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(71) Applicant: OHIO STATE INNOVATION FOUNDATION [US/US]; 1524 North High Street, Columbus, Ohio 43201 (US).

(72) Inventors: WANG, Jinghua; 4131 Lyon Drive, Columbus, Ohio 43220 (US). DING, Yu; 2523 Oyster Loop Drive, Sugar Land, Texas 77478 (US).

(74) Agents: ANDERSON, Bjorn G. et al.; Meunier Carlin & Curfman LLC, 999 Peachtree Street NE, Suite 1300, Atlanta, Georgia 30309 (US).

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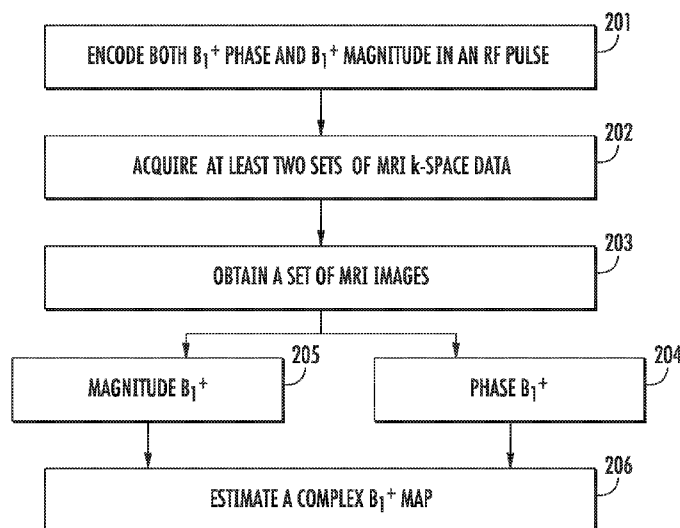


FIG. 2

(57) Abstract: Systems and methods for estimating complex transmit field B_1^+ of a transmit coil of a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) system in both k-space and image domains are described herein. Estimating complex RF field B_1^+ in the k-space domain includes acquiring complex data in a k-space domain, estimating a complex B_1^+ map in the k-space domain of a transmit coil and storing the complex B_1^+ map. The complex B_1^+ map can be estimated based on the complex images. Estimating complex transmit field B_1^+ in the image domain includes acquiring at least two complex images in a k-space domain, transforming the complex images into an image domain, estimating a complex B_1^+ map in the image domain of a transmit coil, and storing the complex B_1^+ map.

SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR ESTIMATING COMPLEX B_1^+ FIELDS OF TRANSMIT COILS OF A MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING (MRI) SYSTEM**CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS**

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 62/161,569, filed on May 14, 2015, entitled "SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR ESTIMATING B_1 FIELDS OF TRANSMIT AND RECEIVE COILS OF A MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING (MRI) SYSTEM," the disclosure of which is expressly incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is one of the most important modern medical imaging modalities. It has far less risk of side effects than most other imaging modalities such as radiology with x-rays or computed tomography because patient and medical personal are not subjected to ionizing radiation exposure in the procedure. The use of MRI has grown very fast. Every year, more than 30 million MRI scans are performed in the United States; more than 60 million MRI scans are performed worldwide. Doctors often recommend MRI for the diagnoses of various diseases, such as tumors, strokes, heart problems, and spine disease. A high-quality scan is important for maximizing diagnostic sensitivity and making the right diagnosis. Generally, a high quality image requires high signal to noise ratio (SNR), high contrast between normal and pathological tissues, low levels of artifact, and reasonable and acceptable spatial-temporal resolution.

[0003] In order to obtain a detectable nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or magnetic resonance (MR) signal, the object being imaged (also referred to herein as "object" or "subject") must be exposed to a static basic magnetic field (usually designated as the B_0 field) which is as homogeneous as possible. The basic magnetic field can be generated by a basic field magnet of the MRI system. While the magnetic resonance images are being recorded, the basic magnetic field has fast-switched gradient fields superimposed on it for spatial encoding, which are generated by gradient coils. Moreover, using radio-frequency (RF) antennas, radio-frequency pulses

with a defined field strength are radiated into the object being imaged. RF field of these RF pulses is normally designated as B_1^+ . Using these RF pulses, the nuclear spins of the atoms in the object being imaged are excited such that the atoms are deflected by a so-called "excitation flip angle" (α) from their equilibrium position parallel to the basic magnetic field B_0 . The nuclear spins then precess around the direction of the basic magnetic field B_0 . The magnetic resonance signals generated in this manner are recorded by RF receiver coil. The receiver coil can be either the same coil which was used to generate the RF pulses (i.e., a transceiver coil) or a separate receive-only coil.

[0004] The magnetic resonance images of the object are generated based on the received magnetic resonance signals. The MR signal is picked up by a receive coil, amplified and processed. The acquired measurements are digitized and stored as complex numerical values in a "k-space" matrix. An associated MR image can be reconstructed from the k-space data, for example, by an inverse 2D or 3D fast Fourier transform (FFT) from raw data, which are collected in the spatial frequency domain (the "k-space"). The k-space data includes multiple lines acquired with different phase encoding. Each line is digitized by collecting a number of samples. A set of k-space data is converted to a MR image by means of Fourier transformation. Each image point in the magnetic resonance image is assigned to a small body volume known as a "voxel" and each brightness or intensity value of the image points is linked to the signal amplitude of the magnetic resonance signal received from this voxel. The relationship between the resonantly radiated B_1^+ and the flip angle $\alpha(x)$ is assumed by the following equation:

$$\alpha(x) = 2\pi\gamma B_1^+(x) \int_0^T f(t) dt \quad (1)$$

where γ is the gyromagnetic ratio, which can be considered to be a fixed material constant for most nuclear spin studies, and τ is the influence duration of the radio-frequency pulse. $f(t)$ is the time dependent transmitter voltage defining the RF pulse shape. Eq. (1) holds true if the frequency of the RF pulse equals the Larmor-frequency of the magnetization.

[0005] Before the commencement of each NMR or MRI scan, it is common practice to adjust the strength of the transmit field and/or the receiver sensitivity to ensure that the RF excitation pulses have the optimal frequency, strength and duration to evoke the desired NMR or MRI or MR signal. This

does not necessarily mean that the expected RF transmit field will be produced uniformly throughout a cross section and/or a volume of the object being imaged, or that the resulting NMR or MRI or MR signals will be received uniformly from all locations. Transmit RF field produced by most transmit coils as loaded by the object being imaged is not homogeneous, and the receive field of most receive coils is similarly not homogeneous. This is particularly true of imperfect coil configuration, such as surface coil and phase array coils. Even if the transmit and receive coil fields are homogeneous for free space (i.e., the unloaded space or space in the absence of the object), wave behavior and penetration of the RF field into the subject may give rise to non-uniform transmit field and receiver sensitivity throughout the region of interest. This is known as the subject loading effect, and this effect becomes pronounced at higher static B_0 magnetic fields such as at static magnetic field of about 3 Tesla or higher. Even at lower static magnetic fields, the subject loading effect may be non-negligible. Moreover, the incorrect calibration of the RF pulse amplitude, instability or drift of the RF amplifier or other RF electronics, can lead to non-uniform transmit field. Also, mutual inductance between the transmit and receive coils may cause further inhomogeneities in the transmit and receive fields.

SUMMARY

[0006] Described herein are systems and methods for quickly, accurately and robustly estimating transmit field of an RF transmit coil (B_1^+) of an MRI scanner system in the k-space domain. For example, the systems and methods described herein relate to techniques for estimating complex transmit field B_1^+ of a transmit coil or coil element of a transmit coil array. As compared to conventional techniques for estimating B_1^+ using magnitude or phase images in the image domain, the techniques described herein using k-space lines from one or more images can greatly reduce the time required to, as well as improve the accuracy of, B_1^+ mapping. It should be understood that the techniques described herein can be applied in a wide range of applications including, but not limited to, RF coil design, RF shimming, image quality improvement, complex scanner design, electromagnetic property tomography imaging with MRI, and quantitative MRI (e.g., T_1 and perfusion imaging).

[0007] An example method of estimating transmit field B_1^+ in the k-space domain is described herein that includes: (1) encoding both B_1 phase and B_1 magnitude in the acquisition sequence; (2) acquiring 2 dimensional (2D) or 3 dimensional (3D) full k-space data and/or sub-set k-space data (e.g., partial k-space data) with different imaging parameters and/or receiver coil; (3) applying an algorithm to the k-space data for estimating a complex B_1^+ map; and (4) storing the complex B_1^+ map for use with clinical and research applications.

[0008] In some implementations, as described below, the techniques for estimating the complex B_1^+ map in the k-space domain can be used for estimating the transmit field B_1^+ of a refocusing RF pulse field, a magnetization preparation RF pulse field, and/or selective RF pulse field.

[0009] Another method for estimating transmit field B_1^+ in the image domain is described herein that includes: (1) encoding both B_1 phase and B_1 magnitude in the acquisition sequences; (2) acquiring 2 dimensional (2D) or 3 dimensional (3D) full k-space data with different imaging parameters; (3) applying FFT transform to the full k-space data for obtaining images; (4) using the images for estimating the complex B_1^+ map; and (5) storing the complex B_1^+ map for use in clinical and research applications.

[0010] In some implementations, as described below, a complex B_1^+ map is applied in B_1^+ inhomogeneity correction, RF safety evaluation, RF transmit coil design evaluation and optimization, quantitative MRI and MRS, electromagnetic property tomography, MRI quality control, RF shimming, tailored RF shimming, and/or parallel transmit field.

[0011] An example method for determining spatial distribution of magnitude and phase of radio frequency (RF) transmit field B_1^+ in a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) system is described herein. The method can include applying at least one pulse sequence configured to excite precessing nuclear spins in magnetic resonance (MR) nuclei. The at least one pulse sequence can include at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and encoded B_1 magnitude. The method can also include detecting a plurality of MR signals representing nuclear MR signals arising from the precessing nuclear spins in the MR nuclei, acquiring at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having

encoded B_1 phase from the MR signals, and acquiring at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude from the MR signals. The method can further include estimating a complex B_1^+ map of at least a portion of a transmit coil of the MRI system using the acquired sets of complex k-space data.

[0012] As used herein, the complex k-space data can optionally be a complex k-space image. Additionally, each set of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase can have a different encoded B_1 phase. For example, each set of complex k-space data can be a complex k-space image with different encoded B_1 phase, i.e., at least two complex k-space images, each complex k-space image including an RF pulse having a different encoded B_1 phase as compared to the other complex k-space image. Additionally, each set of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude can have a different encoded B_1 magnitude. For example, each set of complex k-space data can be a complex k-space image with different encoded B_1 magnitude, i.e., at least two complex k-space images, each complex k-space image including an RF pulse having a different encoded B_1 magnitude as compared to the other complex k-space image.

[0013] Optionally, in some implementations, the method can include applying a plurality of pulse sequences, where a first pulse sequence comprises at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and a second pulse sequence comprises at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude. Alternatively or additionally, the at least one RF pulse can be a single RF pulse. In other words, a single RF pulse can have both encoded B_1 phase and encoded B_1 magnitude. Alternatively or additionally, the at least one RF pulse can optionally be a plurality of RF pulses. Optionally, the RF pulses can include at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude. The RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and the RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude can be the same or different RF pulses. This disclosure contemplates that a plurality of phase and magnitude encoded RF pulses can combine with themselves (and optionally other RF pulses) to create a pulse sequence for image acquisition.

[0014] Alternatively or additionally, the at least two sets of complex k-space data including at least an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase can include full k-space or a portion of k-space.

Alternatively or additionally, the at least two sets of complex k-space data including at least an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude can include full k-space or a portion of k-space.

[0015] Alternatively or additionally, the at least one RF pulse can be on-resonance excitation. Alternatively or additionally, the at least one RF pulse can be off-resonance excitation.

[0016] Alternatively or additionally, the at least one RF pulse can be a rectangle RF pulse, a truncated-sinc RF pulse, a sinc RF pulse, a Gaussian RF pulse, an adiabatic RF pulse, a Hermite RF pulse, a Shinnar-Le Roux RF pulse, or combinations thereof.

[0017] Alternatively or additionally, the complex B_1^+ map can be estimated using data in a k-space domain.

[0018] Alternatively or additionally, the method can optionally further include transforming each of the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase into a respective image in an image domain, and transforming each of the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude into a respective image in the image domain. This disclosure contemplates that the complex k-space data can be transformed into the image domain using an inverse Fourier transform such as an inverse 2D or 3D FFT, for example. Additionally, the complex B_1^+ map of at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system can be estimated based on the respective images. In other words, the complex B_1^+ map can be estimated in the image domain. For example, estimating the complex B_1^+ map based on the respective images can include using at least one a double flip angle method, a dual pulse spin echo method, an actual flip angle imaging method, a steady state method, a dual refocusing echo acquisition mode (DREAM) method, a Bloch Siegert shift method, or a phase sensitive method. Alternatively or additionally, estimating the complex B_1^+ map based on the respective images can further include estimating the complex B_1^+ map based on a relationship between a complex MR signal and the respective images. For example, the complex B_1^+ map can be estimated using an analytic, empirical, or approximated solution of Bloch equations.

