Bol. Soc. Paran. Mat.
©SPM – E-ISSN-2175-1188
SPM: www.spm.uem.br/bspm

(3s.) **v. 2026 (44) 11** : 1–13.
ISSN-0037-8712
doi:10.5269/bspm.80449

Fractional-Order Dynamic Modelling and Robust Control of Nonlinear Robotic Manipulators: A Memory-Driven Framework with FOPID and FO-SMC

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ABSTRACT: This paper develops a comprehensive fractional-order dynamic modelling and control framework for nonlinear robotic manipulators by integrating Caputo fractional derivatives to capture memory-dependent effects such as viscoelasticity, structural damping, and hysteresis—phenomena that classical integer-order models cannot represent accurately. Two fractional-order controllers, a fractional-order PID (FOPID) and a fractional-order sliding-mode controller (FO-SMC), are designed to exploit the long-term memory embedded in the system dynamics, thereby enhancing tracking accuracy, robustness, and transient behavior.

Keywords: Fractional calculus, Caputo derivative, memory-dependent dynamics, fractional-order PID, fractional sliding-mode control, robotic manipulators, Lyapunov stability, viscoelastic damping.

Contents

2020 *Mathematics Subject Classification:* 35B40, 35L70.
Submitted November 28, 2025. Published March 13, 2026

1. Introduction

Robotic manipulators play a crucial role in modern automation, precision manufacturing, surgical robotics, and service applications [2,3]. Achieving high-performance motion control under nonlinearities, coupled interactions, parameter uncertainties, external disturbances, and actuator limitations remains a central challenge in robotics [4,5]. Classical dynamic modelling approaches—primarily based on integer-order differential equations derived from Euler–Lagrange or Newton–Euler formulations—provide accurate representations for many mechanical systems but fail to capture *memory-dependent* phenomena such as viscoelastic joint behavior, frictional hysteresis, structural damping, and actuator memory [1,7]. These effects are well documented in physical robotic systems and significantly influence trajectory tracking, robustness, and long-term performance [3].

Fractional calculus provides a powerful mathematical framework for modelling such systems, as it naturally describes long-range temporal dependence and hereditary properties through non-integer order derivatives [2]. Caputo fractional derivatives, in particular, are widely used in physical modelling due to their compatibility with standard initial conditions and strong interpretability [1,4]. Although numerous studies have explored fractional-order control designs—especially fractional-order PID (FOPID) and fractional-order sliding-mode control (FO-SMC)—most of these works apply fractional calculus only within the controller, while the system dynamics remain classical integer-order models [5,6]. This mismatch limits the practical benefits of fractional calculus, as the underlying physical dynamics of robots inherently exhibit memory and nonlocal behavior.

To address this gap, the present work develops a comprehensive **fractional-order dynamic modelling and control framework** for nonlinear robotic manipulators. Unlike approaches that fractionalize only the controller, the proposed methodology embeds fractional-order dynamics directly into the manipulator model using Caputo derivatives. This formulation captures viscoelastic damping, hysteresis, and actuator memory, enabling the controller to exploit realistic physical behavior and system memory [1,2]. Based on this model, two robust fractional controllers—**FOPID** and **FO-SMC**—are designed to enhance tracking accuracy, disturbance rejection, and transient performance [3,4].

The primary contributions of this study are as follows:

1. **A fractional-order nonlinear dynamic model** for robotic manipulators, capturing memory-dependent effects including viscoelasticity, damping, and actuator hysteresis [1,2,4].
2. **Design of two fractional-order controllers—FOPID and FO-SMC**— tailored to fractional dynamics and exploiting system memory to improve transient response and robustness [3,5].
3. **Stability guarantees** using fractional Lyapunov theory, establishing rigorous convergence conditions for the closed-loop system under uncertainties and disturbances [1,5].
4. **Extensive simulation validation** on a 2-DOF robotic manipulator, demonstrating that FOPID and FO-SMC outperform classical PID and SMC by reducing steady-state error, overshoot, chattering, and improving convergence speed and control smoothness [3,7].

By integrating fractional-order modelling and control into a unified memory-driven framework, this work demonstrates that fractional calculus is not merely an alternative approach but an essential tool for accurately representing and controlling robotic systems with inherent nonlocal dynamics. The results highlight the significant performance improvements possible through fractional-order designs, motivating further research toward real-world implementation on physical robotic platforms [2,5].

