite element discretization

The following parabolic initial-boundary value problem is considered as our model problem: Find  $u : \bar{Q} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  such that

$$\partial_t u - \Delta_x u = f \text{ in } Q, \quad u = 0 \text{ on } \Sigma, \quad u = u_0 \text{ on } \Sigma_0, \quad (1)$$

where  $Q := \Omega \times (0, T)$ ,  $\Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^2$  is a sufficiently smooth and bounded computational domain,  $\Sigma := \partial\Omega \times (0, T)$ ,  $\Sigma_0 := \Omega \times \{0\}$ ,  $\Sigma_T := \Omega \times \{T\}$ .

Let us now introduce the following Sobolev spaces:

$$\begin{aligned} H_0^{1,0}(Q) &= \{u \in L_2(Q) : \nabla_x u \in [L_2(Q)]^2, u = 0 \text{ on } \Sigma\}, \\ H_{0,0}^{1,1}(Q) &= \{u \in L_2(Q) : \nabla_x u \in [L_2(Q)]^2, \partial_t u \in L_2(Q) \text{ and } u|_{\Sigma \cup \Sigma_T} = 0\}, \\ H_{0,0}^{1,1}(Q) &= \{u \in L_2(Q) : \nabla_x u \in [L_2(Q)]^2, \partial_t u \in L_2(Q) \text{ and } u|_{\Sigma \cup \Sigma_0} = 0\}. \end{aligned}$$

Using the classical approach [7, 8], the variational formulation for the parabolic model problem (1) reads as follows: Find  $u \in H_0^{1,0}(Q)$  such that

$$a(u, v) = l(v), \quad \forall v \in H_{0,0}^{1,1}(Q), \quad (2)$$

where

$$\begin{aligned} a(u, v) &= - \int_Q u(x, t) \partial_t v(x, t) dx dt + \int_Q \nabla_x u(x, t) \cdot \nabla_x v(x, t) dx dt, \\ l(v) &= \int_Q f(x, t) v(x, t) dx dt + \int_\Omega u_0(x) v(x, 0) dx. \end{aligned}$$

*Remark 1 (Parabolic solvability and regularity [7, 8])* If  $f \in L_{2,1}(Q) := \{v : \int_0^T \|v(\cdot, t)\|_{L_2(\Omega)} dt < \infty\}$  and  $u_0 \in L_2(\Omega)$ , then there exists a unique generalized solution  $u \in H_0^{1,0}(Q) \cap V_2^{1,0}(Q)$  of (2), where  $V_2^{1,0}(Q) := \{u \in H^{1,0}(Q) : |u|_Q < \infty \text{ and } \lim_{\Delta t \rightarrow 0} \|u(\cdot, t + \Delta t) - u(\cdot, t)\|_{L_2(\Omega)} = 0, \text{ uniformly on } [0, T]\}$ , and  $|u|_Q := \max_{0 \leq \tau \leq t} \|u(\cdot, \tau)\|_{L_2(\Omega)} + \|\nabla_x u\|_{L_2(\Omega \times (0, t))}$ . If  $f \in L_2(Q)$  and  $u_0 \in H_0^1(\Omega)$ , then

the generalized solution  $u$  belongs to  $H_0^{\Delta,1}(Q) := \{v \in H_0^{1,1}(Q) : \Delta_x u \in L_2(Q)\}$  and continuously depends on  $t$  in the norm of the space  $H_0^1(\Omega)$ .

To derive the space-time finite element scheme, we mainly follow the approach proposed in [10]. Let  $V_h = \text{span}\{\varphi_i\}$  be the span of continuous and piecewise linear basis functions  $\varphi_i$  on shape regular finite elements of an admissible triangulation  $\mathcal{T}_h$ . Then we define  $V_{0h} = V_h \cap H_{0,0}^{1,1}(Q) = \{v_h \in V_h : v_h|_{\Sigma \cup \Sigma_0} = 0\}$ . For convenience, we consider homogeneous initial conditions, i.e.,  $u_0 = 0$  on  $\Omega$ . Multiplying the PDE  $\partial_t u - \Delta_x u = f$  on  $K \in \mathcal{T}_h$  by an element-wise time-upwind test function  $v_h + \theta_K h_K \partial_t v_h$ ,  $v_h \in V_{0h}$ , we get

$$\begin{aligned} & \int_K (\partial_t u v_h + \theta_K h_K \partial_t u \partial_t v_h - \Delta_x u (v_h + \theta_K h_K \partial_t v_h)) dx dt = \\ & \int_K f (v_h + \theta_K h_K \partial_t v_h) dx dt. \end{aligned}$$

