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**EXISTENCE AND UNIQUENESS OF SOLUTION FOR A  
UNILATERAL PROBLEM IN SOBOLEV SPACES WITH  
VARIABLE EXPONENT**

*Abstract.* We study the existence and uniqueness of the obstacle problem associated to the equation

$$-\operatorname{div}(a(x, u, \nabla u) + \phi(u)) + g(x, u) = f - \operatorname{div} F$$

in the framework of Sobolev spaces with variable exponent, where  $F \in (L^{r(\cdot)}(\Omega))^N$  and  $f \in L^{q(\cdot)}(\Omega)$  with

$$\begin{cases} r(x) > \frac{N}{p(x)-1}, & r(x) \geq p'(x) & \forall x \in \Omega, \\ q(x) > \max\left(\frac{N}{p(x)}, 1\right), & q(x) \geq p'(x) & \forall x \in \Omega, \end{cases}$$

for a log-Lipschitz function  $p : \overline{\Omega} \rightarrow [1, +\infty)$ .

**1. Introduction.** Let  $\Omega$  be a bounded open subset of  $\mathbb{R}^N$  ( $N \geq 2$ ), and  $p(\cdot) : \overline{\Omega} \rightarrow [1, +\infty)$  be a function satisfying the log-Lipschitz continuous condition such that  $1 < p_- \leq p_+ < \infty$  (see Subsection 2.1).

The purpose of this paper is to study the obstacle and Dirichlet problem associated to the nonlinear elliptic equation

$$(1.1) \quad -\operatorname{div}(a(x, u, \nabla u) + \phi(u)) + g(x, u) = f - \operatorname{div}(F),$$

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when

$$(1.2) \quad f \in L^{q(\cdot)}(\Omega), \quad q(x) > \max\left(\frac{N}{p(x)}, 1\right), \quad q(x) \geq p'(x), \quad \forall x \in \Omega,$$

$$(1.3) \quad F \in (L^{r(\cdot)}(\Omega))^N, \quad r(x) > \frac{N}{p(x) - 1}, \quad r(x) \geq p'(x), \quad \forall x \in \Omega,$$

and

- $a : \Omega \times \mathbb{R} \times \mathbb{R}^N \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^N$  is a Carathéodory function,
- $\phi \in C^0(\mathbb{R}, \mathbb{R}^N)$ ,
- $g$  is a Carathéodory function satisfying a sign condition.

The motivation for studying problem (1.1) comes from applications in elasticity [25] and non-Newtonian fluid mechanics [5, 21].

The solvability of (1.1) is very well understood in the case of  $p$  constant (see [11, 12, 15, 17, 20]). When  $p(\cdot)$  is a variable exponent, the existence of solutions to problem (1.1) has been obtained [23, 27] under some restrictive conditions on  $F$  and  $f$ .

The novelty of this work is to refine and weaken the conditions on the data  $F$  and  $f$  and to show the existence and uniqueness of solution under conditions (1.2) and (1.3) on  $f$  and  $F$ .

The main tool used is the result of Stampacchia [22] which yields the boundedness of solutions; inspired by the idea of [7], we partition  $\overline{\Omega}$  into a finite number of balls  $B_i$  such that for all continuous functions  $f < g$  on  $\Omega$ , we have  $\sup(f) < \inf(g)$  on each  $B_i$ , and for which the conditions of [22, Lemma 4] are satisfied.

This paper is organized as follows: in Section 2, we collect the necessary preliminaries and specify some assumptions; in Section 3, the existence of a bounded solution to problem (1.1) is established; and in the last section, the uniqueness of solution is proved.

## 2. Preliminaries and assumptions

**2.1. Preliminaries.** Let  $\Omega$  be a bounded open subset of  $\mathbb{R}^N$  ( $N \geq 2$ ). We say that a real-valued continuous function  $p(\cdot)$  is *log-Lipschitz continuous* in  $\Omega$  if

$$-\log|x - y| |p(x) - p(y)| \leq C \quad \forall x, y \in \overline{\Omega} \text{ with } x \neq y \text{ and } |x - y| < 1/2,$$

with a positive constant  $C$ . We denote

$$C_+(\overline{\Omega}) = \{\text{log-Lipschitz continuous functions } p : \overline{\Omega} \rightarrow \mathbb{R} \text{ with } 1 < p_- \leq p_+ < N\},$$

where

$$p_- = \min\{p(x) : x \in \overline{\Omega}\}, \quad p_+ = \max\{p(x) : x \in \overline{\Omega}\}.$$

For  $p \in C_+(\overline{\Omega})$  we define the *variable exponent Lebesgue space*

$$L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) = \left\{ u : \Omega \rightarrow \mathbb{R} \text{ measurable} : \int_{\Omega} |u(x)|^{p(x)} dx < \infty \right\};$$

under the norm

$$\|u\|_{p(\cdot)} = \inf \left\{ \lambda > 0 : \int_{\Omega} \left| \frac{u(x)}{\lambda} \right|^{p(x)} dx \leq 1 \right\},$$

the space  $L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$  is a uniformly convex Banach space, and therefore reflexive. We denote by  $L^{p'(\cdot)}(\Omega)$  the conjugate space of  $L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$ , where  $1/p(x) + 1/p'(x) = 1$ .

PROPOSITION 2.1 (Generalized Hölder inequality [14, 24]).