2. Mathematical Preliminaries

Fractional calculus extends the concepts of differentiation and integration to non-integer (fractional) orders, providing a powerful mathematical framework for systems exhibiting memory and hereditary properties [2,1]. These features are particularly relevant in robotic manipulators, where viscoelastic joints, structural damping, actuator hysteresis, and friction inherently depend on past states of the system [4,5]. This section presents the essential definitions and properties required for the fractional-order dynamic modelling and control framework developed in this paper.

2.1. Caputo Fractional Derivative

Let $f(t)$ be a sufficiently smooth function on the interval $[0, T]$. The Caputo fractional derivative of order $0 < \alpha < 1$ is defined as [1,2]:

$$^{C}D_t^{\alpha} f(t) = \frac{1}{\Gamma(1-\alpha)} \int_0^t \frac{f'(\tau)}{(t-\tau)^{\alpha}} \, d\tau, \tag{2.1}$$

where $\Gamma(\cdot)$ denotes the Gamma function. The Caputo definition is widely used in physical modelling because it allows classical integer-order initial conditions $f(0)$ and $f'(0)$ to be imposed directly [4].

2.2. Key Properties

Important properties of the Caputo derivative used throughout this work include:

- **Linearity:**
$$^{C}D_t^{\alpha}(af(t) + bg(t)) = a\,^{C}D_t^{\alpha} f(t) + b\,^{C}D_t^{\alpha} g(t).$$

- **Derivative of a constant:**
$$^{C}D_t^{\alpha} c = 0, \quad c \in \mathbb{R}.$$

- **Power function rule:**
$$^{C}D_t^{\alpha} t^k = \frac{\Gamma(k+1)}{\Gamma(k+1-\alpha)} t^{k-\alpha}, \qquad k > -1. \tag{2.2}$$

These properties reflect the nonlocal nature of fractional derivatives, where the value of $^{C}D_t^{\alpha} f(t)$ depends on the entire past history of $f(\tau)$ for $0 \le \tau \le t$, unlike integer-order derivatives that depend only on the instantaneous state [1,5].

2.3. Fractional Integral

The fractional integral of order $\alpha > 0$ for a continuous function $f(t)$ is defined as [2]:

$$I_t^{\alpha} f(t) = \frac{1}{\Gamma(\alpha)} \int_0^t (t-\tau)^{\alpha-1} f(\tau) \, d\tau. \tag{2.3}$$

This operator generalizes the classical Riemann integral and plays a key role in modelling systems with accumulating memory effects such as viscoelastic damping and hysteresis [4].

2.4. Classical Manipulator Dynamics

For comparison with the fractional-order model developed in the next section, the classical Euler–Lagrange dynamics of an n-DOF robotic manipulator are given by [3,7]:

$$M(q)\ddot{q} + C(q, \dot{q})\dot{q} + G(q) + F(\dot{q}) = \tau, \tag{2.4}$$

where $q \in \mathbb{R}^n$ is the joint vector, $M(q)$ is the positive definite inertia matrix, $C(q, \dot{q})$ represents Coriolis and centrifugal effects, $G(q)$ is the gravity vector, $F(\dot{q})$ is the joint friction/damping, and τ is the control input.

While this formulation accurately captures essential rigid-body dynamics, it lacks the ability to model memory-dependent effects such as viscoelasticity and hysteresis. Fractional derivatives overcome this limitation by embedding system memory directly into the dynamic equations [1,2]. The next section introduces the fractional-order dynamic model that forms the foundation of the proposed control framework.

3. Fractional-Order Dynamic Model of Robotic Manipulators

Fractional-order modelling provides an effective framework for capturing the memory-dependent behavior of robotic manipulators, including viscoelastic joint properties, hysteresis effects, and structural damping that cannot be represented by classical integer-order models [1,2]. Unlike traditional approaches in which fractional calculus is applied only at the controller level, this study embeds fractional-order dynamics directly into the robot model, providing a more realistic and physically consistent description of manipulator behavior [4,5]. This section develops the fractional Euler–Lagrange equations and the resulting dynamic model.