Integration by parts (the first part) with respect to the space and summation lead to

$$\begin{aligned} & \sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} \int_K (\partial_t u v_h + \theta_K h_K \partial_t u \partial_t v_h + \nabla_x u \cdot \nabla_x v_h - \theta_K h_K \Delta_x u \partial_t v_h) dx dt \\ & - \sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} \int_{\partial K} n_x \cdot \nabla_x u v_h ds = \sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} \int_K f (v_h + \theta_K h_K \partial_t v_h) dx dt. \end{aligned}$$

Since  $n_x \cdot \nabla_x u$  is continuous on inner boundary of  $K$ ,  $n_x = 0$  on  $\Sigma_0 \cup \Sigma_T$ , and  $v_h = 0$  on  $\Sigma$ , the term  $-\sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} \int_{\partial K} n_x \cdot \nabla_x u v_h ds$  vanishes.

If the solution  $u$  of (2) belongs to  $H_{0,0}^{\Delta,1}(\mathcal{T}_h) := \{v \in H_{0,0}^{1,1}(Q) : \Delta_x v|_K \in L_2(K), \forall K \in \mathcal{T}_h\}$ , cf. Remark 1, then the consistency identity

$$a_h(u, v_h) = l_h(v_h), \quad v_h \in V_{0h}, \quad (3)$$

holds, where

$$\begin{aligned} a_h(u, v_h) & := \sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} \int_K (\partial_t u v_h + \theta_K h_K \partial_t u \partial_t v_h + \nabla_x u \cdot \nabla_x v_h - \theta_K h_K \Delta_x u \partial_t v_h) dx dt, \\ l_h(v_h) & := \sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} \int_K f (v_h + \theta_K h_K \partial_t v_h) dx dt. \end{aligned}$$

With the restriction of the solution to the finite-dimensional subspace  $V_{0h}$ , the space-time finite element scheme reads as follows: Find  $u_h \in V_{0h}$  such that

$$a_h(u_h, v_h) = l_h(v_h), \quad v_h \in V_{0h}. \quad (4)$$

Thus, we have the Galerkin orthogonality:  $a_h(u - u_h, v_h) = 0$ ,  $\forall v_h \in V_{0h}$ .

*Remark 2* Since we use continuous and piecewise linear trial functions, the integrand  $-\theta_K h_K \Delta_x u_h \partial_t v_h$  vanishes element-wise, which simplifies the implementation.

*Remark 3* On fully unstructured meshes,  $\theta_k = O(h_k)$  [10]; on uniform meshes,  $\theta_k = \theta = O(1)$  [9]. In this work, we have used  $\theta = 0.5$  and  $\theta = 2.5$  on uniform meshes for testing robustness of the BDDC preconditioners.

It was shown in [10] that the bilinear form  $a_h(\cdot, \cdot)$  is  $V_{0h}$ -coercive:  $a_h(v_h, v_h) \geq \mu_c \|v_h\|_h^2$ ,  $\forall v_h \in V_{0h}$  with respect to the norm  $\|v_h\|_h^2 = \sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} (\|\nabla_x v_h\|_{L_2(K)}^2 + \theta_K h_K \|\partial_t v_h\|_{L_2(K)}^2) + \frac{1}{2} \|v_h\|_{L_2(\Sigma_T)}^2$ . Furthermore, the bilinear form is bounded on  $V_{0h,*} \times V_{0h}$ :  $|a_h(u, v_h)| \leq \mu_b \|u\|_{0h,*} \|v_h\|_h$ ,  $\forall u \in V_{0h,*}$ ,  $\forall v_h \in V_{0h}$ , where  $V_{0h,*} = H_{0,0}^{\Delta,1}(\mathcal{T}_h) + V_{0h}$  equipped with the norm  $\|v\|_{0h,*}^2 = \|v\|_h^2 + \sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} (\theta_K h_K)^{-1} \|v\|_{L_2(K)}^2 + \sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} \theta_K h_K \|\Delta_x v\|_{L_2(K)}^2$ . Let  $l$  and  $k$  be positive reals such that  $l \geq k > 3/2$ . We now define the broken Sobolev space  $H^s(\mathcal{T}_h) := \{v \in L_2(Q) : v|_K \in H^s(K) \forall K \in \mathcal{T}_h\}$  equipped with the broken Sobolev semi-norm  $|v|_{H^s(\mathcal{T}_h)}^2 := \sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} |v|_{H^s(K)}^2$ . Using the Lagrangian interpolation operator  $\Pi_h$  mapping  $H_{0,0}^{1,1}(Q) \cap H^k(Q)$  to  $V_{0h}$ , we obtain  $\|u - u_h\|_h \leq \|u - \Pi_h u\|_h + \|\Pi_h u - u_h\|_h$ . The term  $\|u - \Pi_h u\|_h$  can be bounded by means of the interpolation error estimate, and the term  $\|\Pi_h u - u_h\|_h$  by using ellipticity, Galerkin orthogonality and boundedness of the bilinear form. The discretization error estimate  $\|u - u_h\|_h \leq C(\sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} h_K^{2(l-1)} |u|_{H^l(K)}^2)^{1/2}$  holds for the solution  $u$  provided that  $u$  belongs to  $H_{0,0}^{1,1}(Q) \cap H^k(Q) \cap H^l(\mathcal{T}_h)$ , and the finite element solution  $u_h \in V_{0h}$ , where  $C > 0$ , independent of mesh size; see [10].