[0019] Alternatively or additionally, estimating the complex B_1^+ map of at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system can further include estimating a k-space domain convolution kernel between k-space of the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude. In other words, the complex B_1^+ map can be estimated in the k-space domain. For example, the k-space domain convolution kernel can be estimated using a fitting algorithm. The complex B_1^+ map can then be transformed into an image domain using an inverse Fourier transform such as an inverse 2D or 3D FFT, for example.

[0020] Alternatively or additionally, the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase or the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude can be acquired using at least one of different MRI system configurations. For example, the different MRI system configurations include at least one of different coil elements of a receive coil, different receive coils, or different gradient encoding strategies. Alternatively or additionally, the at least two sets of complex k-space data including at least an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase or the at least two sets of complex k-space data including at least an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude can be acquired using different image contrasts.

[0021] Alternatively or additionally, the complex B_1^+ map can be applied for at least one type of RF pulse.

[0022] Alternatively or additionally, the method can optionally further include, using the complex B_1^+ map, generating a refocusing RF pulse, a selective RF pulse, or a magnetization preparation RF pulse.

[0023] Alternatively or additionally, the method can optionally further include applying the complex B_1^+ map to improve performance of simultaneous multi-slice excitation.

[0024] Alternatively or additionally, the method can optionally further include storing the complex B_1^+ map in a memory.

[0025] Alternatively or additionally, the MRI system can include a plurality of RF transmit channels or elements. Additionally, the at least two sets of complex k-space data including at least an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase or the at least two sets of complex k-space data including at least an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude can be acquired using an acquisition pulse sequence that is repeated a plurality of times using different ones or combinations of the RF transmit channels or elements for respectively corresponding different acquisition pulse sequences.

[0026] An example magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) system for determining spatial distribution of magnitude and phase of radio frequency (RF) transmit field B_1^+ is described herein. The MRI system can include a transmitting and receiving unit including at least one RF coil, and an MRI system controller operably coupled with the transmitting and receiving unit. The transmitting and receiving unit can be configured to apply at least one pulse sequence using the at least one RF coil. The at least one pulse sequence can be configured to excite precessing nuclear spins in magnetic resonance (MR) nuclei, and the at least one pulse sequence can include at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and encoded B_1 magnitude. The transmitting and receiving unit can also be configured to detect a plurality of MR signals using the at least one RF coil. The MR signal can represent nuclear MR signals arising from the precessing nuclear spins in the MR nuclei. The MRI system controller can include a processor and a memory, the memory having computer-executable instructions stored thereon that, when executed by the processor, cause the processor to acquire at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase from the MR signals, acquire at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude from the MR signals, and estimate a complex B_1^+ map of at least a portion of a transmit coil of the MRI system using the acquired sets of complex k-space data.

[0027] An example non-transitory computer-readable recording medium having computer-executable instructions stored thereon for determining spatial distribution of magnitude and phase of radio frequency (RF) transmit field B_1^+ is described herein. The computer-executable instructions, when executed by a processor, can cause the processor to receive a plurality of magnetic resonance (MR)

signals representing nuclear MR signals arising from precessing nuclear spins in MR nuclei, acquire at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase from the MR signals, acquire at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude from the MR signals, and estimate a complex B_1^+ map of at least a portion of a transmit coil of the MRI system using the acquired sets of complex k-space data.

[0028] It should be understood that the above-described subject matter may also be implemented as a computer-controlled apparatus, a computer process, a computing system, or an article of manufacture, such as a computer-readable storage medium.

[0029] Other systems, methods, features and/or advantages will be or may become apparent to one with skill in the art upon examination of the following drawings and detailed description. It is intended that all such additional systems, methods, features and/or advantages be included within this description and be protected by the accompanying claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0030] The components in the drawings are not necessarily to scale relative to each other. Like reference numerals designate corresponding parts throughout the several views.

[0031] FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram illustrating an example MRI system.

[0032] FIG. 1A is a block diagram illustrating an example computing device.

[0033] FIG. 2 is a flow chart illustrating example operations for complex B_1^+ mapping in the image domain according to an implementation described herein.

[0034] FIGS. 3A and 3B illustrate encoding B_1^+ phase and B_1^+ magnitude in RF pulses according to an implementation described herein.

[0035] FIG. 4 is a flow chart illustrating example operations for complex B_1^+ mapping in the K-space domain according to an implementation described herein. As shown in FIG. 4, K-space data from multiple receive coils can be lumped together to estimate the B_1^+ mapping.

[0036] FIG. 5 illustrates a comparison of the B_1^+ mapping results in a phantom object using a B_1^+ mapping technique described herein (left-hand side of FIG. 5) and using a conventional double flip angle method (right-hand side of FIG. 5). As shown in FIG. 5, the conventional double flip angle method does not have the phase of the B_1^+ mapping. In contrast, the B_1^+ mapping technique described herein has both phase and magnitude of the B_1^+ mapping.

[0037] FIG. 6 illustrates a comparison of the B_1^+ mapping results in an *in vivo* human brain using a B_1^+ mapping technique described herein (left-hand side of FIG. 6) and using a conventional double flip angle method (right-hand side of FIG. 6). As shown in FIG. 6, the conventional double flip angle method does not have the phase of the B_1^+ mapping. In contrast, the B_1^+ mapping technique described herein has both phase and magnitude of the B_1^+ mapping.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0038] Unless defined otherwise, all technical and scientific terms used herein have the same meaning as commonly understood by one of ordinary skill in the art. Methods and materials similar or equivalent to those described herein can be used in the practice or testing of the present disclosure. As used in the specification, and in the appended claims, the singular forms “a,” “an,” “the” include plural referents unless the context clearly dictates otherwise. The term “comprising” and variations thereof as used herein is used synonymously with the term “including” and variations thereof and are open, non-limiting terms. The terms “optional” or “optionally” used herein mean that the subsequently described feature, event or circumstance may or may not occur, and that the description includes instances where said feature, event or circumstance occurs and instances where it does not.

[0039] DEFINITIONS

[0040] B_1 is the transmit RF field which is generated by a transmit coil in MRI system. B_1 includes a transversal transmit field B_{xy} and a longitudinal transmit field B_z .

[0041] B_1^+ is the positive circularly polarized component of a transversal transmit field of a RF pulse which is generated by a transmit coil. The RF pulse can be used as an excitation RF pulse,

refocused RF pulse, and magnetization preparation RF pulse. The transmit coil can be at least one of volume coil, surface coil, one element of an array coils, or a combination thereof. The transversal transmit RF field can be decomposed into two rotating fields: the positive circularly polarized component B_1^+ , which rotates in the direction of nuclear magnetic moment precession (counterclockwise direction), and the negative circularly polarized component B_1^- , which rotates opposite to the direction of precession (clockwise direction). In an MRI system, only the positive circularly polarized component of the transmitting field B_1^+ contributes to the excitation of proton nuclei spins. Therefore, as used herein, B_1^+ refers to the transmit field of a transmit coil.

[0042] It should be understood that the MRI systems described herein can include a plurality of transmit coils and/or a plurality of receiver coils. Optionally, the transmit and/or receiver coils can be an array coil (e.g., transmit coil elements arranged in an array and/or receiver coil elements arranged in an array). In some implementations, the transmit and receiver coils are different coils. In other implementations, the transmit and receiver coil are the same coil (e.g., a transceiver coil). Alternatively or additionally, the transmit coil can include, but is not limited to, a transmit volume coil, a transmit surface coil, or an array coil. In some implementations, the complex B_1^+ map described herein can be a complex B_1^+ map of a portion of the transmit coil or element of an array coil. In some implementations, the complex B_1^+ map described herein can be a complex B_1^+ map of the entire transmit coil or element of an array coil.

[0043] As used herein, encoded RF pulse can refer to encoded excitation RF pulses and/or encoded reference RF pulses. The encoded excitation RF pulses are used as excitation RF pulses and estimation of complex B_1^+ mapping of the encoded excitation RF pulses. The encoded reference RF pulses are used as non-excitation RF pulses and estimation of complex B_1^+ mapping of the encoded non-excitation RF pulses. The encoded reference RF pulses include at least one of off-resonance RF pulse, saturation pulse, inversion recovery RF pulse, or other magnetization preparation pulse.

[0044] B₁ MAPPING OVERVIEW

[0045] B₁⁺ field estimation is significant to applications including, but not limited to, image quality improvement, RF safety, RF coil design and optimization, quantitative MRI, RF shimming, tailored RF shimming, parallel transmit field, and electromagnetic property tomography.

[0046] Inhomogeneous transmit or inhomogeneous receiver sensitivity (or both) can give rise to signal and contrast inhomogeneities in the reconstructed images. Without removing or sufficiently reducing these B₁ inhomogeneities, the value of MRI images in clinic and research may be compromised.

[0047] B₁⁺ estimation can also be important for RF safety in high field and ultra-high field MRI. B₁ inhomogeneities can generate a local exposure where most of the absorbed energy is applied to one body region rather than the entire body. As a result, the hotspots may occur in the exposed tissues and may lead to regional damage of these tissues even when global specific absorption rate (SAR) is less than U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) SAR limits.

[0048] B₁⁺ field estimation can also be important for RF coil design. The uniformity of B₁⁺ field is an important metric for RF coil design and optimization. The B₁⁺ field estimation can be a direct and efficient method to evaluate the performance of RF coil. As for a RF coil design and validation, fast and accurate B₁⁺ field estimation can improve the efficiency for RF coil design and evaluation. As for specific application RF coil, such as knee coil, breast coil, the RF inhomogeneity can be greatly improved if the loaded effect is taken account into the coil design.

[0049] Correction of B₁⁺ inhomogeneity can also be important for quantitative MRI, such as quantitative fast T₁ mapping and MR image segmentation. It is known that contrast-to-noise ratio and signal inhomogeneity are major factors that strongly affect the performance of segmentation. In quantitative MRI, one solution is to measure an absolute B₁⁺ and correct the intensity inhomogeneities that arise from B₁⁺ variations.

[0050] B_1^+ can also provide information about coil performance and inhomogeneity and can also be used for preventive maintenance of RF system.

[0051] RF shimming, tailored RF shimming, and parallel transmission are techniques that enable high field and ultra-high field MRI at maximum image quality and RF patient safety. These techniques are based on accurate B_1^+ mapping and adjust current amplitude and phase of each element of the RF coils and/or gradient configuration to maximize B_1^+ or flip angle uniformity in subsequent imaging. The estimation of transmit field B_1^+ is a precondition of RF shimming and parallel transmission techniques. RF shimming technique is coil configuration and object dependent. Thus, the transmit field B_1^+ must be estimated for each coil and object when using the RF shimming technique. Reducing time for estimating transmit field B_1^+ reduces the time of applying RF shimming technique in clinical settings. Additionally, parallel transmission technique is coil configuration, object, and sequence dependent. Therefore, the transmit field B_1^+ must be estimated for each coil, object, and sequence when using the parallel transmit technique. Reducing time for estimating transmit field B_1^+ reduces the time of applying parallel transmit technique in clinical settings.

[0052] B_1^+ mapping has an increasing role in electrical property tomography. The conductivity and permittivity of living tissues can be directly estimated using B_1^+ mapping.

[0053] More recently, it has become possible to omit the use of all conventional main field gradients using only RF encoding to achieve spatial resolution, alleviating problems that come along with switched gradients like acoustic noise. For example, single echo acquisition (SEA) imaging uses a one-dimensional array of long and narrow parallel elements to localize the image information in one direction, and an entire image is obtained from a single line of k-space, avoiding rapid or repeated manipulation of gradients.

[0054] MRI signals strongly relate to MRI tissue properties (such as T_1 and T_2 relaxation time), hardware configuration, sequence, RF pulse profile, and/or imaging parameters. Thus, an ideal B_1 mapping based on MRI techniques may have one or more of the following characteristics: MRI tissue properties independent ; B_0 inhomogeneity and susceptibility independent; short scan time;

large dynamic range; insensitive to imperfect spoiling or RF profile; insensitive to signal to noise (SNR); RF safety; and/or high accuracy and low precision of B_1 field estimation.

[0055] Recently, three major developments can be envisaged in MRI: the use of parallel acquisition methods, the move to high field, and the development of new MRI scanner designs such as open access scanners. For these developments, the inhomogeneous signal intensity from non-tissue characteristics (such as inhomogeneous transmission and reception) has been being a greater problem. Estimating transmit field is precondition of developing the techniques to correct the inhomogeneous signal intensity which is caused by the transmit field.

[0056] Estimating transmit field B_1^+ and its mapping have wide applications in MRI industry and clinical practice, including: adjusting voltage of an RF amplifier for desired flip angle; understanding or correcting signal and contrast inhomogeneity through tissue and space to improve diagnostic performance; improving the accuracy and precision of quantitative MRI, such as T_1 , T_2 and MRS, segmentation; optimizing coil design; improving the performance of multiple transmit techniques (parallel transmit, RF shimming, pulse design); evaluating RF safety and MRI safety; and/or exploring new contrast, such as conductivity and permittivity contrast.