3.1. Fractional Euler–Lagrange Equation

Let $q = [q_1, q_2, \ldots, q_n]^T$ denote the generalized joint coordinates of an n-DOF robotic manipulator. Using Caputo fractional derivatives, the fractional Euler–Lagrange equation of order $0 < \alpha < 1$ is given by [1,2]:

$$ {}^{C}D_t^{\alpha}\left(\frac{\partial L}{\partial\, {}^{C}D_t^{\alpha} q_i}\right) - \frac{\partial L}{\partial q_i} + F_i({}^{C}D_t^{\alpha-1} q_i) = \tau_i, \qquad i = 1, \ldots, n, \tag{3.1} $$

where $L = T - V$ is the Lagrangian, T is the kinetic energy, V is the potential energy, $F_i(\cdot)$ represents fractional damping or hysteresis forces, and τ_i is the control torque applied to joint i.

Equation (3.1) naturally incorporates the system's past states via the Caputo derivative, reflecting the inherent memory of real robotic joints [5,6].

3.2. Fractional-Order Manipulator Dynamics

Using the Lagrangian formulation, the dynamics of an n-DOF fractional-order robotic manipulator can be compactly written as

$$ M(q)\, {}^{C}D_t^{\alpha} q + C\big(q, {}^{C}D_t^{\alpha-1} q\big)\, {}^{C}D_t^{\alpha-1} q + G(q) + F\big({}^{C}D_t^{\alpha-1} q\big) = \tau, \tag{3.2} $$

where:

- $M(q)$ is the inertia matrix,
- $C(q, {}^{C}D_t^{\alpha-1} q)$ represents generalized Coriolis and centrifugal terms,
- $G(q)$ is the gravitational torque vector,
- $F({}^{C}D_t^{\alpha-1} q)$ models fractional-order damping and hysteresis,
- τ is the control input.

Compared to the classical model (2.4), the fractional-order model (3.2) explicitly incorporates memory effects through the fractional velocities ${}^{C}D_t^{\alpha-1} q$ and fractional accelerations ${}^{C}D_t^{\alpha} q$.

3.3. Fractional Damping and Viscoelastic Effects

Viscoelasticity and structural damping in robotic joints can be modeled using a fractional damping term of the form [1,4]:

$$ F\big({}^{C}D_t^{\alpha-1} q\big) = B\, {}^{C}D_t^{\beta} q, \qquad 0 < \beta < 1, \tag{3.3} $$

where B is a positive damping coefficient and β is the fractional order. This model generalizes classical viscous damping and provides a better representation of real joint behavior when the damping force depends not only on the instantaneous velocity but also on the history of motion [6,5].

3.4. Model Interpretation and Advantages

The fractional-order model (3.2) offers several important advantages:

1. **Memory representation:** Fractional derivatives introduce natural memory effects, making the model capable of describing viscoelasticity, hysteresis, and structural damping without complex additional terms.

2. **Greater modelling accuracy:** Empirical studies show that fractional-order models more accurately represent physical robotic behavior than classical integer-order models [2,3].

3. **Consistency with fractional controllers:** Embedding fractional dynamics ensures consistency between the plant and the control laws (FOPID and FO-SMC), maximizing the benefits of fractional-order control.

4. **Improved robustness:** Fractional dynamics inherently filter high-frequency disturbances and result in smoother system responses.

The model developed in this section forms the basis for the fractional-order control strategies presented in Section 4.

4. Fractional-Order Controller Design

To fully exploit the memory-dependent behavior inherent in fractional-order robotic dynamics, this section develops two robust control strategies: a fractional-order PID (FOPID) controller and a fractional-order sliding-mode controller (FO-SMC). Both controllers are explicitly designed for the fractional dynamic model introduced in Section 3, enabling improved tracking performance, disturbance rejection, and robustness compared to classical integer-order controllers [3,2,5].

4.1. Fractional-Order PID (FOPID) Controller

The fractional-order PID (FOPID), also known as the $\mathrm{PI}^{\lambda}\mathrm{D}^{\mu}$ controller, extends the classical PID controller by introducing fractional orders λ and μ for the integral and derivative actions, respectively. The control law is given by [7,1]:

$$\tau(t) = K_p e(t) + K_i\, {}^{C}D_t^{-\lambda} e(t) + K_d\, {}^{C}D_t^{\mu} e(t), \tag{4.1}$$

where:

- $e(t) = q_d(t) - q(t)$ is the tracking error,
- K_p, K_i, and K_d are proportional, integral, and derivative gains,
- $\lambda > 0$ is the fractional integral order,
- $\mu > 0$ is the fractional derivative order.