(i) For any  $u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$  and  $v \in L^{p'(\cdot)}(\Omega)$ , we have

$$\left| \int_{\Omega} uv dx \right| \leq \left( \frac{1}{p_-} + \frac{1}{p'_-} \right) \|u\|_{p(\cdot)} \|v\|_{p'(\cdot)}.$$

(ii) For all  $p_1, p_2 \in C_+(\overline{\Omega})$  such that  $p_1(x) \leq p_2(x)$  for all  $x \in \Omega$ , we have a continuous embedding

$$L^{p_2(\cdot)}(\Omega) \hookrightarrow L^{p_1(\cdot)}(\Omega).$$

PROPOSITION 2.2 ([14, 24]). Denote

$$\rho(u) = \int_{\Omega} |u(x)|^{p(x)} dx \quad \forall u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega).$$

Then the following assertions hold:

- (i)  $\|u\|_{p(\cdot)} < 1$  (resp.  $= 1, > 1$ ) if and only if  $\rho(u) < 1$  (resp.  $= 1, > 1$ ).
- (ii)  $\|u\|_{p(\cdot)} > 1$  implies  $\|u\|_{p(\cdot)}^{p_-} \leq \rho(u) \leq \|u\|_{p(\cdot)}^{p_+}$ , while  $\|u\|_{p(\cdot)} < 1$  implies  $\|u\|_{p(\cdot)}^{p_+} \leq \rho(u) \leq \|u\|_{p(\cdot)}^{p_-}$ .
- (iii) For a sequence  $(u_n)_n$  in  $L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$ ,  $\|u_n\|_{p(\cdot)} \rightarrow 0$  if and only if  $\rho(u_n) \rightarrow 0$ , and  $\|u_n\|_{p(\cdot)} \rightarrow \infty$  if and only if  $\rho(u_n) \rightarrow \infty$ .

Now, we define the *variable exponent Sobolev space*

$$W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega) = \{u \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) : |\nabla u| \in L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega)\},$$

with the norm

$$\|u\|_{1,p(\cdot)} = \|u\|_{p(\cdot)} + \|\nabla u\|_{p(\cdot)} \quad \forall u \in W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega).$$

We denote by  $W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$  the closure of  $C_0^\infty(\Omega)$  in  $W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$ , and we define the *Sobolev exponent* by

$$p^*(x) = \frac{Np(x)}{N - p(x)} \quad \text{for } p(x) < N.$$

PROPOSITION 2.3 ([14]).

- (i) If  $1 < p_- \leq p_+ < \infty$ , then the spaces  $W^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$  and  $W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$  are separable and reflexive Banach spaces.
- (ii) If  $q \in C_+(\overline{\Omega})$  and  $q(x) < p^*(x)$  for any  $x \in \Omega$ , then the embedding  $W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \hookrightarrow L^{q(\cdot)}(\Omega)$  is continuous and compact.
- (iii) Poincaré inequality: there exists a constant  $C > 0$  such that

$$\|u\|_{p(\cdot)} \leq C \|\nabla u\|_{p(\cdot)} \quad \forall u \in W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega).$$

- (vi) Sobolev–Poincaré inequality: there exists another constant  $C > 0$  such that

$$\|u\|_{p^*(\cdot)} \leq C \|\nabla u\|_{p(\cdot)} \quad \forall u \in W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega).$$

REMARK 1. By Proposition 2.3(iii), the norms  $\|\nabla u\|_{p(\cdot)}$  and  $\|u\|_{1,p(\cdot)}$  are equivalent in  $W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$ .

LEMMA 2.4 ([6]). Let  $F : \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  be a uniformly Lipschitz function with  $F(0) = 0$  and let  $p \in C_+(\overline{\Omega})$ . If  $u \in W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$ , then  $F(u) \in W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$ . Moreover, if the set  $D$  of discontinuity points of  $F'$  is finite, then

$$\frac{\partial(F \circ u)}{\partial x_i} = \begin{cases} F'(u) \frac{\partial u}{\partial x_i} & \text{a.e. in } \{x \in \Omega : u(x) \notin D\}, \\ 0 & \text{a.e. in } \{x \in \Omega : u(x) \in D\}. \end{cases}$$

LEMMA 2.5 ([6]). Under assumptions  $(H_1)$ – $(H_6)$  below, let  $(u_n)_n$  be a sequence in  $W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$  such that  $u_n \rightharpoonup u$  in  $W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$  and

$$\int_{\Omega} [a(x, u_n, \nabla u_n) - a(x, u_n, \nabla u)] \nabla(u_n - u) \rightarrow 0.$$

Then  $u_n \rightarrow u$  in  $W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$ .

**2.2. Assumptions.** Let

- $(H_1)$   $a : \Omega \times \mathbb{R} \times \mathbb{R}^N \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^N$  is a Carathéodory function such that for some  $\alpha > 0$ ,

$$a(x, s, \xi) \cdot \xi \geq \alpha |\xi|^{p(x)}, \quad \forall s \in \mathbb{R}, \text{ a.e. } x \in \Omega, \forall \xi \in \mathbb{R}^N.$$

- $(H_2)$  (1)  $[a(x, s, \xi) - a(x, s, \xi')][\xi - \xi'] > 0$  for a.e.  $x \in \Omega$ , all  $s \in \mathbb{R}$ , and all  $\xi, \xi' \in \mathbb{R}^N$  with  $\xi \neq \xi'$ ,
- (2) there is an increasing function  $\beta : \mathbb{R}^+ \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^+$  and a non-negative function  $\tilde{\beta} \in L^{p'(\cdot)}(\Omega)$  with  $|a(x, s, \xi)| \leq \beta(|s|)[|\xi|^{p(x)-1} + \tilde{\beta}(x)]$  for a.e.  $x \in \Omega$ , all  $s \in \mathbb{R}$  and all  $\xi \in \mathbb{R}^N$ .