[0057] A number of techniques have been proposed for estimating transmit field in vivo in both image domain and k-space domain. In image domain, the techniques can be categorized into MR amplitude based methods and MR phase based methods. MR amplitude based methods include the double flip angle method [Insko EK et al, 1993; U.S. 7,446,526], dual pulse spin echo method [Jiru F et al, 2006], actual flip angle imaging method [Yarnykh VL, 2007], steady state method [Brunner et al, 2009], and composite pulses [Nehrke K et al. 2012; EP 2615470]. MR phase based methods include Bloch Siegert shift method [U.S. 8,198,891, U.S. 8,558,547, U.S. 9,086,446], phase sensitive method [U.S. 8,305,077], adiabatic pulses [U.S. 8,258,786; Jordanova KV, 2014], and other signal phase manipulation techniques [Chang YV 2012]. Additionally, a method [U.S. 8,077,955] has been proposed to estimate spatial patterns and amplitudes of transmit RF fields in MRI systems using frequency filtering of spatially modulated or “tagged” MRI data in k-space domain.

[0058] All MR amplitude based methods in image domain [e.g., Insko EK et al, 1993; U.S. 7,446,526; Nehrke K et al. 2012; EP 2615470], only encode B_1 magnitude into excitation RF pulse and provide the magnitude of B_1^+ . In other words, the MR amplitude based methods do not include encoding B_1 phase. For example, a double flip angle method encodes B_1 magnitude into two excitation RF pulses of flip angles of α and 2α . Because 2α are realized by doubling magnitude of B_1 field, the phase of RF pulse at the flip angle of α is the same as that at the flip angle of 2α . The phase difference of B_1^+ is therefore not encoded into the two excitation RF pulses. As a result, only the magnitude (but not the phase) of transmit field B_1^+ can be estimated by the double flip angle method.

[0059] The MR phase based method [U.S. 8,305,077] applies a composite pulse to encode B_1 phase and estimates B_1 magnitude through computing a phase difference between the two phase measurements and generating a radio frequency magnitude map based on the phase difference. This method, however, does not provide a complex B_1^+ map, and instead only provides magnitude of transmit field B_1^+ .

[0060] Bloch Siegert shift method [U.S. 8,198,891, U.S. 8,558,547, U.S. 9,086,446] encodes B_1 phase in at least one MR excitation pulse as an encoded B_1 phase MR excitation pulse and encodes B_1 magnitude in at least one off-resonance MR pulse as an encoded B_1 magnitude off-resonance MR excitation pulse. The applied far off-resonant RF pulses to a magnetization induce a Bloch Siegert phase shift in the transverse component. The magnitude of transmit field B_1^+ can be estimated by the Bloch Siegert phase shift. However, the Bloch Siegert shift method does not provide a complex B_1^+ map.

[0061] A recently proposed technique, i.e., “ B_1 estimation using adiabatic refocusing” (BEAR) method [Jordanova KV, 2014], uses adiabatic pulses to induce a spin-echo with phase that has a linear dependence on magnitude of B_1^+ . That is, BEAR method encodes the magnitude of transmit field B_1^+ into successive refocusing pulses. As a result, the magnitude of transmit field B_1^+ can be estimated by the linear relationship between phase and B_1 field strength. However, the BEAR method does not provide a complex B_1^+ map.

[0062] In k-space domain, the magnitude of transmit B_1^+ is estimated using frequency filtering of spatially modulated or “tagged” MRI data in k-space domain [U.S. 8,077,955]. The method requires at least one two-dimensional set of B_1 amplitude-tagged MRI data. The application of Tagged RF pulse (180) will increase SAR of patients and have a potential risk. Additionally, this method cannot provide the estimation of B_1^+ phase. In other words, the method does not provided a complex B_1^+ map.

[0063] As described above, existing techniques for transmit field B_1^+ focus on image domain and can be divided into signal intensity-sensitive methods (e.g., amplitude-based methods) and phase-sensitive methods (e.g., phase-based methods).

[0064] Among signal intensity-sensitive methods, there are a couple of double or multi-angle techniques. These methods use multiple (e.g., two) spin- or gradient-echo recalled acquisitions with different flip angles of the exciting RF pulses in the individual sub-experiments. By using the ratio of signal intensities, in case of two acquisitions, or fitting the signal behavior, the effective flip angle, which is proportional to the actual B_1^+ can be estimated. However, these methods are not efficient, because a long repetition time (TR) need to be used to achieve full relaxation so that the effect of T_1 relaxation could be removed. To overcome this limitation magnetization prepared methods have been proposed transferring the double/multi-angle idea into an appropriate preparation of the longitudinal magnetization. This allows a more efficient read out of multiple echoes to reduce the total mapping time. In another technique, the flip angle is calculated from the ratio of a spin echo and a stimulated echo, similar to the double angle methods but with both echoes obtained during the same sequence repetition. In contrast, the actual flip angle technique interleaves two or multiple steady state sequences with significantly differing sequence repetition times (TR). In these T_1 -weighted gradient echo sequences spoiling of the transverse magnetization after read-out is essential allowing to derive the actual B_1^+ from the signal intensity ratio. In case on multi-sequence interleaving also T_1 can be estimated additionally to B_1^+ .

[0065] An alternative method uses a set of gradient echo image acquisitions with rather high flip angles. The basic underlying idea is that flip angles of exactly 180° degrees do not generate any

transverse magnetization, independent of the T_1 , T_2 relaxation parameters present. Using a couple of measurements, performed at different flip angles around the expected 180° value, allows fitting the expected signal null and via the observed signal intensities. This approach can find an application for mapping small changes in the B_1^+ field. However, if the whole dynamic range (e.g., from relatively high to relatively low fields) should be covered, this approach fails.

[0066] The second class of mapping approaches transforms the spatially changing B_1^+ field into signal phase variations. For these purposes, RF pulse trains (e.g., at least two pulses) are used. In Morrell's approach an initial nonselective nominal 180° RF pulse is applied followed immediately by a nonselective 90° flip about an axis perpendicular to the first. The B_1 inhomogeneity causes the actual flip angle to differ from the expected value. It can be shown that the phase of the detectable transverse magnetization is proportional to the actual local B_1 . However, to compensate for other MR intrinsic phase variations, present in the detection chain, etc., a second scan is performed with the phase of the second RF pulse inverted. This approach works in absence of off-resonance, but demands the incorporation of an off-resonance map in case of significant B_0 variations. The magnetization thus generated can be read out using a variety of 3D MR imaging schemes, which could represent a restriction for some applications.

[0067] This phase-sensitive method allows imaging over a much wider range of flip angles than double-angle methods. Another phase sensitive approach, recently introduced, is based on the Bloch-Siegert shift, a physical effect known already for a long time. This is an approach of B_1^+ related signal phase encoding. After generating transverse magnetization, a second RF pulse of defined duration and shape is applied off-resonant (several kHz) changing the effective precession field for the transverse magnetization, encoding in this way the magnitude of the B_1^+ into the MR signal phase. To compensate for other MR intrinsic phase variations, this experiment is repeated without the second RF pulse (or even better with the second RF applied at the off-resonance frequency mirrored to the Larmor frequency). This results in a rather robust approach that is independent of TR, T_1 relaxation, flip angle,

chemical shift, background field inhomogeneity, and MTC effects. The magnetization thus generated can be read out using a number of MR imaging schemes.

[0068] The existing phase-sensitive method for B_1^+ mapping, for example Bloch-Siegert shift method, may have a drawback. It is known that any magnetic field change (including B_0 , gradient field, and each component of RF field) can contribute to image phase. The field estimated by phase-sensitive method should be not B_1^+ but B_1 which includes B_x , B_y and B_z components of B_1 . These techniques will be accurate for B_1^+ mapping only if transmit coils generate perfect circularly polarized RF field cross the object being imaged. In practice, it is impossible at high field strength.

[0069] In existing B_1^+ mapping MR sequences, measurements are performed for each individual transmit channel or coil in two- or three-dimensions. For an N-coil array where N indicates the number of coils, N transmit field mapping sequences are therefore performed. Unfortunately, these B_1^+ mapping MR sequences are relatively slow, and undesirably lengthen the imaging session time.

[0070] All of these above mentioned B_1^+ mapping methods, including signal intensity-sensitive methods and phase-sensitive methods deal with the magnitude of B_1^+ . In other words, none of the above mentioned B_1^+ mapping methods deal with B_1^+ as complex number, that is, both magnitude and phase of B_1^+ simultaneously. Compared with conventional B_1^+ mapping methods (e.g., using MRI techniques in image domain), the B_1^+ mapping techniques in k-space domain described herein provide fast, robust, and accurate B_1^+ . U.S. 8,502,538 to Dannels et al., entitled "B₁ and/or B₀ mapping in MRI system using k-space spatial frequency domain filtering with complex pixel by pixel off-resonance phase in the B₀ map," describes frequency filtering of spatially modulated or "tagged" MRI data in the spatial frequency k-space domain to estimate B₁ and/or B₀ maps for an MRI system. However, Dannel's technique requires at least one two-dimensional set of B₁ amplitude-tagged MRI data. That is, the technique is based on Tagged MRI technique. Additionally, according to the technique, application of Tagged RF pulse (180) will increase SAR of patients and have a potential risk. Further, the technique uses a sub-set frequency-filter to process the data for estimating transmit field. When there is overlap

of frequency spectrum between transmit field and region of interest being imaged, the method may introduce error or artifacts.

[0071] In summary, a number of existing techniques have been proposed either encoding B_1^+ into the signal intensity or into signal phase. All of these techniques provide methods to estimate the magnitude of transmit field B_1^+ via signal intensity and phase. However, all of these techniques show a weakness because these techniques do not estimate phase of transmit field B_1^+ . In other words, none of the existing techniques provide complex B_1^+ mapping. It is clear that the phase of transmit field B_1^+ is important for image reconstruction, RF shimming, multi-transmit, and conductivity contrast. Accordingly, in the techniques described below, both the magnitude and phase of B_1^+ is encoded into the signal intensity and phase of composite pulses. Furthermore, complex B_1^+ (both magnitude and phase) can be estimated in both image domain and k-space domain herein.

[0072] MRI SYSTEM OVERVIEW

[0073] An example MRI system is described in U.S. 8,502,538 to Dannels et al., entitled “ B_1 and/or B_0 mapping in MRI system using k-space spatial frequency domain filtering with complex pixel by pixel off-resonance phase in the B_0 map,” issued Aug. 6, 2013, the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety. The example MRI system is described below with reference to FIG. 1. This disclosure contemplates that the methods for B_1^+ mapping can optionally be implemented using the example MRI system. For example, the MRI system shown in FIG. 1 has a static magnetic field generating unit 12 and a gradient magnetic field generating unit 14 for generating respective magnetic fields in proximity to an object 18. The MRI system also includes a transmitting and receiving unit 16 for irradiating RF pulses to the object and receiving MR signals, a patient table on which the object 18 is placed, and a patient table moving system for moving the table in the body axis direction (e.g., z-axis direction) of the object. The MRI system can also include one or more computing devices such as the example computing device of FIG. 1A. A computing device can be operably coupled to the MRI system, for example, using by any medium that facilitates data exchange between the MRI system and the computing device including, but not limited to, wired, wireless and optical links. For example, a

computing device can be configured to convert the MR signals received by the transmitting and receiving unit 16 into k-space data. A computing device can also be configured to generate MR image data from the k-space data by image reconstruction processing. Further, the MRI system can optionally include a workflow setting unit, an imaging operation determining unit, a display unit, an input unit, and a controller system.

[0074] The workflow setting unit sets a first workflow relating to the MRI examination by estimating an imaging time of each of the imaging methods in the performing order initially set by a scan plan. Further, the workflow setting unit sets a second workflow relating to the MRI examination by estimating a shortest performing order, by which an examination time necessary to sequentially perform a plurality of imaging methods constituting the imaging method group set by the input unit is minimized, an imaging time of each imaging method in the shortest performing order, and the like. The imaging operation determining unit determines whether an imaging operation during a main imaging according to the workflow. This disclosure contemplates that the workflow setting unit and/or the imaging operation unit can be implemented using hardware, software, and or a combination thereof. The display unit displays image data such as local image data, diagnosis image data using display, printer and other displayer. The input unit is manipulated by an operator to input signals to the MRI apparatus to set the imaging method group, the performing order, the imaging condition, and the like. The controller system is composed of a processor and integrally controls the respective units of the MRI system described above.

[0075] The static magnetic field generating unit 12 includes a main magnet to generate a strong static magnetic field in proximity to the object. The gradient magnetic field generating unit 14 includes gradient magnetic field coils for generating gradient magnetic fields in an x-axis direction, a y-axis direction, and a z-axis direction, which are orthogonal to each other. The transmitting and receiving unit 16 includes a transmission coil and a transmitter unit for irradiating the RF pulses to the object and a receiving coil and a receiver unit for receiving MR signals generated by the object. Optionally, a transceiver coil having the functions of both the transmission coil and the receiving coil can be used.

The receiving coil may be composed of, for example, a so-called array coil in which, for example, a plurality of coil elements are disposed to detect the MR signals generated by the object.

