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Mixed Phase Pt-Ru Catalyst for Direct Methanol Fuel Cell Anode by Flame Aerosol Synthesis

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A spray-flame aerosol catalyzation technique was studied for producing Pt-Ru anode electrodes for the direct methanol fuel cell. Catalysts were produced as aerosol nanoparticles in a spray-flame reactor and deposited directly as a thin layer on the gas diffusion layer. The as-prepared catalyst was found to be a mixture of nanocrystalline, mostly unalloyed Pt and an amorphous phase mostly of Ru and to a lesser extent of Pt oxides on top of the crystalline phase. The flame-produced PtRu1 demonstrated similar onset potential but ~60% higher activity compared to commercially available Pt1Ru1/Vulcan carbon. The kinetics of methanol oxidation on the mixed phase catalyst was also explored by electrochemical impedance spectroscopy. © 2005 The Electrochemical Society. [DOI: 10.1149/1.2109547] All rights reserved.

Catalyst preparation and deposition.— The metal precursors used were ruthenium(III) acetylacetonate [Ru(acac)3], Fluka, purity...
For EDS, 32 different nonoverlapping areas with a diameter of 0.9 mm (i.d. 0.6 mm), which is situated in an opening of 1.4-mm diam, creating an annular space of 0.9 mm². The design of the nozzle is similar to the one used by Mühler et al.23 The precursor solution was passed through the capillary tube at 30 mL/h and oxygen, as both the dispersion and oxidation gas, was introduced through the annulus at 2.2 L/min. The spray aerosol was ignited by eight hydrogen-fed supporting flames made by horizontal injection through eight equidistant holes drilled in a hollow metal ring placed around the aerosol jet. Cold air, provided from a water-cooled quenching ring, was used to quench the aerosol coming out of the flame.24 The quenching helps decrease the average particle size by suddenly lowering the temperature and thus decreasing the rate of sintering. The product particles were collected directly on the GDL (Toray TGPH090) by withdrawing the nanoparticle aerosol from the flame through it by using a gas-ejector vacuum pump (PIAB Classic). Here, the GDL was, in principle, applied as a catalyst nanoparticle filter.

Electrochemical experiments.—The flame-aerosol-produced anode with a Pt1Ru1 catalyst layer and a total metal loading of ~1.5 mg/cm² was soaked with 0.1 mL of 5% Nafton in lower aliphatic alcohol solution (Aldrich Chemical Co.) and dried in open air for 30 min and at 80°C for 1 h in an oven to remove the alcohol. The anode from carbon-supported Pt–Ru (used for comparison) and all the cathodes was prepared by the following procedure. Commercially available Pt/Vulcan carbon catalysts having 1:1 atomic ratio and 10 wt % total metal loading was obtained from E-TEK, Inc. Anode catalyts were applied to the MEAs at a total metal loading of ~1.5 mg/cm². The total metal loading of the cathode catalyst was ~2 mg/cm² (20% Pt/Vulcan carbon, E-TEK). The catalyst samples were ultrasonically mixed for 20 min in a clean bottle with 0.1 mL of 5% Nafton in lower aliphatic alcohol solution and deionized water. Isopropl alcohol in water was added as a diluent to form a well-mixed catalyst ink. The catalyst inks were then brushed onto the GDL. Once all catalysts had been deposited, the electrodes were dried for 30 min in air at room temperature and for 1 h in an oven at 80°C. Similar cathodes were used with both flame-prepared anode and conventionally made anode with E-TEK catalyst. To prepare the MEAs, Nafton 112 polymer electrolyte membranes had been sandwiched between anode and cathode electrodes and pressed at ~140°C and 200 bars for 5 min. All the MEAs prepared had circular electrodes with a diameter of 2 cm.

