A soft and conductive PDMS-PEG block copolymer as a compliant electrode for dielectric elastomers

A Razak, Aliff Hisyam

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A soft and conductive PDMS-PEG block copolymer as a compliant electrode for dielectric elastomers

Aliff H. A Razak
Danish Polymer Centre (DPC)
Main supervisor: Anne Ladegaard Skov
Co-supervisor: Peter Szabo

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DTU Chemical Engineering
Department of Chemical and Biochemical Engineering
Motivation

Principle of dielectric elastomer (DE) as an actuator:

Requirement of compliant electrodes:  1) Inherently soft  2) conductivity
Stereotypes of electrodes

1) A conductive material is generally non-stretchable.

2) A stretchable material is usually non-conductive.

Our goal: soft-conductive polymer
Conventional electrodes for DEs

1) **Losse carbon black**
   - Samuel Rosset (EPFL)
   - Helmut Schlaak (University of Darmstadt)

2) **Carbon grease**
   - Samuel Rosset (EPFL)

**Alternative electrodes:**
1) Ionic conductor (hydrogel)
2) Silver nanowires
3) Conductive rubber
PDMS3-PEG copolymer

1. Hydrosilylation reaction of PDMS-PEG copolymer:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{PDMS3-PEG} & \rightarrow \text{Stiff} \\
\text{PDMS-PEG} & \rightarrow \text{high conductivity (10}^{-8}\text{ S/cm)}
\end{align*}
\]

2. Conductivity (PDMS-PEG copolymers)\(^1\)

3. Linear viscoelasticity-LVE (PDMS-PEG copolymers)\(^1\)

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Chain-extended PDMS$_3$-PEG copolymer

1. To obtain a soft-conductive polymer \( \rightarrow \) Chain extended PDMS-PEG copolymer

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{PDMS - PEG (vinyl terminated)} & \quad + \\
\text{PDMS232 (hydride terminated)} &
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\text{23 deg. C} \quad \text{Pt}^{2+}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(PDMS - PEG) - PDMS232 (hydride terminated)} &
\end{align*}
\]

2. Crosslinked copolymer:
Chain-extended PDMS-PEG copolymer + 15-functional vinyl crosslinker + 30 ppm Pt catalyst

\[
M_n = 38 \text{ kg/mol}
\]
Multi-walled carbon nanotubes (MWCNTs)

1. conductivity (PDMS3-PEG) \rightarrow add conductive nanofillers (MWCNTs)

2. Obstacle \rightarrow MWCNTs entangle

SEM image of pure MWCNTs showing entanglements.

3. Dispersion methods:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chemical</th>
<th>Mechanical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oxidation process by acid e.g. HNO$_3$ &amp; solution of H$_2$O$_2$/NH$_4$OH</td>
<td>1) Probe sonicator 2) Ball milling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawback: intrinsic properties of MWCNTs are destroyed due to structural defects</td>
<td>Drawback: rupture MWCNTs into smaller lengths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Non-covalent physical treatment

Mechanism of flocculation of CNTs via surfactant molecules.$^1$

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Multi-walled carbon nanotubes (MWCNTs)

- Dispersion of MWCNTs → Rastogi et al.\(^1\), Geng et al.\(^2\) and Goswami et al.\(^3\)

1. Stability versus time for MWCNT/NMP/Triton X-100 dispersed by water-bath ultrasonication at 23 °C for 6 hours: a) Immediately b) 5 min c) 30 min d) 60 min.

2. Stability versus time for a reference method (MWCNT/NMP/Triton X-100) dispersed by a mechanical shaker at 23 °C: a) Immediately b) 5 min c) 30 min d) 60 min.

3. Optical microscope image of this film containing MWCNTs (0.07 phr) in PDMS-PEG matrix.

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Conductivity & permittivity

![Graph showing conductivity vs. frequency for different samples]

- 0CNT Si3PEG_H25
- 1CNT Si3PEG_H25
- 2CNT Si3PEG_H25
- 3CNT Si3PEG_H25
- 4CNT Si3PEG_H25
- LR 3162

Conductivity (S/cm) vs. Frequency (Hz)

Retest with normal force = 10N
Modulus

![Modulus graph](image)

- **Storage modulus (Pa)**
- **Modulus loss factor**
- **Frequency (Hz)**
Stress-strain plots

- 0CNT Si3PEG_H25
- 1CNT Si3PEG_H25
- 2CNT Si3PEG_H25
- 3CNT Si3PEG_H25
- 4CNT Si3PEG_H25
- LR 3162

Stress (MPa) vs. Strain (%)

Y = 1.17 MPa
Y = 0.92 MPa
Y = 0.70 MPa
Y = 0.47 MPa
Y = 0.26 MPa
Y = 0.23 MPa
Conclusion

• The cross-linked conductive PDMS-PEG copolymers were successfully prepared with addition of different MWCNT concentrations.
• The conductivity of the chain-extended elastomers increases nearly to $10^{-3}$ S/cm;
  – $< \text{LR3162} = 10^{-1}$ S/cm
• The mechanical properties of chain-extended PDMS-PEG copolymers with MWCNTs ($< 3$ phr) indicate soft networks with low modulus losses.
• Future work:
  – The conductivity can be improved by adding silver nanoparticles in the system if properly designed.
  – Measure the conductivity of samples in “stretch” mode.
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