[0076] The image reconstruction unit includes an MR signal storage unit, a signal processing unit, and an image data storage unit. The MR signal storage unit (e.g., memory) stores the MR signals, which are collected by the receiver unit of the transmitting and receiving unit 16. The signal processing unit has an image reconstruction processing unit and an image processing unit. The image reconstruction processing unit generates image data from the MR signal storage unit by image reconstruction processing, for example, performed by a Fourier transformation such as 2D FFT. When the MR signals to a three-dimensional region are collected, the image reconstruction processing unit of the signal processing unit generates volume data. Subsequently, the image processing unit generates three-dimensional image data such as volume rendering image data, surface rendering image data and the like or two-dimensional image data, multi planar reconstruction image data, and the like, because predetermined image processing is performed for the volume data generated by the image reconstruction processing unit. Then, the image data described above obtained by the signal processing unit are stored to the respective storage regions of the image data storage unit.

[0077] EXAMPLE COMPUTING DEVICE

[0078] It should be appreciated that the logical operations described herein with respect to the various figures may be implemented (1) as a sequence of computer implemented acts or program modules (i.e., software) running on a computing device (e.g., the computing device described in FIG. 1A), (2) as interconnected machine logic circuits or circuit modules (i.e., hardware) within the computing device and/or (3) a combination of software and hardware of the computing device. Thus, the logical operations discussed herein are not limited to any specific combination of hardware and software. The implementation is a matter of choice dependent on the performance and other requirements of the computing device. Accordingly, the logical operations described herein are referred to variously as operations, structural devices, acts, or modules. These operations, structural devices, acts and modules may be implemented in software, in firmware, in special purpose digital logic, and any combination

thereof. It should also be appreciated that more or fewer operations may be performed than shown in the figures and described herein. These operations may also be performed in a different order than those described herein.

[0079] Referring to FIG. 1A, an example computing device 100 upon which embodiments of the invention may be implemented is illustrated. It should be understood that the example computing device 100 is only one example of a suitable computing environment upon which embodiments of the invention may be implemented. Optionally, the computing device 100 can be a well-known computing system including, but not limited to, personal computers, servers, handheld or laptop devices, multiprocessor systems, microprocessor-based systems, network personal computers (PCs), minicomputers, mainframe computers, embedded systems, and/or distributed computing environments including a plurality of any of the above systems or devices. Distributed computing environments enable remote computing devices, which are connected to a communication network or other data transmission medium, to perform various tasks. In the distributed computing environment, the program modules, applications, and other data may be stored on local and/or remote computer storage media.

[0080] In its most basic configuration, computing device 100 typically includes at least one processing unit 106 and system memory 104. Depending on the exact configuration and type of computing device, system memory 104 may be volatile (such as random access memory (RAM)), non-volatile (such as read-only memory (ROM), flash memory, etc.), or some combination of the two. This most basic configuration is illustrated in FIG. 1A by dashed line 102. The processing unit 106 may be a standard programmable processor that performs arithmetic and logic operations necessary for operation of the computing device 100. The computing device 100 may also include a bus or other communication mechanism for communicating information among various components of the computing device 100.

[0081] Computing device 100 may have additional features/functionality. For example, computing device 100 may include additional storage such as removable storage 108 and non-

removable storage 110 including, but not limited to, magnetic or optical disks or tapes. Computing device 100 may also contain network connection(s) 116 that allow the device to communicate with other devices. Computing device 100 may also have input device(s) 114 such as a keyboard, mouse, touch screen, etc. Output device(s) 112 such as a display, speakers, printer, etc. may also be included. The additional devices may be connected to the bus in order to facilitate communication of data among the components of the computing device 100. All these devices are well known in the art and need not be discussed at length here.

[0082] The processing unit 106 may be configured to execute program code encoded in tangible, computer-readable media. Tangible, computer-readable media refers to any media that is capable of providing data that causes the computing device 100 (i.e., a machine) to operate in a particular fashion. Various computer-readable media may be utilized to provide instructions to the processing unit 106 for execution. Example tangible, computer-readable media may include, but is not limited to, volatile media, non-volatile media, removable media and non-removable media implemented in any method or technology for storage of information such as computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules or other data. System memory 104, removable storage 108, and non-removable storage 110 are all examples of tangible, computer storage media. Example tangible, computer-readable recording media include, but are not limited to, an integrated circuit (e.g., field-programmable gate array or application-specific IC), a hard disk, an optical disk, a magneto-optical disk, a floppy disk, a magnetic tape, a holographic storage medium, a solid-state device, RAM, ROM, electrically erasable program read-only memory (EEPROM), flash memory or other memory technology, CD-ROM, digital versatile disks (DVD) or other optical storage, magnetic cassettes, magnetic tape, magnetic disk storage or other magnetic storage devices.

[0083] In an example implementation, the processing unit 106 may execute program code stored in the system memory 104. For example, the bus may carry data to the system memory 104, from which the processing unit 106 receives and executes instructions. The data received by the system

memory 104 may optionally be stored on the removable storage 108 or the non-removable storage 110 before or after execution by the processing unit 106.

[0084] It should be understood that the various techniques described herein may be implemented in connection with hardware or software or, where appropriate, with a combination thereof. Thus, the methods and apparatuses of the presently disclosed subject matter, or certain aspects or portions thereof, may take the form of program code (i.e., instructions) embodied in tangible media, such as floppy diskettes, CD-ROMs, hard drives, or any other machine-readable storage medium wherein, when the program code is loaded into and executed by a machine, such as a computing device, the machine becomes an apparatus for practicing the presently disclosed subject matter. In the case of program code execution on programmable computers, the computing device generally includes a processor, a storage medium readable by the processor (including volatile and non-volatile memory and/or storage elements), at least one input device, and at least one output device. One or more programs may implement or utilize the processes described in connection with the presently disclosed subject matter, e.g., through the use of an application programming interface (API), reusable controls, or the like. Such programs may be implemented in a high level procedural or object-oriented programming language to communicate with a computer system. However, the program(s) can be implemented in assembly or machine language, if desired. In any case, the language may be a compiled or interpreted language and it may be combined with hardware implementations.

[0085] THEORY

[0086] Although nuclear spins interact with each other in the NMR experiment, many experiments assume that: (1) The influence of atomic electrons on local static field strength (such as chemical shift) is negligible; (2) The interaction between neighboring nuclei as well as between nuclei and the lattice is neglected, i.e., the longitudinal relaxation and the transverse relaxation times are much longer compared to the considered time intervals (several milliseconds). According to Bloch equation, nuclear magnetization $\vec{M}$ in laboratory frame obeys the equation below:

$$[0087] \quad \frac{d\vec{M}}{dt} = \gamma (\vec{M} \times \vec{B}_{eff}) \quad (2)$$

[0088] where γ is the magnetogyric ratio.

$$[0089] \quad \vec{B}_{eff} = B_0 \vec{k} + \vec{B}_1 + \vec{G} \cdot \vec{r} \quad (3)$$

[0090] where B_0 is static magnetic field strength; $\vec{B}_1$ is radiofrequency magnetic field strength of the transmission coil, $\vec{G}$ is the system gradient strength; $\vec{r}$ is spatial location vector. The $\vec{i}$, $\vec{j}$ and $\vec{k}$ are the unit vectors in the Cartesian coordinate system. In three components of $\vec{B}_1$, any transverse components of B_x and B_y of transmit coils can contribute to MR signal. That is, a positive circularly polarized component of the transmit field $B_1^+ = \frac{1}{2}(B_x + i \bullet B_y)$ can excite near spin and then contribute to MR signal.

[0091] The components M_x and M_y of nuclear magnetization $\vec{M}$ can be stimulated by an analytical, empirical, and/or approximated solution of Bloch Equations, e.g., Eq.(2). For example, analytical solutions to Bloch Equations for fast spin echo are described in Lukzen NN, Savelov AA, Analytical derivation of multiple spin echo amplitudes with arbitrary refocusing angle, J Magn Reson 2007, 185(1):71-6. Numerical solutions to Bloch Equations are described in Murase K., Tanki N., Numerical solutions to the time-dependent Bloch equations revisited, Magn Reson Imaging 2011; 29(1):126-31. High tip angle approximation solutions to Bloch Equations are described in Boulant N1, Hoult DI, High tip angle approximation based on a modified Bloch-Riccati equation, Magn Reson Med 2012; 67(2):339-43. In other words, the simulation can be performed using Bloch Equations. Additionally, a solution of the Bloch's Equations can be at least one of an analytic solution, a numerical solution, or an approximation solution.

[0092] The complex signal is given by:

$$[0093] \quad \text{Signal} \propto M_x + i \cdot M_y \quad (4)$$

[0094] The magnitude of signal is given by :

[0095] $|Signal| \propto \sqrt{M_x^2 + M_y^2}$ (5)

[0096] The phase φ of signal is given by :

[0097] $\varphi = \arctan\left(\frac{M_y}{M_x}\right)$ (6)

[0098] A double flip angle method for estimating B_1^+ mapping of transmit coil

[0099] For a gradient echo (GRE) sequence with excitation flip angle $\alpha(x)$, the transmission field for non-interacting spins without transverse coherence, and assuming that the repetition time TR >> longitudinal relaxation time T_1 , can be written as follows:

[00100] $B_1^+ = \frac{1}{\gamma\tau} \cdot \arccos\left(\frac{\lambda}{2}\right)$ (7)

[00101] where γ is the magneto-gyric ratio, $\lambda = \frac{SI_2(x)}{SI_1(x)} = \frac{\sin \alpha_2(x)}{\sin \alpha_1(x)}$ is the ratio

of signal intensities of two GRE images which are acquired with different excitation flip angles such that $\alpha_2(x) = 2\alpha_1(x)$ while maintaining the other imaging parameters (TE, TR). τ is the duration of the RF pulse, and B_1^+ is a positive circularly polarized component of the RF field of transmit coil, which rotates in the same direction as nuclear spins precess. Generally, the two gradient echo images are chosen with the nominal exciting flip angle of 60° and 120°, respectively, because at these angles the measured B_1^+ map will have high SNR which is close to the SNR of the image with the exciting flip angle of 60°. B_1^+ map can be estimated by Eq (7).

[00102] Various factors, such as transmit coil configuration, uncompensated eddy currents, wave behavior and object positioning, generate inhomogeneous transmit field. The nominal flip angle of α is defined by averaged flip angles cross volume being imaged. Thus, the actual flip angle should be a function of location. The goal of B_1^+ mapping is to estimate the function of flip angle as a space distribution. In most MRI applications, only magnitude images are used. However, phase information is very fundamental, if not more fundamental than magnitude, considering the fact that MR

signal magnitude changes are often ultimately due to spin “de-phasing”. In k-space, phase of the raw data has been demonstrated to carry more information than magnitude for visualization. Thus, MR image phase is very important. The MR image phase is given:

$$\phi_{image} = \sum_i^N \phi_{Ti} + \phi_{B0} + \phi_{Rec} + \phi_{syn} \quad (8)$$

Where ϕ_{Ti} is the phase of the B_1^+ field for the i^{th} RF pulse. The RF pulse can be either on-resonance or off-resonance RF pulse. This phase ϕ_{syn} is a constant, and therefore assumed to be zero. ϕ_{B0} is the phase accumulation of phases which result from at least one of B_0 inhomogeneity, flow, eddy current, and chemical shift. The receive phase, ϕ_{Rec} , is a phase of the receive coil which is spatial function at the high field strength. ϕ_{syn} is a reference phase which is the sum of reference phases from transmitter radiofrequency synthesizer, receiver radiofrequency synthesizer, and digitizer. Thus, estimating the phase of B_1^+ is very important and useful in MRI.

[00103] METHODS AND RESULTS

[00104] Referring now to FIG. 2, a flow chart illustrating example operations for complex B_1^+ mapping in the image domain according to an example implementation is shown. In order to obtain complex B_1^+ mapping of a transmit coil of an MRI system with a given RF pulse type, both B_1^+ phase and B_1^+ magnitude of the transmit coil being estimated are encoded into at least one RF pulse at step 201. The RF pulse can be an excitation RF pulse or a reference RF pulse as described above. Optionally, in some implementations, the RF pulse can be a single RF pulse. In other words, a single RF pulse can have both encoded B_1 phase and encoded B_1 magnitude. Alternatively or additionally, in other implementations, the RF pulse can optionally be a plurality of RF pulses. Optionally, the RF pulses can include at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude. The RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and the RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude can be the same or different RF pulses. This disclosure contemplates that a plurality of phase and magnitude encoded RF pulses can combine with themselves (and optionally other RF pulses) to create a pulse sequence for image acquisition.

[00105] Alternatively or additionally, the B_1 phase and/or B_1 magnitude encoding can be accomplished using one or more pulse sequences. For example, in some implementations, a single pulse sequence can be used, and at least two sets complex of k-space data (e.g., at least two k-space images) can be acquired, where each set of complex k-space data has at least one RF pulse with different encoded B_1 phase and/or different encoded B_1 magnitude as compared to the other set of complex k-space data. In this implementation, each set of complex k-space data includes at least an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and at least an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude. As described above, the RF pulses having encoded B_1 phase and the RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude can be the same RF pulse or different RF pulses. In addition, the complex B_1^+ map can be estimated based on the at least two sets complex of k-space data (e.g., at least two k-space images) with different encoded B_1 phases and different encoded B_1 magnitudes. This disclosure contemplates that more than two sets of complex k-space data (e.g., 3, 4, 5, 6, etc. sets of complex k-space data) can be acquired.