### 3 Two-level BDDC preconditioners

After the space-time finite element discretization of the model problem (1), the linear system of algebraic equations reads as follows:

$$Kx = f, \quad (5)$$

with  $K := \begin{bmatrix} K_{II} & K_{I\Gamma} \\ K_{\Gamma I} & K_{\Gamma\Gamma} \end{bmatrix}$ ,  $x := \begin{bmatrix} x_I \\ x_\Gamma \end{bmatrix}$ ,  $f := \begin{bmatrix} f_I \\ f_\Gamma \end{bmatrix}$ ,  $K_{II} = \text{diag} [K_{II}^1, \dots, K_{II}^N]$ , where  $N$  denotes the number of polyhedral subdomains  $\Omega_i$  from a non-overlapping domain decomposition of  $\Omega$ . In system (5), we have decomposed the degrees of freedom into the ones associated with the internal ( $I$ ) and interface ( $\Gamma$ ) nodes, respectively. We aim to solve the Schur-complement system living on the interface:

$$Sx_\Gamma = g_\Gamma, \quad (6)$$

with  $S := K_{\Gamma\Gamma} - K_{\Gamma I} K_{II}^{-1} K_{I\Gamma}$  and  $g := f_\Gamma - K_{\Gamma I} K_{II}^{-1} f_I$ .

Following [12] (see also details in [5]), Dohrmann's (two-level) BDDC preconditioners  $P_{BDDC}$  for the interface Schur complement equation (6), originally proposed for symmetric and positive definite systems in [2, 11], can be written in the form

$$P_{BDDC}^{-1} = R_{D,\Gamma}^T (T_{sub} + T_0) R_{D,\Gamma}, \quad (7)$$

where the scaled operator  $R_{D,\Gamma}$  is the direct sum of restriction operators  $R_{D,\Gamma}^i$  mapping the global interface vector to its component on local interface  $\Gamma_i := \partial\Omega_i \cap \Gamma$ , with a proper scaling factor.

Here the coarse level correction operator  $T_0$  is constructed as

$$T_0 = \Phi(\Phi^T S \Phi)^{-1} \Phi^T \quad (8)$$

with the coarse level basis function matrix  $\Phi = [(\Phi^1)^T, \dots, (\Phi^N)^T]^T$ , where the basis function matrix  $\Phi^i$  on each subdomain interface is obtained by solving the following augmented system:

$$\begin{bmatrix} S^i & (C^i)^T \\ C^i & 0 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \Phi^i \\ \Lambda^i \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} 0 \\ R_{\Pi}^i \end{bmatrix}, \quad (9)$$

with the given primal constraints  $C^i$  of the subdomain  $\Omega_i$  and the vector of Lagrange multipliers on each column of  $\Lambda^i$ . The number of columns of each  $\Phi^i$  equals to the number of global coarse level degrees of freedom, typically living on the subdomain corners, and/or interface edges, and/or faces. Here the restriction operator  $R_{\Pi}^i$  maps the global interface vector in the continuous primal variable space on the coarse level to its component on  $\Gamma_i$ .