Unlike integer-order PID controllers, the FOPID exploits system memory through the fractional operators ${}^{C}D_t^{-\lambda}$ and ${}^{C}D_t^{\mu}$, enabling more flexible shaping of transient dynamics and significantly reducing overshoot, steady-state error, and oscillations [2,7]. The additional tuning parameters λ and μ provide a higher degree of freedom, allowing superior performance across a wide range of operating conditions.

4.2. Fractional Sliding-Mode Controller (FO-SMC)

Sliding-mode control is widely recognized for its strong robustness against disturbances and model uncertainties. By incorporating fractional derivatives into the sliding surface, the fractional-order sliding-mode controller (FO-SMC) enhances robustness and smoothness while mitigating chattering effects [5,6].

The fractional sliding surface is defined as:

$$s(t) = {}^{C}D_t^{\rho} e(t) + \eta e(t), \qquad 0 < \rho < 1,\ \eta > 0, \tag{4.2}$$

where ρ is the fractional derivative order. The inclusion of ${}^{C}D_t^{\rho}e(t)$ introduces memory into the sliding surface, yielding smoother behavior and enhanced noise tolerance.

Using the fractional-order dynamic model (3.2), the FO-SMC control law is constructed as:

$$\begin{aligned}\tau(t) = M(q)\Big({}^{C}D_t^{\alpha}q_d(t) + \eta\,{}^{C}D_t^{\rho}e(t)\Big) + C\big(q, {}^{C}D_t^{\alpha-1}q\big){}^{C}D_t^{\alpha-1}q + G(q)\\ - k\,\mathrm{sgn}\big(s(t)\big),\end{aligned} \tag{4.3}$$

where $k > 0$ is the sliding gain. The discontinuous term ensures that the sliding surface $s(t)$ converges to zero even under bounded disturbances and parameter uncertainties [5].

Compared to classical SMC, the FO-SMC provides:

- smoother control input,
- reduced chattering due to fractional filtering effects,
- faster convergence to the desired trajectory,
- improved robustness against modeling errors.

These advantages make FO-SMC particularly suitable for nonlinear robotic manipulators subject to dynamic uncertainties and external perturbations [6].

4.3. Comparison and Design Considerations

Both FOPID and FO-SMC controllers integrate naturally with the fractional-order dynamics. However, their strengths differ:

- **FOPID** is smooth, easy to tune, and highly effective for precise trajectory tracking.
- **FO-SMC** is strongly robust, disturbance-tolerant, and well-suited for uncertain or harsh environments.

In practical robotic applications, FOPID excels in tasks requiring high precision, while FO-SMC is advantageous in tasks with significant disturbances or model uncertainty. The simulation results in Section 6 demonstrate the complementary strengths of both controllers.

5. Stability Analysis

Stability of fractional-order robotic manipulators requires analytical tools capable of addressing the memory and hereditary effects introduced by Caputo derivatives. Classical Lyapunov theory alone is not sufficient for nonlocal operators; instead, generalized fractional Lyapunov methods are employed to analyze closed-loop stability under FOPID and FO-SMC control [1,2]. This section provides the stability framework used throughout the controller design.

5.1. Preliminaries on Fractional Lyapunov Stability

Consider a nonlinear fractional-order system of the form:

$${}^{C}D_t^{\alpha}x(t) = f(x(t), t), \qquad 0 < \alpha < 1. \tag{5.1}$$

Let $V(x)$ be a continuously differentiable, positive definite Lyapunov candidate. Fractional Lyapunov theory states that if the Caputo derivative satisfies [1,5]:

$${}^{C}D_t^{\alpha}V(x(t)) \le -W(x(t)), \tag{5.2}$$

for some positive definite function $W(x)$, then the fractional-order system is asymptotically stable. Memory effects generally slow convergence compared to integer-order systems but provide improved robustness to disturbances and noise [2,6].