[00106] In other implementations, a plurality of pulse sequences can be used, where at least one pulse sequence has at least two RF pulses having different encoded B_1 phases and at least one pulse sequence has at least two RF pulses having different encoded B_1 magnitudes. This disclosure contemplates that more than two pulse sequences (e.g., 3, 4, 5, 6, etc. pulse sequences) can be used. At least two sets complex of k-space data (e.g., at least two k-space images) including RF pulses having different encoded B_1 phases can be acquired based on one of the pulse sequences. A B_1^+ phase map can be determined from these sets of complex k-space data. In addition, at least two sets complex of k-space data (e.g., at least two k-space images) including at least two RF pulses having different encoded B_1 magnitudes can be acquired based on the other pulse sequence. A B_1^+ magnitude map can be determined from these sets of complex k-space data. In addition, the complex B_1^+ map can be estimated based on the B_1^+ phase map and the B_1^+ magnitude map. Similar to above, this disclosure contemplates that more than two sets of complex k-space data (e.g., 3, 4, 5, 6, etc. sets of complex k-space data) can be acquired.

[00107] The RF pulse type can be one of rectangle RF pulse, truncated-sinc RF pulse, sinc RF pulse, Gaussian RF pulse, adiabatic RF pulse, Hermite RF pulse, or Shinnar-Le Roux RF pulses. It should be understood that the RF pulse types above are provided only as examples and should not be limiting. This disclosure contemplates that the RF pulse can be another pulse type. Since complex B_1^+ mapping of the transmit coil strongly depends on the RF pulse type and configuration, the encoded RF pulse can be identical to, or very close to, the RF pulses being estimated, except the phase and magnitude of the encoded RF pulses. For example, the first image at the flip angle of α and the second image at the flip angle of 2α can be used to encode B_1^+ magnitude in the RF pulse for estimate B_1^+ magnitude in a double flip angle method [Insko EK et al, 1993; U.S. 7,446,526]. As used herein, “encoded B_1^+ phase and encoded B_1^+ magnitude” means that the pulse sequence which is used to estimate complex B_1^+ mapping includes variation of both B_1^+ phase and B_1^+ magnitude in the encoded RF pulse or encoded RF reference pulses. The pulse sequence is configured to excite precessing nuclear spins in magnetic resonance (MR) nuclei, and a plurality of MR signals representing nuclear MR signals arising from the precessing nuclear spins in the MR nuclei can be detected using the MRI system.

[00108] At step 202, at least two sets of k-space data (e.g., at least two k-space images) including the encoded RF pulse(s) are acquired with the MRI system. For example, at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude can be acquired. Each set of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase can have a different encoded B_1 phase. For example, each set of complex k-space data can be a complex k-space image with different encoded B_1 phase, i.e., at least two complex k-space images, each complex k-space image including an RF pulse having a different encoded B_1 phase as compared to the other complex k-space image. Additionally, each set of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude can have a different encoded B_1 magnitude. For example, each set of complex k-space data can be a complex k-space image with different encoded B_1 magnitude, i.e., at least two complex k-space images, each complex k-space image including an RF pulse having a different encoded B_1 magnitude as compared to

the other complex k-space image. One or more of (e.g., each of) the sets of complex k-space data can include full k-space or a portion of k-space. As used herein, the complex k-space data can optionally be a complex k-space image.

[00109] At step 203, a series of images with different encoded B_1^+ phases and/or B_1^+ magnitudes are obtained. For example, each of the at least two sets of complex k-space data including at least two RF pulses having different encoded B_1 phases can be transformed into a respective image (e.g., 204 in FIG. 2) in an image domain (i.e., two images, each image having a different encoded B_1 phase as compared to the other image). A B_1^+ phase map can be estimated from the respective images. In addition, each of the at least two sets of complex k-space data including at least two RF pulses having different encoded B_1 magnitudes can be transformed into a respective image (e.g., 205 in FIG. 2) in the image domain (i.e., two images, each image having a different encoded B_1 magnitude as compared to the other image). A B_1^+ magnitude map can be estimated from the respective images. This disclosure contemplates that the complex k-space data can be transformed into the image domain using an inverse Fourier transform such as an inverse 2D or 3D FFT, for example. At 206, the complex B_1^+ map of at least a portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system can be estimated based on the images. For example, the complex B_1^+ map can be determined from the B_1^+ phase map and the B_1^+ magnitude map as described above. The complex B_1^+ map can optionally be stored in a memory for later use. In some implementations, the complex B_1^+ map is estimated using the relationship between a complex MR signal and complex B_1^+ mapping which is created by Bloch Equations. That is, the magnitude and phase of transmit field B_1^+ can be estimated using Bloch Equation from these images, respectively. Furthermore, the complex B_1^+ map can be estimated using an analytic, empirical, and/or approximated solution of Bloch Equations with encoded B_1^+ phase and B_1^+ magnitude. Alternatively or additionally, in some implementations, B_1^+ magnitude can be estimated using at least one of a double flip angle method, dual pulse spin echo, actual flip angle imaging, steady state method, dual refocusing echo acquisition mode (DREAM), Bloch Siegert shift method and phase sensitive method.

[00110] As described above, the phase change in Bloch-Siegert shift method includes the contribution of each component of B_1 , including B_x , B_y and B_z . If the phase is assumed to be the contribution of B_1^+ , it is only an approximation. For surface coil or non-quadrature coil, the approximation may introduce a large error. However, it is a good approximation for quadrature birdcage coil. According to this disclosure, an off-resonant (e.g., by several kHz) RF pulse can be applied to change the effective precession field for the transverse magnetization, and encode phase of the B_1^+ into the MR signal phase. In some implementations, the RF pulse can be on-resonance excitation. Alternatively or additionally, in other implementations, the RF pulse can be off-resonance excitation.

[00111] Encoding both B_1^+ phase and B_1^+ magnitude of the transmit coil being estimated into MR RF pulse sequences and building the relationship between complex MR signal and complex B_1^+ are prerequisites for estimating complex B_1^+ mapping of transmit coils. Theoretically, the complex B_1^+ mapping can be estimated by using an analytic and/or empirical and/or approximated solution of Bloch Equations with different encoded B_1 phases and B_1 magnitudes. In practice, the complex B_1^+ mapping may be limited by encoded B_1 phase and encoded B_1 magnitude methods, as well as solution to the Bloch Equation in short time. FIGS. 3A and 3B illustrate examples for encoding different B_1 phases and different B_1 magnitudes in RF pulses. As used herein, the RF pulse α_1 can be used as “a carrier” of MR signal. The RF pulse α_1 can include at least one RF pulse or one composite RF pulse. The RF pulse α_1 can be an arbitrary RF pulse. In some implementations, it can be the same as the RF pulse being estimated for complex B_1^+ mapping to simplify the procedure for estimating B_1^+ mapping. The RF pulses β_1 and β_2 can include one or more of the following characteristics. The RF pulses β_1 and β_2 can include at least one RF pulse or one composite RF pulse. The composite RF pulse can be a series of different RF pulses. The RF pulses β_1 and β_2 can include at least one of the RF pulse which complex B_1^+ mapping will be estimated by MR images. Both B_1 phase and B_1 magnitude of the transmit coils being estimated can be simultaneously or separately encoded in at least one of the estimated RF pulse(s) in the RF pulses β_1 and β_2 . The RF pulses β_1 and β_2 can be either on-resonance or off-resonance RF pulses. The encoded B_1 phase and B_1 magnitude of the transmit coils in RF pulses β_1 can be different from those in RF pulses

β_2 for complex B_1^+ mapping being estimated. The complex B_1^+ mapping can be estimated using an analytic and/or empirical and/or approximated solution of Bloch Equations of the pulse sequences (e.g., the pulse sequences of FIGS. 3A or 3B). In FIGS. 3A and 3B, the procedure for estimating complex B_1^+ mapping is shown for two images acquired with two sequences. In practice, the complex B_1^+ mapping can be also estimated by at least two images which can be acquired with one or more sequences.

[00112] For example, to simplify the estimation of complex B_1^+ mapping, both the magnitude and the phase of RF pulse α_1 can be same as those of RF pulse β_1 . Additionally, both the pulses excite at the on-resonance frequency in FIG. 3A. In this case, B_1^+ magnitude of the transmit coils has been encoded into this sequence. In FIG. 3B, the magnitude of RF pulse α_2 is same as that of the RF pulses of both β_2 and α_1 . But the RF pulse α_2 excites at the on-resonance frequency and the RF pulse β_2 excites at the off-resonance frequency which far away from on-resonance frequency by several kHz. The B_1^+ magnitude of the transmit coils can be estimated from magnitudes of MR signal acquired by these two sequences. The B_1^+ phase of the transmit coils can be estimated from phases of MR signal acquired by these two sequences. Finally, the complex B_1^+ mapping can be also estimated. Thus, different B_1 phases and different B_1 magnitudes are encoded into the two sequences of FIGS 3A and 3B through the RF pulses β_1 and β_2 simultaneously. As a result, the number of images for estimating complex B_1^+ mapping is reduced to be minimal.

[00113] Referring now to FIG. 4, a flow chart illustrating example operations for complex B_1^+ mapping in the K-space domain according to an example implementation described herein is shown. In order to obtain complex B_1^+ mapping of a transmit coil of an MRI system with a given RF pulse type, both B_1^+ phase and B_1^+ magnitude of the transmit coil being estimated are encoded into at least one RF pulse at step 401. Optionally, in some implementations, the RF pulse can be a single RF pulse. In other words, a single RF pulse can have both encoded B_1 phase and encoded B_1 magnitude. Alternatively or additionally, in other implementations, the RF pulse can optionally be a plurality of RF pulses. Optionally, the RF pulses can include at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude. The RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and the RF pulse having

encoded B_1 magnitude can be the same or different RF pulses. This disclosure contemplates that a plurality of phase and magnitude encoded RF pulses can combine with themselves (and optionally other RF pulses) to create a pulse sequence for image acquisition. Optionally, as described above, a plurality of pulse sequences can be used. As described above, the pulse sequence is configured to excite precessing nuclear spins in magnetic resonance (MR) nuclei, and a plurality of MR signals representing nuclear MR signals arising from the precessing nuclear spins in the MR nuclei can be detected using the MRI system.

[00114] At step 402, a set of k-space data including the encoded RF pulse is acquired with the MRI system. For example, at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude can be acquired. As discussed above, each set of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase can have a different encoded B_1 phase. Additionally, each set of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude can have a different encoded B_1 magnitude. The sets of complex k-space data can include full k-space or a portion of k-space. As used herein, the complex k-space data can optionally be a complex k-space image. K-space data from multiple receive coils can be lumped together to estimate the complex B_1^+ mapping as shown by 403 in FIG. 4. At step 404, a k-space domain convolution kernel between k-space of the acquired sets of complex k-space data can be estimated. For example, the k-space domain convolution kernel can be estimated using a fitting algorithm. The complex B_1^+ map can be estimated from the k-space domain convolution kernel. As described herein, a k-space approach to estimate the complex B_1^+ map in double flip-angle method according to one implementation is provided, which eliminates the pixel-wise division completely. A k-space convolution kernel $c(k)$ between two k-space of image A and B: $F(A) = F(B) \otimes c(k)$ can be estimated. Convolution kernel $c(k)$ can be calculated using k-space data fitting method, for example, the same way as the kernel estimation in GRAPPA/SPIRiT algorithm. Since transmission field is independent of the receive sensitivity, it is possible to use a single channel in a phased-array coil to estimate the transmission field. Every k-space point of a single channel contributes an independent

linear equation. If all channels of a phase-array receive coil are lumped together as shown by 403 in FIG. 4, a better estimation can be achieved because there are more equations. According to convolution theorem, the convolution kernel is the Fourier transform of the pixel-wise division between two images, *i.e.*: the complex B_1^+ map is proportional to $\arccos(F^{-1}(c(k)^*)/2)$.

[00115] At step 405, the complex B_1^+ map can be transformed into an image domain.

This disclosure contemplates that the complex k-space data can be transformed into the image domain using an inverse Fourier transform such as an inverse 2D or 3D FFT, for example. Then, at step 406, the complex B_1^+ map in the image domain is obtained.

[00116] Alternatively or additionally, the MRI system described herein can include a plurality of RF transmit channels or elements. The method can optionally include, using the complex B_1^+ map of each of the RF transmit channels or elements, performing RF shimming or tailored RF shimming.

[00117] Alternatively or additionally, the methods described herein (e.g., the methods described with regard to FIG. 2 and/or FIG. 4) can optionally include, using the complex B_1^+ map, improving the precision of quantitative MRI. For example, the quantitative MRI can include, but is not limited to, T_1 mapping, T_2 imaging, water/fat fraction, molecule concentration for magnetic resonance spectroscopy (MRS), and/or magnetic resonance spectroscopy imaging (MRSI).

[00118] Alternatively or additionally, the methods described herein (e.g., the methods described with regard to FIG. 2 and/or FIG. 4) can optionally include, using the complex B_1^+ map, generating a new MRI contrast at different frequencies. For example, the new MRI contrast can include, but is not limited to, conductivity or permittivity contrast.

[00119] Alternatively or additionally, the methods described herein (e.g., the methods described with regard to FIG. 2 and/or FIG. 4) can optionally include, using the complex B_1^+ map, designing or evaluating the at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system.

[00120] Alternatively or additionally, the methods described herein (e.g., the methods described with regard to FIG. 2 and/or FIG. 4) can optionally include, using the complex B_1^+ map, performing quality control of the at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system.