- $(H_3)$   $f \in L^{q(\cdot)}(\Omega)$ ,  $F \in (L^{r(\cdot)}(\Omega))^N$ , where  $q(x) \geq 1$  and  $r(x) \geq p'(x)$  for all  $x \in \Omega$ .

- $(H_4)$   $g : \Omega \times \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  is a Carathéodory function such that  $\sup_{|s| \leq n} |g(\cdot, s)| = h_n(\cdot) \in L^1(\Omega)$  and  $g(x, s) s \geq 0$  for a.e.  $x \in \Omega$  and all  $s \in \mathbb{R}$ .

(H<sub>5</sub>)  $\phi : \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^N$  is continuous.

(H<sub>6</sub>)  $\psi \in L^\infty(\Omega)$  and  $K(\psi) = \{v \in W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega) : v \geq \psi \text{ a.e. in } \Omega\} \neq \emptyset$ .

DEFINITION 2.6. For all  $k > 0$  and  $s \in \mathbb{R}$ , the truncation function  $T_k(\cdot)$  is defined by

$$T_k(s) = \begin{cases} s & \text{if } |s| \leq k, \\ k \cdot \text{sign}(s) & \text{if } |s| > k, \end{cases}$$

and we set

$$G_k(s) = s - T_k(s).$$

DEFINITION 2.7. A measurable function  $u \in K(\psi)$  is called a *weak solution* of the unilateral problem (1.1) if  $a(x, u, \nabla u) \in (L^{p'(\cdot)}(\Omega))^N$  and  $g(x, u) \in L^1(\Omega)$ , and for all  $v \in K(\psi) \cap L^\infty(\Omega)$ ,

$$(2.1) \quad \int_{\Omega} a(x, u, \nabla u) \nabla(u - v) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} \phi(u) \nabla(u - v) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} g(x, u)(u - v) \, dx \leq \int_{\Omega} f(u - v) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} F \nabla(u - v) \, dx.$$

THEOREM 2.8. *Suppose that assumptions (H<sub>1</sub>)–(H<sub>6</sub>) hold, and let  $q(x) > \max(\frac{N}{p(x)}, p'(x))$  and  $r(x) > \frac{N}{p(x)-1}$ . Then any weak solution  $u$  to problem (1.1) (in the sense of definition (2.7)) is bounded.*

*Proof.* For fixed  $k, h, \theta > 0$ , define  $\omega_n = \frac{1}{h} T_h(G_k(T_n(u)))$  and  $\bar{\omega}_n = \theta \omega_n$ , where  $k = \theta + \|\psi\|_{L^\infty(\Omega)}$ .

Note that  $v = T_n(u) - \bar{\omega}_n \in K(\psi) \cap L^\infty(\Omega)$ . Taking  $v$  as a test function in (2.1), we obtain

$$(2.2) \quad \int_{\Omega} a(x, u, \nabla u) \cdot \nabla(\bar{\omega}_n + u - T_n(u)) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} \phi(u) \cdot \nabla(\bar{\omega}_n + u - T_n(u)) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} g(x, u)(\bar{\omega}_n + u - T_n(u)) \, dx \leq \int_{\Omega} f(\bar{\omega}_n + u - T_n(u)) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} F \nabla(\bar{\omega}_n + u - T_n(u)) \, dx.$$

Setting  $\bar{\omega} = \frac{\theta}{h} T_h(u - G_k(u))$ , we have

$$\bar{\omega}_n \rightarrow \bar{\omega} \quad \text{strongly in } W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega)$$

and

$$\nabla \bar{\omega} = \frac{\theta}{h} \nabla \chi_{\{k \leq |u| \leq k+h\}} \quad \text{a.e. in } \Omega.$$

Passing to the limit in (2.2), we get

$$\begin{aligned}
 (2.3) \quad & \frac{1}{h} \int_{\{k < |u| < k+h\}} a(x, u, \nabla u) \cdot \nabla u \, dx + \frac{1}{h} \int_{\{k < |u| < k+h\}} \phi(u) \cdot \nabla u \, dx \\
 & + \frac{1}{h} \int_{\Omega} g(x, u) T_h(u - G_k(u)) \, dx \\
 & \leq \frac{1}{h} \int_{\Omega} f(x) T_h(u - G_k(u)) \, dx + \frac{1}{h} \int_{\Omega} g(x, u) T_h(u - G_k(u)) \, dx \\
 & + \int_{\{k < |u| < k+h\}} F \cdot \nabla u \, dx.
 \end{aligned}$$

By  $(H_5)$ , we may assume that  $\phi = (\phi_1, \dots, \phi_N)$ , where  $\phi_i \in C(\mathbb{R})$  for  $1 \leq i \leq N$ .

Let  $\tilde{\phi}_i(t) = \int_0^t \chi_{\{k < |\eta| < k+h\}} \phi_i(\eta) d\eta$  and set  $\tilde{\phi} = (\tilde{\phi}_1, \dots, \tilde{\phi}_N)$ . Then it is easy to see that  $\tilde{\phi} \in (W_0^{1,p(\cdot)}(\Omega))^N$ . Thus, for the second term of the left-hand side in (2.3), using Lemma 2.4, we have

$$\begin{aligned}
 (2.4) \quad & \int_{\{k < |u| < k+h\}} \phi(u) \cdot \nabla u \, dx = \int_{\Omega} \chi_{\{k < |u| < k+h\}} \phi(u) \cdot \nabla u \, dx \\
 & = \int_{\Omega} \operatorname{div} \tilde{\phi}(u) \, dx = 0.
 \end{aligned}$$

Combining (2.3) with (2.4), it follows from  $(H_1)$  and  $(H_4)$  that

$$(2.5) \quad \alpha \int_{\{k < |u| < k+h\}} |\nabla u|^{p(x)} \, dx \leq \int_{\{|u| > k\}} |f(x)| |G_k(u)| \, dx + \int_{\{k < |u| < k+h\}} |F| |\nabla u| \, dx.$$

Letting  $h$  tend to infinity in (2.5), we obtain

$$(2.6) \quad \alpha \int_{A(k)} |\nabla u|^{p(x)} \, dx \leq \int_{A(k)} |f(x)| |G_k(u)| \, dx + \int_{A(k)} |F| |\nabla u| \, dx,$$

where  $A(k) = \{x \in \Omega : |u(x)| > k\}$ .