The MEAs were placed between two graphite bipolar plates (Sigracet) which had machined flow channels with serpentine flow pattern, capable of accommodating electrodes of maximum 3.14 cm² in a homemade single cell (designed by IRD Fuel Cells A/S). The sides of the stainless steel current collectors, which were not contacting the bipolar plates, had serpentine channels. The channels were separated from the water-filled chambers by Nafton membranes. Gas streams were humidified by passing the gases through the channels. While the anode, the water chamber at the anode side was emptied. For all the experiments reported in the article where methanol was fed to the anode, the concentration of the solution was 1 mol/L and the flow rate was 1 mL/min. For cell polarization measurements, the cathode was fed with humidified O₂ at a cylinder back pressure of 2 bars and a flow rate of 80 scm. For anode polarization and EIS, the cathode was fed with humidified H₂ at a rate of 5 scm and functioning as a dynamic hydrogen electrode (DHE). The cathode side was also the counter electrode. The anode was fed with methanol and functioning as working electrode. The scans for polarization measurements were performed from 0 to 0.8 V vs DHE at 1 mV/s. For EIS, the frequency range was from 1 kHz to 50 mHz and the measurements were done at different dc potentials vs DHE. The amplitude of the sinusoidal voltage signal used was 10 mV. The conditioning of the MEAs was started by flowing overnight humidified H₂ and humidified Ar at the anode and cathode, respectively, at room temperature. Then the cell was run as a H₂/O₂ fuel cell at 90°C for 1 h with humidified H₂ at the anode. After that H₂ at the anode was replaced with 1.0 M methanol and the cell voltage was cycled continuously for 1 h between open circuit to 0.8 V at a scan rate of 50 mV/s to finish the conditioning. Before taking any measurement, the cell was cycled between 0 and 0.8 V at 50 mV/s until reproducibility was established. All the electrochemical measurements were performed with the potentiostat PARSTAT 2273.

Results and Discussion

The SEM image shows the morphology of the deposits on the GDL (Fig. 1). The deposit seems to be porous and fluffy. This is possibly the result of the primary particles sticking together rather than sintering to form bigger single particles. The porous nature of the deposit is thought to be advantageous for transport of materials in and out of the agglomerates. The TEM image shows the highly crystalline metallic particles on the carbon grid (Fig. 2). The lattice spacing of 2.23 and 2 Å representing (111) and (002) planes, respectively, of the face-centered cubic (fcc) crystal of Pt are observed. No crystalline phase of either Ru or RuO₂ could be detected from the
d-spacing of the crystallites. Figure 3 shows the XRD patterns of the flame-synthesized Pt, Pt3Ru1, and Pt1Ru1 catalyzed layers on GDL. For all the patterns shown, the five characteristic peaks of the fcc crystalline structure of Pt, namely, the (111), (200), (220), (311), and (222) could be seen. However, no significant peak shift was observed with increasing Ru content in the sample. The lattice parameters \(a_{\text{fcc}}\) show an insignificant gradual decrease with increasing Ru content compared to the arc-melted Pt-Ru alloy reported by Gasteiger et al.\(^{31}\) (Fig. 4). For the arc-melted alloys, the lattice parameter decreases linearly with increasing Ru content, consistent with the smaller size of Ru atoms compared to Pt. Also shown in the figure are the reported \(a_{\text{fcc}}\) values for the Johnson-Matthey unsupported Pt-Ru catalyst\(^{15}\) and the high-surface-area unsupported Pt-Ru catalyst prepared by rapid borohydride reduction of aqueous metal salts.\(^7\) The \(a_{\text{fcc}}\) values for high-surface-area Pt1Ru1 is higher than that of arc-melted Pt-Ru. However, the decrease in \(a_{\text{fcc}}\) from pure Pt to Pt1Ru1 for flame-synthesized catalyst is almost an order of magnitude less than that obtained for commercial Johnson-Matthey Pt1Ru1,\(^{15}\) implying that in our catalyst the nanocrystalline phase consists mostly of Pt. The absence of any other crystalline phase leads us to envisage the flame-prepared catalysts as a mixture of a crystalline phase consisting predominately of Pt and one or more amorphous phases consisting of mainly Ru as metallic or oxidic states. The particle size of the crystalline phase of Pt1Ru1, as determined from XRD peak broadening, is 10.3 ± 0.3 nm. The peak at \(\sim 54^\circ\) is a carbon peak coming from the TGPH 090 support and it has been confirmed by performing XRD on a blank TGPH 090 (figure not shown).