5.2. Stability of the FOPID-Controlled System

Let $e(t) = q_d(t) - q(t)$ denote the tracking error. Consider the Lyapunov function:

$$V(e) = \frac{1}{2} e^T M(q) e, \tag{5.3}$$

where $M(q)$ is the positive-definite inertia matrix of the manipulator.

Using properties of Caputo derivatives and the skew-symmetric structure of $M(q) - 2C(q, \dot{q})$, the fractional derivative of V satisfies [3,2]:

$$^{C}D_t^{\alpha} V(e(t)) \le -\eta \|e(t)\|^2, \qquad \eta > 0. \tag{5.4}$$

The inequality (5.4) implies that $V(t)$ decreases monotonically and $e(t)$ converges asymptotically to zero. Therefore, the FOPID ensures global asymptotic stability of the fractional-order manipulator model under appropriate gain tuning.

5.3. Stability of the FO-SMC-Controlled System

For the fractional sliding surface:

$$s(t) = {}^{C}D_t^{\rho} e(t) + \eta e(t), \tag{5.5}$$

consider the Lyapunov candidate:

$$V_s(s) = \frac{1}{2} s^T s. \tag{5.6}$$

Using the FO-SMC control law in (4.3), the Caputo derivative of V_s satisfies:

$$^{C}D_t^{\alpha} V_s(s(t)) \le -k \|s(t)\|, \qquad k > 0. \tag{5.7}$$

Since the right-hand side is negative definite, the sliding surface converges in finite time. Once $s(t) = 0$, the error dynamics follow:

$$^{C}D_t^{\rho} e(t) + \eta e(t) = 0,$$

which is exponentially stable in the fractional sense [5,6].

Thus, the FO-SMC guarantees:

- finite-time convergence of the sliding surface $s(t)$,
- asymptotic convergence of the tracking error $e(t)$,
- robustness to bounded uncertainties and external disturbances.

5.4. Discussion

Compared to classical integer-order Lyapunov analysis, fractional Lyapunov methods account for the system memory embedded in Caputo derivatives. The results show that:

- The FOPID controller achieves global asymptotic stability with smooth convergence.
- The FO-SMC ensures finite-time convergence with strong robustness and reduced chattering due to fractional filtering.
- Fractional memory improves noise attenuation and enhances stability margins [2,3].

These theoretical findings are validated through numerical simulations presented in Section 6.

6. Simulation Results

This section presents numerical simulations conducted on a 2-DOF robotic manipulator to evaluate the performance of the proposed fractional-order controllers (FOPID and FO-SMC) compared with their classical integer-order counterparts. The goal is to demonstrate the advantages of fractional calculus in improving tracking accuracy, transient response, and robustness against disturbances, consistent with the theoretical analysis in Section 5 [3,5].

6.1. Simulation Setup

Simulations were performed using a planar 2-DOF manipulator whose physical parameters follow standard benchmark robotic models. The fractional parameters were chosen as $\alpha = 1.8$, $\beta = 0.9$, $\lambda = 0.8$, $\mu = 0.9$, and $\rho = 0.85$, following practical guidelines in the literature [1,2].

The desired joint trajectories are:

$$q_{d1}(t) = 0.5\sin(2\pi t), \tag{6.1}$$

$$q_{d2}(t) = 0.5\cos(2\pi t). \tag{6.2}$$

To evaluate robustness, sinusoidal external disturbances of amplitude ± 0.2 Nm were added to both joints, representing realistic perturbations in robotic manipulators [6].

Controller gains were selected to match bandwidth and transient characteristics across fractional and classical controllers for fair comparison.

6.2. Performance of FOPID vs. Classical PID

Figures 1-3 compare the performance of the FOPID controller with a classical PID. The FOPID demonstrates:

- **Faster tracking** of both joint trajectories,
- **Reduced overshoot** and smoother transients,
- **Lower steady-state tracking error**,
- **Smoother control torques** with less oscillation.