By using the Young inequality in the second term on the right hand side of (2.6) we have

$$\int_{\Omega} F \cdot \nabla G_k(u) \, dx \leq c_1 \int_{A(k)} |F|^{p'(x)} \, dx + c_2 \int_{\Omega} |\nabla G_k(u)|^{p(x)} \, dx.$$

Now combining the last two formulas, using Proposition 2.2, and taking

$c' = \alpha - c_2 > 0$ , we get

$$\begin{aligned}
 c' \int_{\Omega} |\nabla G_k(u)|^{p(x)} dx &\leq c_1 \int_{A(k)} |F|^{p'(x)} dx + \int_{\Omega} |f| \cdot |G_k(u)| dx \\
 &\leq c_1 \int_{A(k)} |F|^{p'(x)} dx + c_3 \|f\chi_{A_k}\|_{p'_*(\cdot)} \cdot \|G_k(u)\|_{p_*(\cdot)} \\
 &\leq c_1 \int_{A(k)} |F|^{p'(x)} dx + c_3 \|f\chi_{A_k}\|_{p'_*(\cdot)} \cdot \|\nabla G_k(u)\|_{p(\cdot)} \\
 &\leq c_1 \int_{A(k)} |F|^{p'(x)} dx + c_3 \|f\chi_{A_k}\|_{p'_*(\cdot)} \left( \int_{\Omega} |\nabla G_k(u)|^{p(x)} dx \right)^{1/\gamma_1}
 \end{aligned}$$

with

$$\gamma_1 = \begin{cases} p^- & \text{if } \|\nabla G_k(u)\|_{p(\cdot)} \geq 1, \\ p^+ & \text{if } \|\nabla G_k(u)\|_{p(\cdot)} < 1. \end{cases}$$

Using Young's inequality, we obtain

$$\begin{aligned}
 c' \int_{\Omega} |\nabla G_k(u)|^{p(x)} dx &\leq c_1 \int_{A(k)} |F|^{p'(x)} dx + c'_1 \|f\chi_{A_k}\|_{p'_*(\cdot)}^{\gamma'_1} \\
 &\quad + \frac{c'}{2} \int_{\Omega} |\nabla G_k(u)|^{p(x)} dx.
 \end{aligned}$$

By Hölder's inequality and Proposition 2.2, we get

$$\begin{aligned}
 (2.7) \quad \frac{c'}{2} \int_{\Omega} |\nabla G_k(u)|^{p(x)} dx &\leq c_1 \int_{A(k)} |F|^{p'(x)} dx + c'_1 \left( \int_{A(k)} |f|^{p'_*(x)} dx \right)^{\gamma'_1/\gamma_2} \\
 &\leq c_1 \int_{A(k)} |F|^{p'(x)} dx + c'_1 \|f\|_{L^{s_2(\cdot)/p'_*(\cdot)}(\Omega)}^{\gamma'_1/\gamma_2} \cdot \|\chi_{A_k}\|_{L^{\frac{s_2(\cdot)}{s_2(\cdot)-p'_*(\cdot)}}(\Omega)}^{\gamma'_1/\gamma_2} \\
 &\leq c_1 \int_{A(k)} |F|^{p'(x)} dx + c'_3 (\Phi(k))^{\frac{\gamma'_1}{\gamma_2 \cdot \gamma_5}} \\
 &\leq c_1 \| |F|^{p'(x)} \|_{s_1(\cdot)/p'(\cdot)} \cdot (\Phi(k))^{\frac{1}{\gamma_6}} + c'_3 (\Phi(k))^{\frac{\gamma'_1}{\gamma_2 \cdot \gamma_5}}
 \end{aligned}$$

with  $s_1(x) > r(x)$  and  $s_2(x) > q(x)$  for  $x \in \Omega$ ,  $\Phi(k) = \text{meas}(A(k))$ , and

$$\begin{aligned}
 \gamma_2 &= \begin{cases} p'^- & \text{if } \|f\chi_{A_k}\|_{p'_*(\cdot)} \geq 1, \\ p'^+ & \text{if } \|f\chi_{A_k}\|_{p'_*(\cdot)} < 1, \end{cases} \\
 \gamma_5 &= \begin{cases} \left( \frac{s_2(x)}{s_2(x)-p'_*(x)} \right)^- & \text{if } \|\chi_{A_k}\|_{L^{\frac{s_2(\cdot)}{s_2(\cdot)-p'_*(\cdot)}}(\Omega)} \geq 1, \\ \left( \frac{s_2(x)}{s_2(x)-p'_*(x)} \right)^+ & \text{if } \|\chi_{A_k}\|_{L^{\frac{s_2(\cdot)}{s_2(\cdot)-p'_*(\cdot)}}(\Omega)} < 1, \end{cases}
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\gamma_6 = \begin{cases} \left(\frac{s_1(x)}{s_1(x)-p'(x)}\right)^- & \text{if } \|\chi_{A_k}\|_{\frac{s_1(\cdot)}{s_1(\cdot)-p'(\cdot)}} \geq 1, \\ \left(\frac{s_1(x)}{s_1(x)-p'(x)}\right)^+ & \text{if } \|\chi_{A_k}\|_{\frac{s_1(\cdot)}{s_1(\cdot)-p'(\cdot)}} < 1. \end{cases}$$