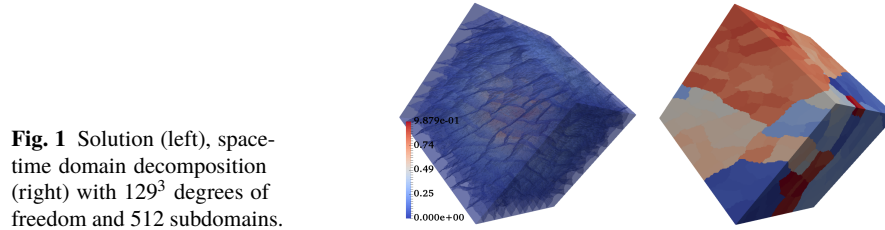
The subdomain correction operator  $T_{sub}$  is defined as

$$T_{sub} = \sum_{i=1}^N \begin{bmatrix} (R_{\Gamma}^i)^T & 0 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} S^i & (C^i)^T \\ C^i & 0 \end{bmatrix}^{-1} \begin{bmatrix} R_{\Gamma}^i \\ 0 \end{bmatrix}, \quad (10)$$

with vanishing primal variables on all the coarse levels. Here the restriction operator  $R_{\Gamma}^i$  maps global interface vectors to their components on  $\Gamma_i$ .

## 4 Numerical experiments

We use  $u(x, y, t) = \sin(\pi x) \sin(\pi y) \sin(\pi t)$  as exact solution of (1) in  $Q = (0, 1)^3$ ; see the left plot in Fig. 1. We perform uniform mesh refinements of  $Q$  using tetrahedral elements. By using Metis [6], the domain is decomposed into  $N = 2^k$ ,  $k = 3, 4, \dots, 9$ , non-overlapping subdomains  $\Omega_i$  with their own tetrahedral elements; see the right plot in Fig. 1. The total number of degrees of freedom is  $(2^k + 1)^3$ ,  $k = 4, 5, 6, 7$ . We run BDDC preconditioned GMRES iterations until the relative residual error reaches  $10^{-9}$ . Three variants of BDDC preconditioners are used with corner (C), corner/edge (CE), and corner/edge/face (CEF) constraints, respectively. The number of BDDC preconditioned GMRES iterations and the computational time measured in seconds [s] are given in Table 1, with respect to the number of subdomains (row-wise) and number of degrees of freedom (column-wise). Since the system is unsymmetric but positive definite, the BDDC preconditioners do not show the same typical robustness and efficiency behavior when applied to the symmetric and positive definite system



**Fig. 1** Solution (left), space-time domain decomposition (right) with  $129^3$  degrees of freedom and 512 subdomains.

[14]. Nevertheless, we still observe certain scalability with respect to the number subdomains (up to 128), in particular, with corner/edge and corner/edge/face constraints. For  $\theta = 2.5$ , we see improvement of BDDC preconditioners with respect to the number of GMRES iterations and computational time; see Table 2. Further, we observe improved scalability with respect to the number of subdomains as well as number of degrees of freedom.

## 5 Conclusions

In this work, we have applied two-level BDDC preconditioned GMRES methods to the solution of finite element equations arising from the space-time discretization of a parabolic model problem. We have compared the performance of BDDC preconditioners with different coarse level constraints for such an unsymmetric, but positive definite system. The preconditioners show certain scalability provided that  $\theta$  is sufficiently large. Future work will concentrate on improvement of coarse-level corrections in order to achieve robustness with respect to different choices of  $\theta$ .

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**Table 1**  $\theta = 0.5$ . BDDC performance using different coarse level constraints (*C/CE/CEF*).