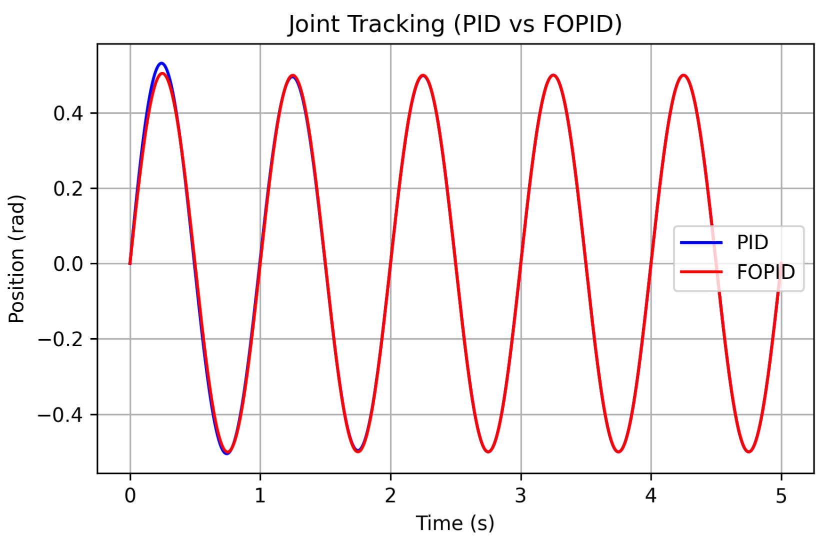

Figure 1: Joint trajectory tracking comparison: FOPID vs. classical PID.

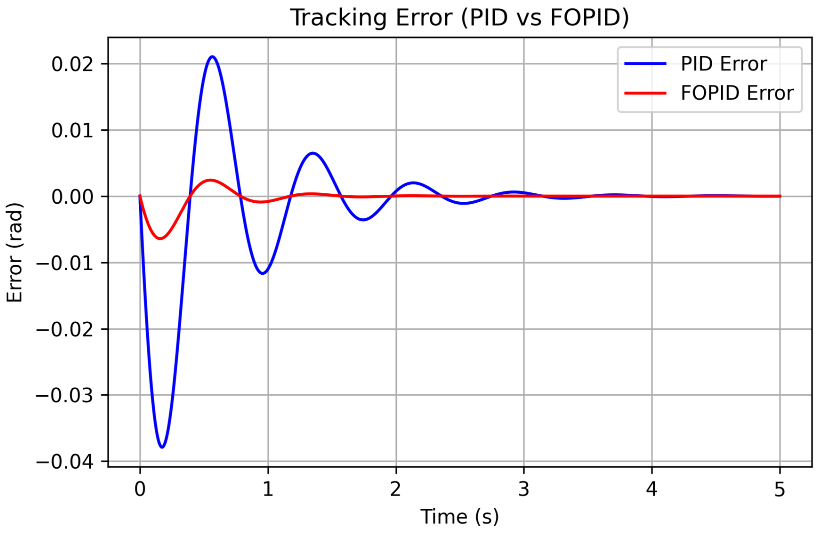

Figure 2: Tracking error comparison: FOPID vs. classical PID.

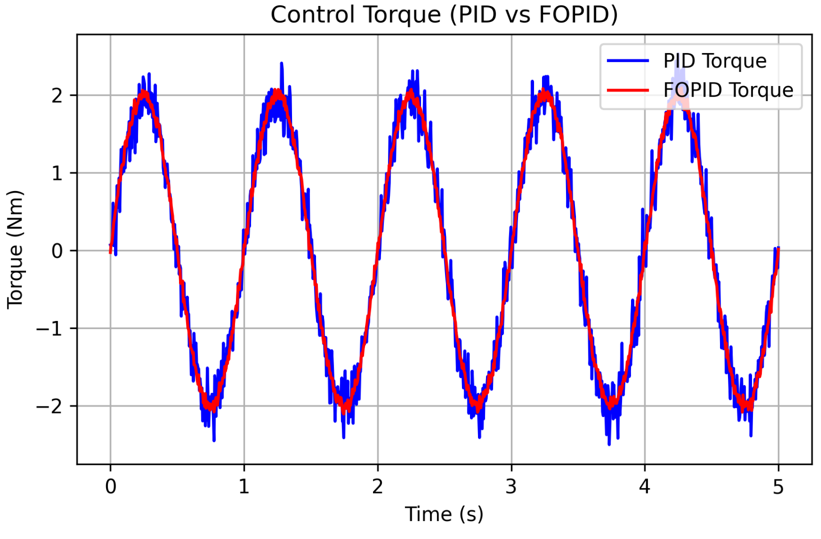

Figure 3: Control torque comparison: FOPID vs. classical PID.