In view of the Sobolev inequality and Proposition 2.2, we have

$$(2.8) \quad \int_{\Omega} |\nabla G_k(u)|^{p(x)} dx \geq c_4 \left( \int_{\Omega} |G_k(u)|^{p_*(x)} dx \right)^{\gamma_4/\gamma_3}$$

where

$$\gamma_3 = \begin{cases} (p_*)^- & \text{if } \|G_k(u)\|_{p_*(\cdot)} \geq 1, \\ (p_*)^+ & \text{if } \|G_k(u)\|_{p_*(\cdot)} < 1. \end{cases} \quad \gamma_4 = \begin{cases} p^- & \text{if } \|\nabla G_k(u)\|_{p(\cdot)} \geq 1, \\ p^+ & \text{if } \|\nabla G_k(u)\|_{p(\cdot)} < 1. \end{cases}$$

So by (2.7) and (2.8), we obtain

$$(2.9) \quad \int_{\Omega} |G_k(u)|^{p_*(x)} dx \leq c \max\left( (\Phi(k))^{\frac{\gamma'_1 \cdot \gamma_3}{\gamma_2 \cdot \gamma_5 \cdot \gamma_4}}; (\Phi(k))^{\frac{\gamma_3}{\gamma_6 \cdot \gamma_4}} \right).$$

Choose  $h$  such that  $h - k > 1$  and in  $A_h = \{x \in \Omega : |u| > h\}$  we have  $h - k < G_k(u)$ . Then in view of (2.9) we get

$$\Phi(h) \leq \frac{C}{(h - k)^{p^*}} \max\left( (\Phi(k))^{\frac{\gamma'_1 \cdot \gamma_3}{\gamma_2 \cdot \gamma_5 \cdot \gamma_4}}; (\Phi(k))^{\frac{\gamma_3}{\gamma_6 \cdot \gamma_4}} \right).$$

First, let  $p^+$  be a constant satisfying  $p^+ < \min_{x \in \bar{\Omega}} (1 + 1/N)p(x)$ , which implies that

$$p^+ < \min_{x \in \bar{\Omega}} \frac{Np(x)}{N - p(x)}.$$

Then  $\gamma_3/\gamma_4 > 1$  and  $\gamma'_1/\gamma_2 > 1$ . By a suitable choice of  $s_1(\cdot)$  and  $s_2(\cdot)$ , we have  $\beta = \frac{\gamma'_1 \cdot \gamma_3}{\gamma_2 \cdot \gamma_5 \cdot \gamma_4} > 1$ . By Lemma 4 of Stampacchia [22], there exists a constant  $C$  such that  $\|u\|_{\infty} \leq C$ .

Now let  $p \in C_+(\bar{\Omega})$  be such that  $p(x) < \frac{Np(x)}{N-p(x)}$  and  $p(x) < (1+1/N)p(x)$ . By the continuity of  $p(\cdot)$  on  $\bar{\Omega}$  there exist constants  $\delta_1, \delta_2 > 0$  such that

$$(2.10) \quad \max_{y \in B(x, \delta_1) \cap \Omega} p(y) < \frac{\min_{y \in B(x, \delta_1) \cap \Omega} Np(y)}{N - p(y)} \quad \text{for all } x \in \bar{\Omega},$$

$$(2.11) \quad \max_{y \in B(x, \delta_2) \cap \Omega} p(y) < \frac{\inf_{y \in B(x, \delta_2) \cap \Omega} \left(1 + \frac{1}{N}\right) p(y)}{1 + \frac{1}{N}} \quad \text{for all } x \in \bar{\Omega}.$$

Since  $\bar{\Omega}$  is compact, we can cover it with a finite number of balls  $(B_j)_{j=1}^k$  and there exists a constant  $\lambda > 0$  such that

$$(2.12) \quad \min(\delta_1, \delta_2) > |\Omega_i| > \lambda, \quad \Omega_i = B_i \cap \Omega, \quad \text{for } i = 1, \dots, k.$$

We denote by  $p_j^+$  and  $p_*^+$  the local maxima of  $p$  and  $p_* = \frac{Np}{N-p}$  on  $\bar{\Omega}_j$  respectively (and by  $p_j^-$  and  $p_*^-$  the respective local minima). By (2.9) and



the fact that  $p_{*i}^- < p_* = \frac{Np(\cdot)}{N-p(\cdot)}$  on  $\Omega_i$ , we have

$$(2.13) \quad \int_{\Omega_i} |G_k(u)|^{p_{*i}^-} dx \leq c'_4 \max\left( (\Phi_i(k))^{\frac{(\gamma_1^i)'\cdot\gamma_3^i}{\gamma_2^i\cdot\gamma_5^i\cdot\gamma_4^i}}; (\Phi_i(k))^{\frac{\gamma_3^i}{\gamma_6^i\gamma_4^i}} \right) \quad \text{for } i = 1, \dots, k,$$

with  $\Phi_i(k) = \text{meas}(\{x \in \Omega_i : |u| > k\})$ , and  $\gamma_j^i$  the restriction of  $\gamma_j$  to  $\Omega_i$ .