[00121] Alternatively or additionally, the at least two complex images described herein can have different contrasts.

[00122] Alternatively or additionally, the at least two complex images described herein can be acquired using different MRI system configurations. For example, the different MRI system configurations include, but are not limited to, different coil elements of a receive coil, different receive coils, and/or different gradient encoding strategies.

[00123] Alternatively or additionally, the at least two complex images described herein can be acquired using different imaging parameters. For example, the imaging parameters can include, but are not limited to, repetition time (TR), echo time (TE), flip angle, inversion recovery time, and/or receiver bandwidth.

[00124] Alternatively or additionally, the complex B_1^+ map can be estimated for a global or regional region of interest (ROI).

[00125] Alternatively or additionally, the methods described herein (e.g., the methods described with regard to FIG. 2 and/or FIG. 4) can optionally include displaying the complex B_1^+ map for visual observation by a user of the MRI system.

[00126] Alternatively or additionally, the methods described herein (e.g., the methods described with regard to FIG. 2 and/or FIG. 4) can optionally include, using the complex B_1^+ map, performing image compensation to a diagnostic image acquired by the MRI system.

[00127] Alternatively or additionally, the methods described herein (e.g., the methods described with regard to FIG. 2 and/or FIG. 4) can optionally include, using the complex B_1^+ map, determining a parameter controlling RF transmission of the MRI system.

[00128] Alternatively or additionally, the methods described herein (e.g., the methods described with regard to FIG. 2 and/or FIG. 4) can optionally include, using the complex B_1^+ map, improving the precision of quantitative MRI. For example, the quantitative MRI can include, but is not limited to, T_1 mapping, T_2 imaging, water/fat fraction, molecule concentration for magnetic resonance spectroscopy (MRS), and/or magnetic resonance spectroscopy imaging (MRSI).

[00129] Alternatively or additionally, the methods described herein (e.g., the methods described with regard to FIG. 2 and/or FIG. 4) can optionally include, using the complex B_1^+ map, generating a new MRI contrast at different frequencies. For example, the new MRI contrast can include, but is not limited to, conductivity or permittivity contrast.

[00130] Alternatively or additionally, the methods described herein (e.g., the methods described with regard to FIG. 2 and/or FIG. 4) can optionally include, using the complex B_1^+ map, designing or evaluating the at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system.

[00131] Alternatively or additionally, the methods described herein (e.g., the methods described with regard to FIG. 2 and/or FIG. 4) can optionally include, using the complex B_1^+ map, performing quality control of the at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system.

[00132] Alternatively or additionally, parallel transmit techniques can optionally be derived from an amplitude and a phase of the complex B_1^+ of the MRI system.

[00133] Alternatively or additionally, the methods described herein (e.g., the methods described with regard to FIG. 2 and/or FIG. 4) can optionally include, using the complex B_1^+ , correcting MR signal inhomogeneity caused by transmit coils of the MRI system. Conventional B_1^+ mapping methods are just used for mapping the magnitude of excitation RF pulse in image domain. The systems and methods described herein: (1) can estimate B_1^+ mapping from both image domain and k-space domain; (2) can extend B_1^+ mapping from excitation RF pulse to any RF pulse, including excitation RF pulse, refocusing RF pulse and magnetization preparation RF pulse; (3) can estimate B_1^+ mapping from real (magnitude) to complex (including magnitude and phase).

[00134] Alternatively or additionally, the complex B_1^+ can be applied to improve performance of simultaneous multi-slice imaging. Simultaneous multi-slice (SMS) imaging using parallel image reconstruction is a promising imaging technique because an acceleration factor equal to the number of simultaneously excited slices can be reached. Therefore, SMS imaging significantly decreases the amount of time for acquiring image data. Comparing to traditional parallel imaging techniques, SMS imaging has the following advantages: (1) it is applicable to imaging pulse

sequences that sample multiple lines of k-space following each RF excitation; and (2) it allows more reliable separation of aliased pixels.

[00135] Even though multiple slices are excited using SMS imaging, only one image is acquired, and all slices overlap on each other. Specific data acquisition and corresponding reconstruction strategies are employed to resolve each individual image. Three techniques are used for SMS spatial encoding: RF phase encoding, gradient phase encoding, and coil encoding. For multiband excitations, i.e., multiple slice excitation, shifts between simultaneously excited slices can be accomplished by applying individual phase cycling patterns to each frequency band. The number of different multiband RF pulses that are required depend on the number of simultaneous slices. Simultaneously excited slices can also be resolved by the gradient phase encoding along the slice direction. The third technique (i.e., receiver coil encoding) is also known as parallel MRI and is an integral part of modern clinical MRI. Receiver sensitivity phase encoding can be used to achieve a substantial acceleration, compared with receiver sensitivity magnitude encoding only. In practice, modern SMS acquisitions use a combination of coil encoding with either RF encoding or gradient encoding to resolve the slice direction. The complex B_1^+ map described herein can be used to achieve a substantial acceleration in SMS acquisitions. As a result, the performance of SMS acquisitions, including acceleration factors and image quality, can be greatly improved using the complex B_1^+ map.

[00136] FIGS. 5 and 6 illustrate comparisons of the B_1^+ mapping results in a phantom and *in vivo* human brain, respectively, using a B_1^+ mapping technique described herein (left-hand side of FIGS. 5 and 6) and using a conventional double flip angle method (right-hand side of FIGS. 5 and 6). As shown in FIGS. 5 and 6, the conventional double flip angle method does not have the estimated phase of the B_1^+ mapping. There are many factors influencing the accuracy or practical usefulness of B_1^+ mapping techniques, including coil configuration, a subject or object, and/or RF pulse configuration (shape, duration, etc.). Accurate B_1^+ mapping should be estimated in real time for subject and RF pulse

configuration, *e.g.*, most of conventional B_1^+ mapping methods, such as double flip angle method require image space pixel-wise division. When SNR is low, the common coil combine algorithm introduces signal bias as well as complex noise behavior due to small pixel value appear as denominators. Therefore, the pixel-wise division based B_1^+ map may be problematic. As described herein, a method utilizing k-space data to estimate B_1^+ map is described instead. According to convolution theorem, the image space pixel-wise multiply/division can be calculated in k-space as convolution. The method described herein utilizes k-space convolution to substitute image space pixel-wise division. Therefore, it does not have instabilities caused by small denominators. In addition, it avoids coil combine completely because it uses k-space data directly. Therefore, the method described herein easily combines with various sequences, k-space trajectories, and parallel imaging techniques to improve temporal-spatial resolution, accuracy and precision of B_1^+ maps.

[00137] Since the convolution kernel has finite support in k-space, *i.e.*, the kernel size may be smaller than the k-space size, there is an intrinsic low-pass filtering effect in the method described herein. Comparing to the conventional methods, the method described herein finds the optimal solution at a given filter bandwidth in the least-square sense. Therefore, the method described herein is more robust when the SNR is low. It also avoids the bias introduced by coil combine which is a nonlinear process when the SNR is low.

[00138] Although the subject matter has been described in language specific to structural features and/or methodological acts, it is to be understood that the subject matter defined in the appended claims is not necessarily limited to the specific features or acts described above. Rather, the specific features and acts described above are disclosed as example forms of implementing the claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED:

1. A method for determining spatial distribution of magnitude and phase of radio frequency (RF) transmit field B_1^+ in a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) system, comprising:
 - applying at least one pulse sequence configured to excite precessing nuclear spins in magnetic resonance (MR) nuclei, the at least one pulse sequence comprising at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and encoded B_1 magnitude;
 - detecting a plurality of MR signals representing nuclear MR signals arising from the precessing nuclear spins in the MR nuclei;
 - acquiring at least two sets of complex k-space data from the MR signals, the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase;
 - acquiring at least two sets of complex k-space data from the MR signals, the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude; and
 - estimating a complex B_1^+ map of at least a portion of a transmit coil of the MRI system using the acquired sets of complex k-space data.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein applying at least one pulse sequence further comprises applying a plurality of pulse sequences.
3. The method of any of claims 1 or 2, wherein the at least one RF pulse comprise a single RF pulse.
4. The method of any of claims 1 or 2, wherein the at least one RF pulse comprises a plurality of RF pulses.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein the RF pulses include at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude.
6. The method of any of claims 1-5, wherein each of the acquired sets of complex k-space data comprises full k-space or a portion of k-space.
7. The method of any of claims 1-6, wherein the at least one RF pulse comprises on-resonance excitation.

8. The method of any of claims 1-6, wherein the at least one RF pulse comprises off-resonance excitation.

9. The method of any of claims 1-8, wherein the at least one RF pulse comprises a rectangle RF pulse, a truncated-sinc RF pulse, a sinc RF pulse, a Gaussian RF pulse, an adiabatic RF pulse, a Hermite RF pulse, or a Shinnar-Le Roux RF pulse.

10. The method of any of claims 1-9, wherein the complex B_1^+ map is estimated using data in a k-space domain.

11. The method of any of claims 1-10, further comprising:
transforming each of the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase into a respective image in an image domain; and
transforming each of the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude into a respective image in the image domain, wherein the complex B_1^+ map of at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system is estimated based on the respective images.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein estimating the complex B_1^+ map of at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system based on the respective images further comprises using at least one a double flip angle method, a dual pulse spin echo method, an actual flip angle imaging method, a steady state method, a dual refocusing echo acquisition mode (DREAM) method, a Bloch Siegert shift method, or a phase sensitive method.

13. The method of claim 11, wherein estimating the complex B_1^+ map of at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system based on the respective images further comprises estimating the complex B_1^+ map based on a relationship between a complex MR signal of the respective images and the complex B_1^+ map.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the complex B_1^+ map is estimated using an analytic, empirical, or approximated solution of Bloch equations.

15. The method of any of claims 1-10, wherein estimating the complex B_1^+ map of at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system further comprises estimating a k-space domain convolution kernel between k-space of the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the k-space domain convolution kernel is estimated using a fitting algorithm.

17. The method of any of claim 15 or 16, further comprising transforming the complex B_1^+ map into an image domain.

18. The method of any of claims 1-17, wherein the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase or the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude data are acquired using at least one of different MRI system configurations.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein the different MRI system configurations include at least one of different coil elements of a receive coil, different receive coils, or different gradient encoding strategies.

20. The method of any of claims 1-19, further comprising using the complex B_1^+ map as a refocusing RF pulse, a selective RF pulse, or a magnetization preparation RF pulse.

21. The method of any of claims 1-20, wherein the MRI system comprises a plurality of RF transmit channels or elements, and wherein the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase or the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude are acquired using an acquisition pulse sequence that is repeated a plurality of times using different ones or combinations of the RF transmit channels or elements for respectively corresponding different acquisition pulse sequences.

22. The method of any of claims 1-21, further comprising applying the complex B_1^+ map to improve performance of simultaneous multi-slice excitation.

23. The method of any of claims 1-22, further comprising storing the complex B_1^+ map in a memory.

24. A magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) system for determining spatial distribution of magnitude and phase of radio frequency (RF) transmit field B_1^+ , comprising:

a transmitting and receiving unit comprising at least one RF coil, wherein the transmitting and receiving unit is configured to:

apply at least one pulse sequence using the at least one RF coil, the at least one pulse sequence being configured to excite precessing nuclear spins in magnetic resonance (MR) nuclei, the at least one pulse sequence comprising at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and encoded B_1 magnitude, and

detect a plurality of MR signals using the at least one RF coil, the MR signals representing nuclear MR signals arising from the precessing nuclear spins in the MR nuclei; and
an MRI system controller operably coupled with the transmitting and receiving unit, the MRI system controller comprising a processor and a memory, the memory having computer-executable instructions stored thereon that, when executed by the processor, cause the processor to:

acquire at least two sets of complex k-space data from the MR signals, the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase,

acquire at least two sets of complex k-space data from the MR signals, the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude, and

estimate a complex B_1^+ map of at least a portion of a transmit coil of the MRI system using the acquired sets of complex k-space data.

25. The MRI system of claim 24, wherein applying at least one pulse sequence further comprises applying a plurality of pulse sequences.

26. The MRI system of any of claims 24 or 25, wherein the at least one RF pulse comprise a single RF pulse.

27. The MRI system of any of claims 24 or 25, wherein the at least one RF pulse comprises a plurality of RF pulses.

28. The MRI system of claim 27, wherein the RF pulses include at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase and at least one RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude.

29. The MRI system of any of claims 24-28, wherein each of the acquired sets of complex k-space data comprises full k-space or a portion of k-space.

30. The MRI system of any of claims 24-29, wherein the at least one RF pulse comprises on-resonance excitation.

31. The MRI system of any of claims 24-29, wherein the at least one RF pulse comprises off-resonance excitation.

32. The MRI system of any of claims 24-31, wherein the at least one RF pulse comprises a rectangle RF pulse, a truncated-sinc RF pulse, a sinc RF pulse, a Gaussian RF pulse, an adiabatic RF pulse, a Hermite RF pulse, or a Shinnar-Le Roux RF pulse.