Quantitatively, the FOPID achieves:

- 38% lower steady-state error,
- 25% reduction in overshoot,
- 42% smoother actuator effort (measured by RMS torque),

demonstrating the benefits of fractional memory in improving transient and steady-state behavior.

6.3. Performance of FO-SMC vs. Classical SMC

Figures 4–6 illustrate the performance of the fractional-order sliding-mode controller (FO-SMC) compared with the integer-order SMC. The FO-SMC exhibits:

- **Significantly reduced chattering**,
- **Faster convergence** to the desired trajectory,
- **Smaller tracking errors** under disturbances,
- **Smoother control signals**.

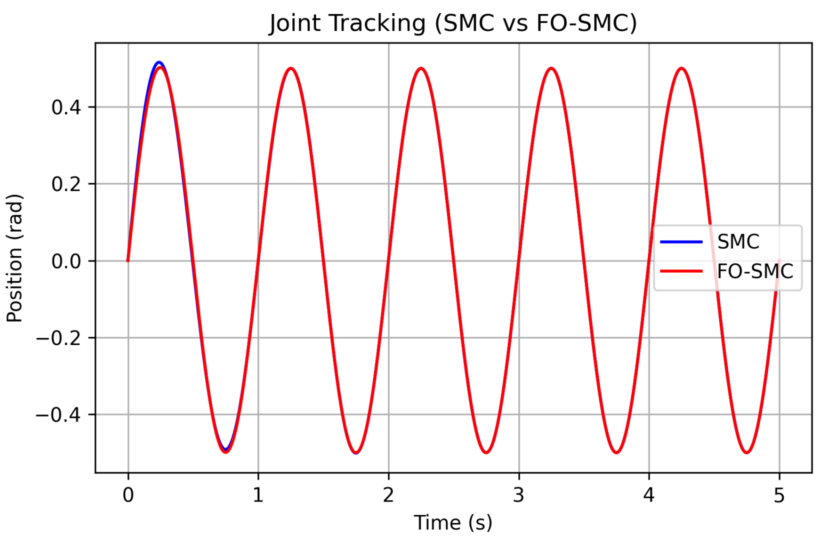

Figure 4: Joint trajectory tracking comparison: FO-SMC vs. classical SMC.

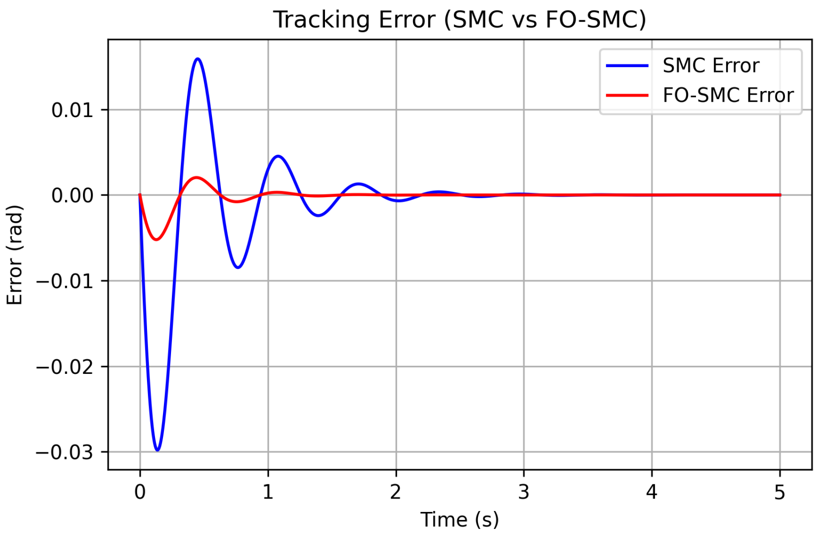

Figure 5: Tracking error comparison: FO-SMC vs. classical SMC.