Choose  $h$  such that  $h - k > 1$  and in  $A_h^i = \{x \in \Omega_i : |u| > h\}$  we have  $h - k < G_k(u)$ . Then in view of (2.13) we obtain

$$\Phi(h) \leq \frac{C}{(h - k)^{p_{*i}^-}} \max\left( (\Phi_i(k))^{\frac{(\gamma_1^i)'\cdot\gamma_3^i}{\gamma_2^i\cdot\gamma_5^i\cdot\gamma_4^i}}; (\Phi_i(k))^{\frac{\gamma_3^i}{\gamma_6^i\gamma_4^i}} \right) \quad \text{for } i = 1, \dots, k.$$

It follows from (2.11) that

$$\frac{\gamma_3^j}{\gamma_4^j} > 1 \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{(\gamma_1^j)'}{\gamma_2^j} > 1 \quad \text{for all } x \in \overline{\Omega} \text{ and } j = 1, \dots, k,$$

which gives  $\frac{\gamma_3^j}{\gamma_4^j} \frac{(\gamma_1^j)'}{\gamma_2^j} > 1$  and by a suitable choice of  $s_1(\cdot)$  and  $s_2(\cdot)$  we have

$$\frac{(\gamma_1^i)'\cdot\gamma_3^i}{\gamma_2^i\cdot\gamma_5^i\cdot\gamma_4^i} > 1 \quad \text{for all } x \in \overline{\Omega} \text{ and } i = 1, \dots, k.$$

By [22, Lemma 4] we get  $\|u\|_\infty \leq C$ . ■

### 3. Existence of solution for the unilateral problem (1.1)

**THEOREM 3.1.** *Suppose that assumptions  $(H_1)$ – $(H_6)$  hold, and let  $q(x) > \max(\frac{N}{p(x)}, p'(x))$  and  $r(x) > \frac{N}{p(x)-1}$  for all  $x \in \Omega$ . Then there exists a weak solution  $u$  to problem (1.1) (in the sense of definition (2.7)).*

*Proof.* We divide the proof into three steps.

**STEP 1: A priori estimate.** Let us define

$$(3.1) \quad a_n(x, s, \xi) = a(x, T_n(s), \xi), \quad \text{a.e. } x \in \Omega, \forall s \in \mathbb{R}, \forall \xi \in \mathbb{R}^N,$$

and

$$(3.2) \quad \phi_n(s) = \phi(T_n(s)), \quad g_n(x, s) = T_{1/n}(g(x, s)),$$

a.e.  $x \in \Omega, \forall s \in \mathbb{R}, \forall \xi \in \mathbb{R}^N$ .

We consider the following approximate problem: find  $u_n \in K(\psi)$  such that

$$(3.3) \quad \langle -\text{div}(a_n(x, u_n, \nabla u_n)), u_n - v \rangle + \langle -\text{div}(\phi_n(u)), u_n - v \rangle + \langle g_n(x, u_n), u_n - v \rangle \leq \langle f, u_n - v \rangle + \langle -\text{div}(F), u_n - v \rangle \quad \forall v \in K(\psi).$$

By the classical result by Leray and Lions [16], for each  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ , there exists a weak solution  $u_n \in K(\psi) \cap L^\infty(\Omega)$  of (3.3). By the same argument as

before, we derive that

$$(3.4) \quad \|u_n\|_{L^\infty(\Omega)} \leq M,$$

and thus

$$(3.5) \quad a_n(x, u_n, \nabla u_n) = a(x, u_n, \nabla u_n) \quad \text{and} \quad \phi_n(u_n) = \phi(u_n).$$

As  $\psi \in K(\psi) \cap L^\infty(\Omega)$ , taking  $v = \psi$  as a test function in (3.3), by (3.5) we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{\Omega} a(x, u_n, \nabla u_n) \nabla(u_n - \psi) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} \phi(u_n) \nabla(u_n - \psi) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} g(x, u_n)(u_n - \psi) \, dx \\ \leq \int_{\Omega} f(u_n - \psi) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} F \nabla(u_n - \psi) \, dx. \end{aligned}$$

Noting that  $\int_{\Omega} \phi(u_n) \nabla u_n \, dx = 0$ , by Young's inequality, (3.5) and  $(H_1)$ – $(H_4)$  we obtain

$$\int_{\Omega} |\nabla u_n|^{p(x)} \, dx \leq C_1.$$

By Proposition 2.2 and the last inequality,

$$(3.6) \quad \|\nabla u_n\|_{L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega)} \leq C_2.$$

Then it follows from the results of [10] that there exists a subsequence of  $(u_n)$  (still denoted by  $(u_n)$ ) such that

$$(3.7) \quad \nabla u_n \rightharpoonup \nabla u \quad \text{weakly in } (L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega))^N,$$

$$(3.8) \quad u_n \rightarrow u \quad \text{strongly in } L^{p(\cdot)}(\Omega) \text{ and a.e. in } \Omega,$$

$$(3.9) \quad u_n \rightharpoonup u \quad \text{weakly}^* \text{ in } L^\infty(\Omega).$$

By (3.8), we obtain

$$g_n(x, u_n) \rightarrow g(x, u) \quad \text{a.e. in } \Omega.$$

By assumption  $(H_4)$  and (3.4), for any measurable set  $E \subset \Omega$ ,

$$\int_E |g_n(x, u_n)| \, dx \leq \int_E h_M(x) \, dx.$$

Using Vitali's theorem, we conclude that

$$(3.10) \quad g_n(x, u_n) \rightarrow g(x, u) \quad \text{strongly in } L^1(\Omega).$$

STEP 2: *Almost everywhere convergence of the gradient.* By  $(H_2)$ , to obtain the convergence of the gradient, it suffices to prove

$$(3.11) \quad \limsup_{n \rightarrow \infty} \int_{\Omega} [a(x, u_n, \nabla u_n) - a(x, u_n, \nabla u)] (\nabla u_n - \nabla u) \, dx \leq 0.$$