33. The MRI system of any of claims 24-32, wherein the complex B_1^+ map is estimated using data in a k-space domain.

34. The MRI system of any of claims 24-33, wherein the memory has further computer-executable instructions stored thereon that, when executed by the processor, cause the processor to:

transform each of the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase into a respective image in an image domain; and

transform each of the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude into a respective image in the image domain, wherein the complex B_1^+ map of at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system is estimated based on the respective images.

35. The MRI system of claim 34, wherein estimating the complex B_1^+ map of at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system based on the respective images further comprises using at least one a double flip angle method, a dual pulse spin echo method, an actual flip angle imaging method, a steady state method, a dual refocusing echo acquisition mode (DREAM) method, a Bloch Siegert shift method, or a phase sensitive method.

36. The MRI system of claim 34, wherein estimating the complex B_1^+ map of at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system based on the respective images further comprises estimating the complex B_1^+ map based on a relationship between a complex MR signal of the respective images and the complex B_1^+ map.

37. The MRI system of claim 36, wherein the complex B_1^+ map is estimated using an analytic, empirical, or approximated solution of Bloch equations.

38. The MRI system of any of claims 24-33, wherein estimating the complex B_1^+ map of at least the portion of the transmit coil of the MRI system further comprises estimating a k-space domain convolution kernel between k-space of the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF

pulse having encoded B_1 phase and the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude.

39. The MRI system of claim 38, wherein the k-space domain convolution kernel is estimated using a fitting algorithm.

40. The MRI system of any of claims 38 or 39, wherein the memory has further computer-executable instructions stored thereon that, when executed by the processor, cause the processor to transform the complex B_1^+ map into an image domain.

41. The MRI system of any of claims 24-40, wherein the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase or the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude data are acquired using at least one of different MRI system configurations.

42. The MRI system of claim 41, wherein the different MRI system configurations include at least one of different coil elements of a receive coil, different receive coils, or different gradient encoding strategies.

43. The MRI system of any of claims 24-42, wherein the MRI system further comprises a plurality of RF transmit channels or elements, and wherein the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase or the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude are acquired using an acquisition pulse sequence that is repeated a plurality of times using different ones or combinations of the RF transmit channels or elements for respectively corresponding different acquisition pulse sequences.

44. The MRI system of any of claims 24-43, wherein the memory has further computer-executable instructions stored thereon that, when executed by the processor, cause the processor to store the complex B_1^+ map.

45. A non-transitory computer-readable recording medium having computer-executable instructions stored thereon for determining spatial distribution of magnitude and phase of radio frequency (RF) transmit field B_1^+ that, when executed by a processor, cause the processor to:

receive a plurality of magnetic resonance (MR) signals representing nuclear MR signals arising from precessing nuclear spins in MR nuclei;

acquire at least two sets of complex k-space data from the MR signals, the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 phase;

acquire at least two sets of complex k-space data from the MR signals, the at least two sets of complex k-space data including an RF pulse having encoded B_1 magnitude; and

estimate a complex B_1^+ map of at least a portion of a transmit coil of the MRI system using the acquired sets of complex k-space data.

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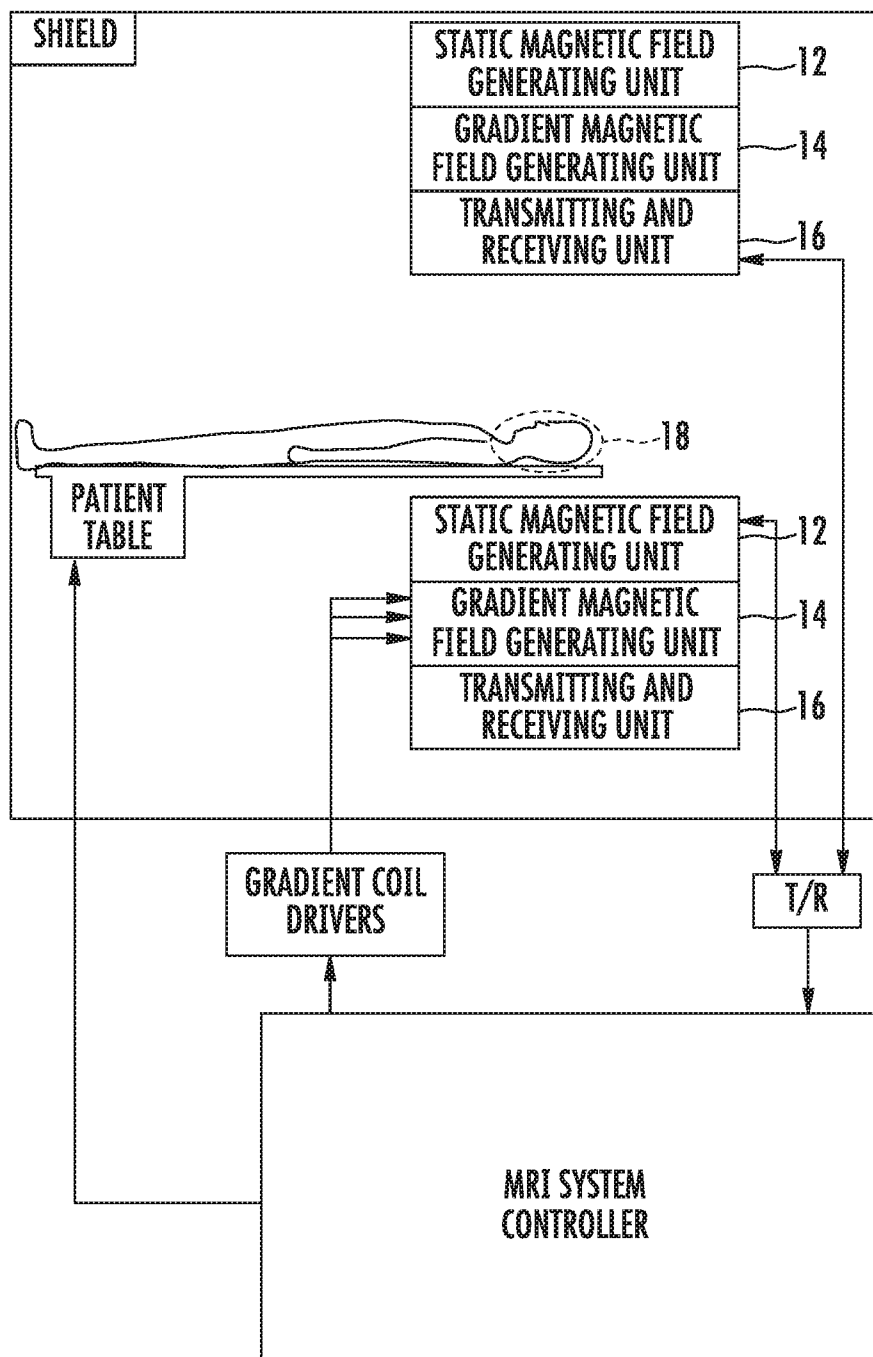


FIG. 1

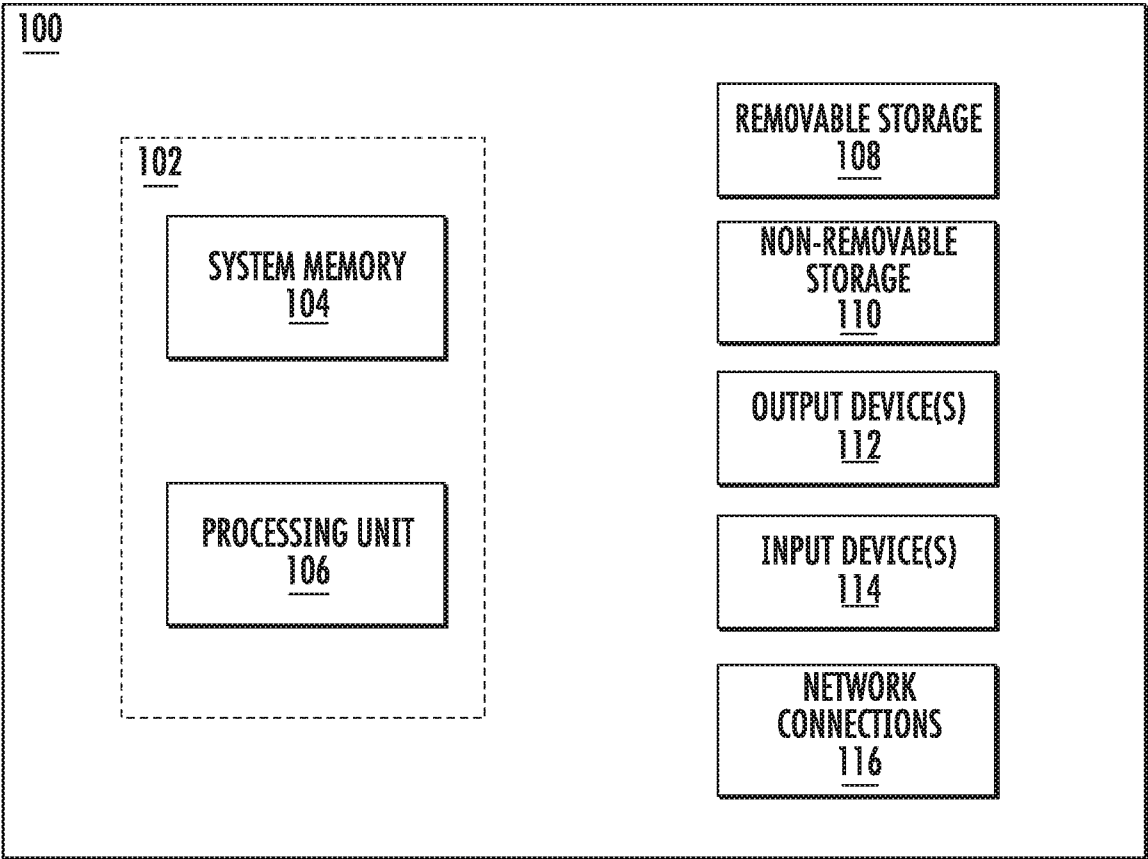


FIG. 1A

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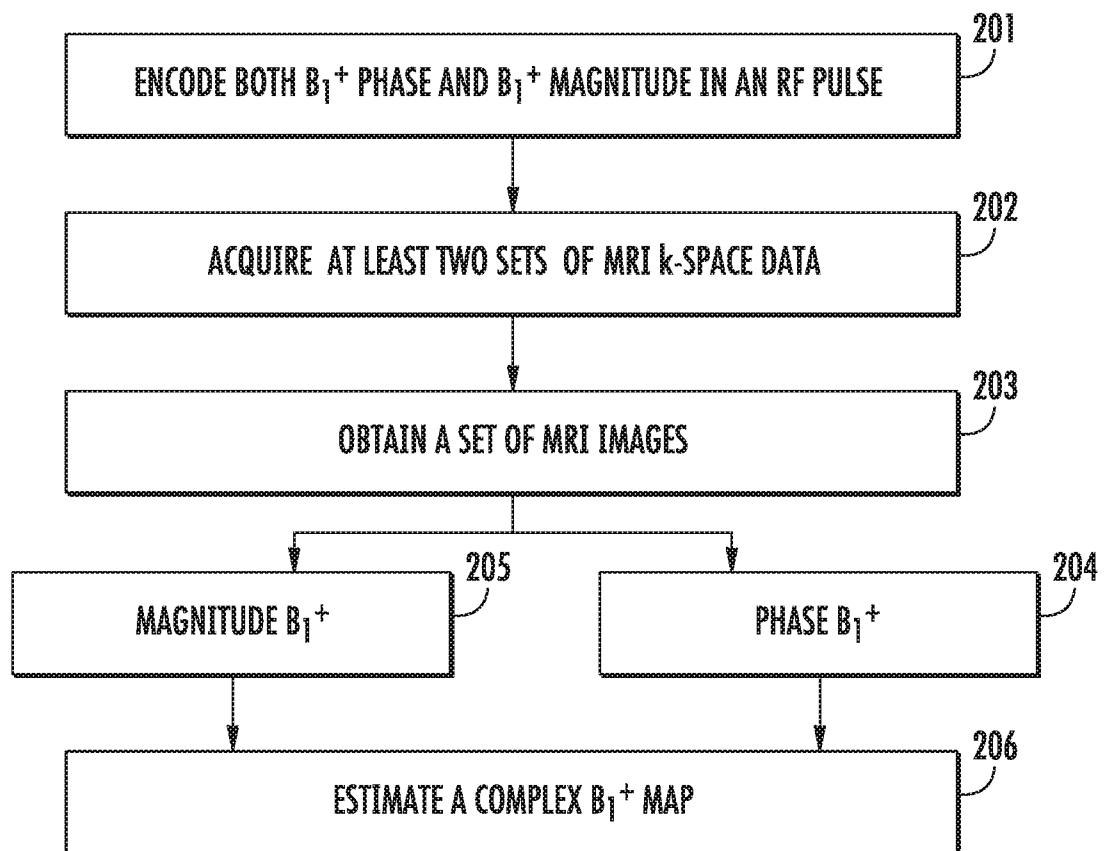