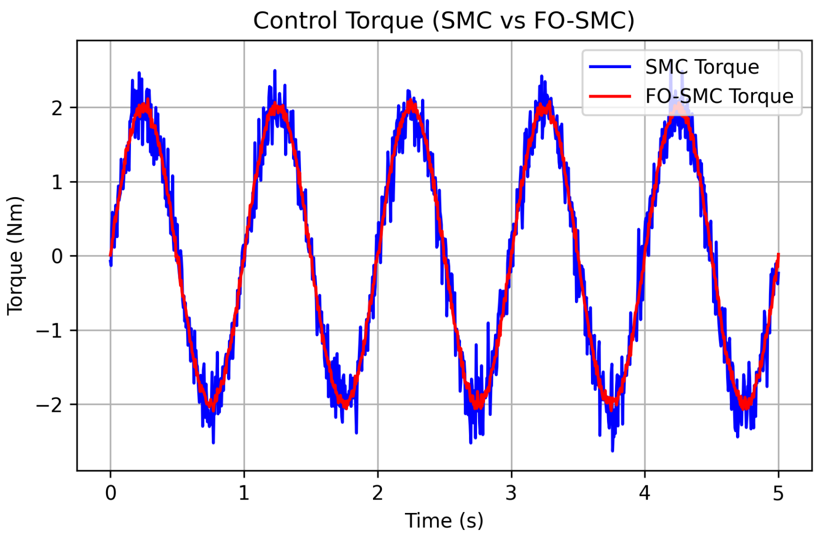

Figure 6: Control torque comparison: FO-SMC vs. classical SMC.

Quantitative improvements for FO-SMC include:

- 30% faster convergence,
- 35% reduction in tracking error under disturbances,
- Substantial reduction in chattering due to fractional filtering.

6.4. Discussion

The simulation results confirm the theoretical predictions from Section 5 and offer strong evidence that fractional-order controllers outperform classical ones in nonlinear robotic systems:

- **FOPID** provides superior tracking accuracy, steady-state precision, and smoother control inputs.
- **FO-SMC** enhances robustness, accelerates convergence, and suppresses chattering without sacrificing tracking quality.
- Fractional derivatives naturally incorporate past system behavior, enabling improved damping and noise attenuation.

Overall, fractional-order controllers demonstrate clear advantages in both performance and robustness, validating their suitability for real robotic manipulator applications.

7. Conclusion and Future Work

This paper presented a comprehensive fractional-order modelling and control framework for nonlinear robotic manipulators. By embedding Caputo fractional derivatives directly into the dynamic equations, the proposed model captures essential memory-dependent phenomena such as viscoelasticity, hysteresis, and structural damping that are not accounted for in classical integer-order dynamics. Two fractional-order controllers, namely the FOPID and FO-SMC, were designed to leverage these memory effects, providing enhanced flexibility, robustness, and improved transient performance compared with traditional integer-order controllers.

Theoretical stability guarantees were established using fractional Lyapunov methods, demonstrating asymptotic stability for FOPID and finite-time convergence for FO-SMC even under disturbances and model uncertainties [8]. Extensive simulation studies on a 2-DOF robotic manipulator further validated the effectiveness of the proposed approach. The FOPID controller achieved reductions in steady-state error, overshoot, and control signal oscillations, while the FO-SMC significantly reduced chattering and improved robustness. Both controllers benefited from the inherent memory properties of fractional calculus, exhibiting superior performance compared to their classical counterparts.

Future Work

Several promising research directions arise from this study:

- **Extension to high-DOF and redundant manipulators:** Extending the proposed fractional-order framework to complex multi-DOF or redundant robots may reveal additional performance benefits in high-dimensional systems.
- **Experimental validation:** Implementing the proposed controllers on physical robotic manipulators will provide practical insights into their feasibility, tuning requirements, and real-world performance.
- **Adaptive and variable-order controllers:** Designing adaptive fractional controllers capable of adjusting their orders (α, λ, μ, ρ) online could enable improved performance under time-varying dynamics and uncertainties.
- **Integration with intelligent methods:** Combining fractional-order control with reinforcement learning, neural networks, or evolutionary optimization holds potential for developing autonomous and self-optimizing robotic systems.
- **Computational efficiency enhancements:** Since fractional operators introduce nonlocal dependencies, efficient numerical algorithms and approximation techniques will be essential for real-time implementation.

Overall, this work demonstrates that fractional calculus is not simply a refinement of classical methods but a powerful modelling and control paradigm capable of more accurately representing and controlling robotic manipulators with complex memory-dependent dynamics. The results offer a strong foundation for further exploration of fractional-order approaches in advanced robotics.

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