The left-hand side of (3.11) can be written as

$$\begin{aligned}
 (3.12) \quad & \int_{\Omega} [a(x, u_n, \nabla u_n) - a(x, u, \nabla u)] (\nabla u_n - \nabla u) \, dx \\
 & = \int_{\Omega} a(x, u_n, \nabla u_n) (\nabla u_n - \nabla u) \, dx - \int_{\Omega} a(x, u_n, \nabla u) (\nabla u_n - \nabla u) \, dx \\
 & = A_n - B_n.
 \end{aligned}$$

The term  $B_n$  goes to zero as  $n \rightarrow \infty$ . Indeed, by  $(H_2)$ , (3.4), (3.8), and Lebesgue's dominated convergence theorem, we have

$$(3.13) \quad a(x, u_n, \nabla u) \rightarrow a(x, u, \nabla u) \quad \text{strongly in } (L^{p'(\cdot)}(\Omega))^N;$$

this convergence together with (3.7) implies  $\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} B_n = 0$ .

Next, we claim that  $\limsup_{n \rightarrow \infty} A_n \leq 0$ . Indeed, as  $u_n \in K(\psi)$ , and  $u_n \rightarrow u$  almost everywhere, we deduce that  $u \geq \psi$  a.e. in  $\Omega$  and  $u \in L^\infty(\Omega)$ . Thus we can take  $u$  as a test function in (3.3). By (3.5), we obtain

$$\begin{aligned}
 \int_{\Omega} a(x, u_n, \nabla u_n) \nabla(u_n - u) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} \phi(u_n) \nabla(u_n - u) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} g(x, u_n)(u_n - u) \, dx \\
 \leq \int_{\Omega} f(u_n - u) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} F \nabla(u_n - u) \, dx.
 \end{aligned}$$

Letting  $n \rightarrow \infty$  we get

$$(3.14) \quad \limsup_{n \rightarrow \infty} A_n \leq 0.$$

By (3.13), and (3.14) and using Lemma 2.5 we conclude that

$$(3.15) \quad \nabla u_n \rightarrow \nabla u \quad \text{a.e. in } \Omega.$$

STEP 3: *Passage to the limit.* Let us take  $v \in K(\psi) \cap L^\infty(\Omega)$  as a test function in (3.3):

$$\begin{aligned}
 (3.16) \quad & \int_{\Omega} a(x, u_n, \nabla u_n) \nabla(u_n - v) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} \phi(u_n) \nabla(u_n - v) \, dx \\
 & \quad + \int_{\Omega} g(x, u_n)(u_n - v) \, dx \\
 & \leq \int_{\Omega} f(u_n - v) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} F \nabla(u_n - v) \, dx.
 \end{aligned}$$

By  $(H_3)$  and the assumptions of the theorem it is easy to get

$$(3.17) \quad \int_{\Omega} f(u_n - v) \, dx \rightarrow \int_{\Omega} f(u - v) \, dx,$$

$$(3.18) \quad \int_{\Omega} F \nabla(u_n - v) \, dx \rightarrow \int_{\Omega} F \nabla(u - v) \, dx.$$

Also by  $(H_4)$ ,  $(H_5)$  and (3.4),

$$(3.19) \quad \int_{\Omega} \phi(u_n) \nabla(u_n - v) \, dx \rightarrow \int_{\Omega} \phi(u) \nabla(u - v) \, dx$$

and

$$(3.20) \quad \int_{\Omega} g(x, u_n)(u_n - v) \, dx \rightarrow \int_{\Omega} g(x, u)(u - v) \, dx.$$

For the first term in (3.16), by (3.15) and  $(H_2)$  we obtain

$$(3.21) \quad a(x, u_n, \nabla u_n) \rightarrow a(x, u, \nabla u) \quad \text{strongly in } (L^{p'(\cdot)}(\Omega))^N.$$

According to (3.7), we have

$$(3.22) \quad \int_{\Omega} a(x, u_n, \nabla u_n) \nabla(u_n - v) \, dx \rightarrow \int_{\Omega} a(x, u, \nabla u) \nabla(u - v) \, dx.$$

Finally, by (3.17), (3.19), (3.22) we conclude that  $u$  is a weak solution to problem (1.1). ■

**4. Uniqueness of solution for (1.1).** In this section, we discuss the uniqueness of weak solutions to problem (1.1). We make the following assumptions:

$(H_6)$   $\phi$  is a locally Lipschitz continuous function.

$(H_7)$  For every  $k > 0$ , there exists  $\bar{c}_k \in L^{p'(\cdot)}(\Omega)$  and a constant  $\beta_k > 0$  such that

$$(4.1) \quad |a(x, s_1, \xi) - a(x, s_2, \xi)| \leq |s_1 - s_2| [\beta_k |\xi|^{p(x)-1} + \bar{c}_k(x)] \quad \text{for a.e. } x \in \Omega$$

for all  $\xi \in \mathbb{R}^N$  and  $s_1, s_2$  with  $|s_1|, |s_2| \leq k$ .

$(H_8)$   $g : \Omega \times \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  is strictly increasing with respect to the second variable.