FIG. 2

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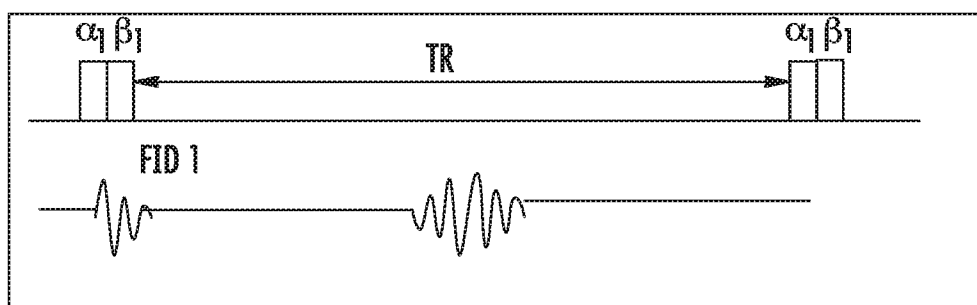


FIG. 3A

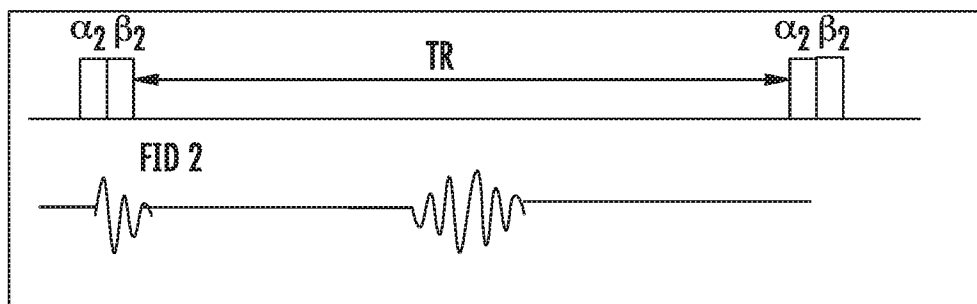


FIG. 3B

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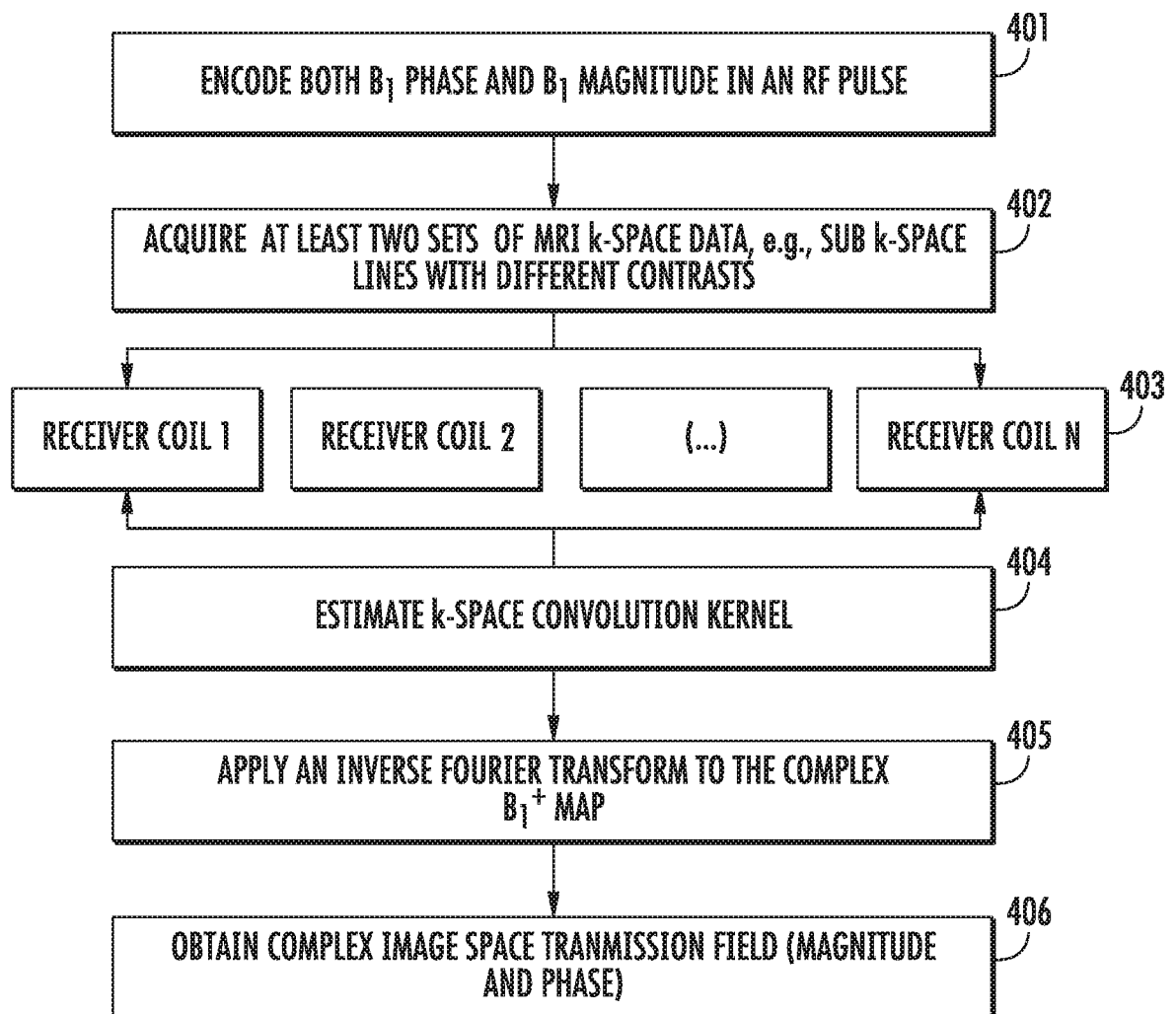


FIG. 4

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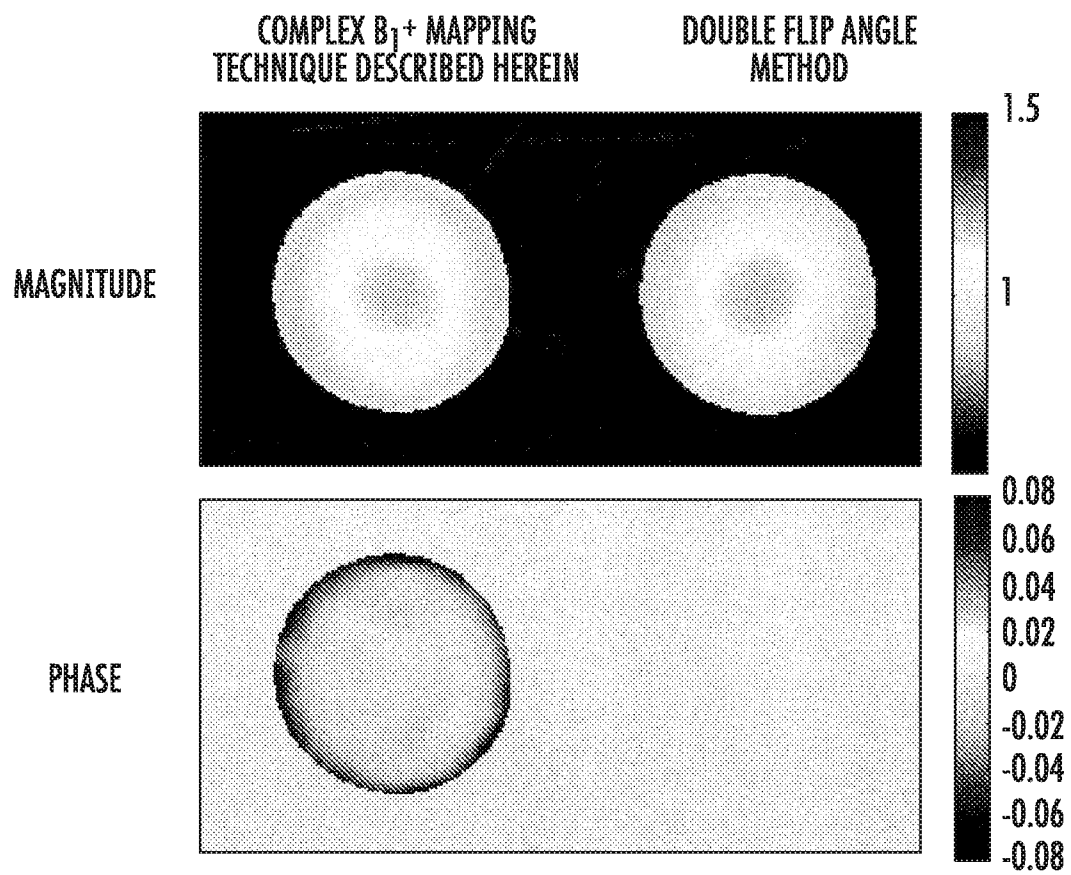


FIG. 5

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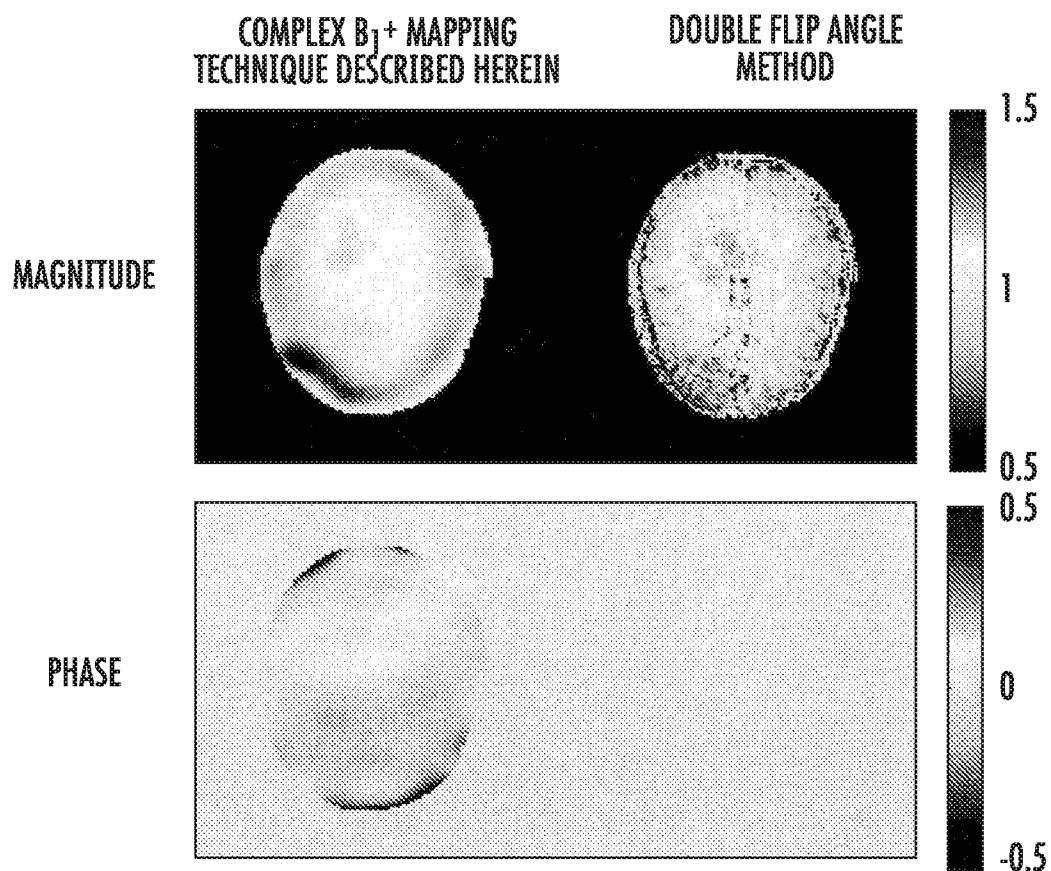


FIG. 6

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US2016/032671

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(8) - G01R 33/48; G01R 33/563; G01V 3/00; G06K 9/00 (2016.01)

CPC - G01R 33/48; G01R 33/563; G01V 3/00; G06K 9/00 (2016.05)

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC - G01R 33/48; G01R 33/563; G01V 3/00; G06K 9/00

CPC - G01R 33/48; G01R 33/563; G01V 3/00; G06K 9/00

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

USPC - 324/300; 324/309; 324/310; 382/131 (keyword delimited)

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

Orbit, Google Patents, Google Scholar, Google

Search terms used: MRI, encode, phase, magnitude, b1, map

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 2013/0134972 A1 (SCHULTE et al) 30 May 2013 (30.05.2013) entire document	1-5, 24-28, 45
Y	US 2010/0239151 A1 (DANNELS et al) 23 September 2010 (23.09.2010) entire document	1-5, 24-28, 45
A	US 2010/0286500 A1 (RUHM) 11 November 2010 (11.11.2010) entire document	1-5, 24-28, 45
A	US 2010/0253336 A1 (SCHNEIDER et al) 07 October 2010 (07.10.2010) entire document	1-5, 24-28, 45

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

20 July 2016

Date of mailing of the international search report

18 AUG 2016

Name and mailing address of the ISA/

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PCT OSP: 571-272-7774

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US2016/032671

Box No. II Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This international search report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:
2. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:
3. ☒ Claims Nos.: 6-23, 29-44
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box No. III Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 3 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

1. ☐ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.
2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying additional fees, this Authority did not invite payment of additional fees.
3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:
4. ☐ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

Remark on Protest

- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest and, where applicable, the payment of a protest fee.
- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest but the applicable protest fee was not paid within the time limit specified in the invitation.
- ☐ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.