		No preconditioner						
		8	16	32	64	128	256	512
$17^3$		52 (0.04s)	59 (0.03s)	63 (0.03s)	71 (0.04s)	76 (0.05s)	> 500 –	> 500 –
$33^3$		86 (0.76s)	100 (0.41s)	113 (0.22s)	126 (0.18s)	144 (0.33s)	> 500 –	> 500 –
$65^3$		149 (35.32s)	176 (13.55s)	206 (6.05s)	225 (2.88s)	260 (2.02s)	294 (5.78s)	> 500 –
$129^3$		OoM (–)	OoM (–)	346 (213.23s)	399 (89.23s)	467 (41.51s)	> 500 (–)	> 500 (–)
		<i>C</i> (corner) preconditioner						
$17^3$		24 (0.03s)	31 (0.02s)	30 (0.02s)	38 (0.03s)	44 (0.08s)	56 (0.32s)	114 (2.7s)
$33^3$		34 (0.65s)	40 (0.30s)	57 (0.21s)	78 (0.19s)	75 (0.27s)	247 (2.11s)	233 (8.33s)
$65^3$		40 (22.56s)	64 (10.05s)	92 (5.26s)	126 (2.95s)	149 (1.70s)	166 (4.95s)	476 (19.56s)
$129^3$		OoM (–)	OoM (–)	173 (227.67s)	250 (113.38s)	286 (47.2s)	> 500 (–)	311 (20.40s)
		<i>CE</i> (corner+edge) preconditioner						
$17^3$		23 (0.03s)	25 (0.02s)	24 (0.02s)	26 (0.03s)	29 (0.12s)	44 (0.32s)	70 (1.52s)
$33^3$		32 (0.63s)	32 (0.27s)	35 (0.13s)	49 (0.15s)	40 (0.23s)	124 (1.59s)	146 (7.19s)
$65^3$		38 (21.93s)	56 (9.02s)	72 (4.37s)	85 (2.10s)	87 (1.23s)	89 (3.43s)	295 (21.59s)
$129^3$		OoM (–)	OoM (–)	139 (184.57s)	177 (82.38s)	196 (33.43s)	> 500 (–)	218 (23.76s)
		<i>CEF</i> (corner+edge+face) preconditioner						
$17^3$		22 (0.03s)	24 (0.02s)	23 (0.02s)	24 (0.04s)	23 (0.09)	39 (0.32s)	72 (1.47s)
$33^3$		33 (0.80s)	31 (0.33s)	35 (0.17s)	46 (0.17s)	37 (0.32s)	119 (2.51s)	134 8.2s
$65^3$		39 (21.56s)	55 (11.52s)	70 (5.61s)	80 (2.50s)	81 (2.14s)	80 (4.04s)	275 (48.58s)
$129^3$		OoM (–)	OoM (–)	173 (226.93s)	171 (109.94s)	185 (45.05s)	> 500 (–)	206 (33.13s)

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**Table 2**  $\theta = 2.5$ . BDDC performance using different coarse level constraints (*C/CE/CEF*).

No preconditioner							
	8	16	32	64	128	256	512
$17^3$	46 (0.02s)	51 (0.02s)	55 (0.02s)	61 (0.03s)	66 (0.04s)	> 500 –	> 500 –
$33^3$	72 (0.64s)	79 (0.32s)	87 (0.15s)	99 (0.12s)	108 (0.13s)	> 500 –	> 500 –
$65^3$	116 (27.59s)	126 (9.17s)	145 (4.07s)	163 (1.92s)	176 (1.06s)	191 (2.02s)	> 500 –
$129^3$	OoM (–)	OoM (–)	240 (145.64s)	271 (58.51s)	304 (24.3s)	> 500 (–)	382 (12.41s)
<i>C</i> (corner) preconditioner							
$17^3$	23 (0.02s)	28 (0.02s)	27 (0.03s)	32 (0.03s)	36 (0.07s)	51 (0.72s)	110 (2.48s)
$33^3$	30 (0.60s)	33 (0.26s)	39 (0.14s)	50 (0.10s)	50 (0.09s)	206 (3.86s)	182 (6.2s)
$65^3$	35 (19.85s)	47 (7.42s)	61 (3.47s)	64 (1.44s)	69 (0.68s)	77 (1.05s)	287 (9.00s)
$129^3$	OoM (–)	OoM (–)	94 (124.30s)	104 (46.45s)	107 (16.90s)	340 (33.45s)	112 (5.89s)
<i>CE</i> (corner+edge) preconditioner							
$17^3$	21 (0.03s)	22 (0.02s)	22 (0.01s)	25 (0.03s)	27 (1.78s)	42 (0.78s)	80 (1.65s)
$33^3$	27 (0.54s)	26 (0.23s)	32 (0.11s)	38 (0.12s)	32 (0.15s)	117 (2.52s)	132 (5.98s)
$65^3$	33 (19.00s)	44 (7.27s)	51 (2.98s)	54 (1.33s)	54 (0.75s)	54 (1.32s)	235 (15.13s)
$129^3$	OoM (–)	OoM (–)	82 (109.19s)	83 (38.59s)	90 (15.21s)	366 (37.00s)	94 (7.91s)
<i>CEF</i> (corner+edge+face) preconditioner							
$17^3$	21 (0.02s)	21 (0.01s)	22 (0.02s)	22 (0.04s)	22 (0.13s)	38 (0.74s)	74 (1.74s)
$33^3$	27 (0.68s)	26 (0.28s)	30 (0.14s)	35 (0.12s)	31 (0.25s)	115 (3.79s)	123 (7.08s)
$65^3$	34 (26.64s)	44 (9.29s)	49 (3.86s)	52 (1.61s)	53 (1.11s)	51 (1.88s)	226 (21.30s)
$129^3$	OoM (–)	OoM (–)	82 (145.39s)	83 (53.10s)	88 (23.04s)	369 (52.33)	92 (13.8s)

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