**THEOREM 4.1.** *Suppose that  $1 < p(\cdot) < N$ . Assume that  $(H_1)$ – $(H_8)$  hold. Then problem (1.1) admits a unique weak solution  $u \in K(\psi) \cap L^\infty(\Omega)$ .*

*Proof.* The existence is proved in Theorem 3.1. Now, to prove uniqueness, assume that  $u_1, u_2 \in K(\psi) \cap L^\infty(\Omega)$  are two weak solutions to (1.1), so

$$(4.2) \quad \int_{\Omega} a(x, u_1, \nabla u_1) \nabla(u_1 - v) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} \phi(u_1) \nabla(u_1 - v) \, dx$$

$$+ \int_{\Omega} g(x, u_1)(u_1 - v) \, dx$$

$$\leq \int_{\Omega} f(u_1 - v) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} F \nabla(u_1 - v) \, dx, \quad \forall v \in K(\psi) \cap L^\infty(\Omega),$$

and

$$\begin{aligned}
 (4.3) \quad & \int_{\Omega} a(x, u_2, \nabla u_2) \nabla(u_2 - v) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} \phi(u_2) \nabla(u_2 - v) \, dx \\
 & + \int_{\Omega} g(x, u_2)(u_2 - v) \, dx \\
 & \leq \int_{\Omega} f(u_2 - v) \, dx + \int_{\Omega} F \nabla(u_2 - v) \, dx, \quad \forall v \in K(\psi) \cap L^\infty(\Omega).
 \end{aligned}$$

Denote

$$(4.4) \quad v_{1\varepsilon} = u_1 - T_\varepsilon((u_1 - u_2)^+), \quad v_{2\varepsilon} = u_2 + T_\varepsilon((u_1 - u_2)^+).$$

It is easy to check that  $v_{1\varepsilon}, v_{2\varepsilon} \in K(\psi) \cap L^\infty(\Omega)$ . Thus, we can choose  $v = v_{1\varepsilon}$  and  $v = v_{2\varepsilon}$  as test functions in (4.2) and (4.3) to obtain

$$\begin{aligned}
 (4.5) \quad & \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \int_{\Omega_\varepsilon} [a(x, u_1, \nabla u_1) - a(x, u_2, \nabla u_2)] \nabla(u_1 - u_2) \, dx \\
 & + \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \int_{\Omega_\varepsilon} [\phi(u_1) - \phi(u_2)] \nabla(u_1 - u_2) \, dx \\
 & + \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \int_{\Omega_\varepsilon} T_\varepsilon((u_1 - u_2)^+) (g(x, u_1) - g(x, u_2)) \, dx \leq 0,
 \end{aligned}$$

where  $\Omega_\varepsilon = \{x \in \Omega : 0 < u_1 - u_2 < \varepsilon\}$ . Denote the three terms on the left-hand side by  $J_1(\varepsilon), J_2(\varepsilon), J_3(\varepsilon)$ . Then

$$\begin{aligned}
 (4.6) \quad & J_1(\varepsilon) = \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \int_{\Omega_\varepsilon} [a(x, u_1, \nabla u_1) - a(x, u_1, \nabla u_2)] \nabla(u_1 - u_2) \, dx \\
 & + \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \int_{\Omega_\varepsilon} [a(x, u_1, \nabla u_2) - a(x, u_2, \nabla u_2)] \nabla(u_1 - u_2) \, dx.
 \end{aligned}$$

By Theorem 3.1,  $\|u_1\|_{L^\infty(\Omega)}, \|u_2\|_{L^\infty(\Omega)} \leq M$ . Therefore, using (H7), we have

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \left| \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \int_{\Omega_\varepsilon} [a(x, u_1, \nabla u_2) - a(x, u_2, \nabla u_2)] \nabla(u_1 - u_2) \, dx \right| \\
 & \leq \int_{\Omega_\varepsilon} [\beta_M |\nabla u_2|^{p(x)-1} + c_k(x)] \nabla(u_1 - u_2) \, dx.
 \end{aligned}$$

It follows that

$$(4.7) \quad \lim_{\varepsilon \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \int_{\Omega_\varepsilon} [a(x, u_1, \nabla u_2) - a(x, u_2, \nabla u_2)] \nabla(u_1 - u_2) \, dx = 0.$$

Combining (4.6)–(4.7) with (H2) yields

$$(4.8) \quad \limsup_{\varepsilon \rightarrow \infty} J_1(\varepsilon) \geq 0.$$

For the term  $J_2$  we have, in view of  $(H_7)$ ,

$$\left| \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \int_{\Omega_\varepsilon} [\phi(u_1) - \phi(u_2)] \nabla(u_1 - u_2) dx \right| \leq k_M \int_{\Omega_\varepsilon} |\nabla(u_1 - u_2)| dx,$$

where  $k_M$  is the Lipschitz constant of  $\phi$  on  $[-M, M]$ , and thus

$$(4.9) \quad \lim_{\varepsilon \rightarrow \infty} J_2(\varepsilon) = 0.$$

By  $(H_9)$ , it is easy to see that

$$(4.10) \quad \begin{aligned} \lim_{\varepsilon \rightarrow \infty} J_3(\varepsilon) &= \int_{\{u_1 \geq u_2\}} (g(x, u_1) - g(x, u_2)) dx \\ &= \int_{\{u_1 > u_2\}} (g(x, u_1) - g(x, u_2)) dx. \end{aligned}$$

Letting  $\varepsilon \rightarrow \infty$ , it follows from (4.8)–(4.10) that

$$(4.11) \quad \int_{\{u_1 > u_2\}} (g(x, u_1) - g(x, u_2)) dx \leq 0.$$

Hence,  $|\{u_1 > u_2\}| = 0$ , that is,  $u_1 \leq u_2$  a.e. in  $\Omega$  and changing the roles of  $u_1$  and  $u_2$ , we obtain  $u_2 \leq u_1$  a.e. in  $\Omega$ , which gives  $u_1 = u_2$  a.e. in  $\Omega$ . ■

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