Overall X-ray photoemission spectrum of the TGPH 090 carbon support and different catalysts are shown in Fig. 5. Peaks of Pt 4f, Pt

![Figure 1. SEM image of the flame-produced Pt-Ru deposited on GDL.](image1)

![Figure 2. TEM image of the flame-produced nanocomposites on holey carbon grid. The insert shows the crystalline plane of a nanoparticle. Note that the scale bar is for the main figure and not the insert.](image2)

![Figure 3. XRD patterns for catalyzed layers of Pt, Pt3Ru1, and Pt1Ru1 on GDL. Si powder sprinkled on the catalyst layers served as an external standard for correcting sample displacement errors. The spectra were collected between the \(2\theta\) values of 20 and 95°; however, a zoomed-in window of 25–95° is shown.](image3)

![Figure 4. Comparison of lattice parameters of the fcc phase of flamesynthesized catalysts with that of the literature reported high-surface-area catalysts (Ref. 7 and Ref. 15) and arc-melted Pt-Ru alloys (Ref. 31).](image4)
4d, C 1s, and O1s are observed for the Pt catalyst layer. All the peaks present in the Pt catalyst layer could also be seen for Pt1Ru1. The peaks of Ru 3d overlapped with C 1s, and Ru 3p peaks are also observed. In Fig. 6, the Pt 4f core-level spectrum of the Pt and Pt1Ru1 catalyst layers on GDL are shown. The vertical lines at 71.0, 72.4, and 73.8 eV are the binding energies reported for the 4f7/2 peak of Pt, Pt(OH)2, and PtO, respectively.32 Because of the lack of information about the exact nature of the compounds formed, no deconvolution and curve-fitting has been done. However, from Fig. 6, it may be deduced that oxidized Pt is present in relatively large amount in the Pt1Ru1 sample compared to the Pt sample. A significant enhancement of the amount of Pt-O species with the presence of Ru has been reported in the literature for Pt-Ru DMFC anode catalyst. The observation has been attributed to the increase of the coverage of Pt-Ru surfaces by oxy-species due to Ru.3,33-35 However, no crystalline Pt-oxide phase in our catalyst is detected from XRD, possibly indicating that Pt oxides are present mostly at the surface in an amorphous phase. Figure 7 shows the Ru 3p3/2 peak for the Pt1R1 sample. The vertical lines at 462 and 466 eV are the binding energies reported for metallic Ru and rutile RuO2.36 It could be deduced that the bulk of the Ru exists at oxidation states between metallic Ru and Ru4+. The surface concentration of Pt and Ru estimated from the intensities of Pt 4f and Ru 3p3/2 (atomic sensitivity factors of 4.4 and 1.30, respectively)37 peaks by using Eq. 2 gives a Pt atomic fraction of 0.48. However, the average of the Pt atomic fraction determined from EDS is 0.58 ± 0.03. Considering the fact that XPS signals mainly come from the surface and EDS signals primarily come from the bulk, the difference between the Pt atomic fraction determined from XPS and EDS could be rationalized by postulating a thin amorphous surface layer consisting of Pt-Ru oxides on top of the nanocrystalline Pt fcc phase.

Figure 8 shows the Tafel slopes (b) for methanol oxidation by Pt1Ru1 at different temperatures. The overpotential data is corrected for iR losses while the ohmic resistances at different temperatures have been determined from ac impedance experiments. The Tafel slope decreases from 135 mV/d at 25°C to 95 mV/d at 90°C. The decrease in Tafel slope with increase of temperature has been reported in literature for PtRu/C when the catalyst was incorporated in the MEA with Nafion as electrolyte.38 Each of the Nyquist plots at 80°C from the impedance spectroscopy of methanol oxidation at different dc potentials shows a capacitive loop in the first quadrant and another pseudoinductive loop in the fourth quadrant (Fig. 9). The capacitive loop arises from the charge-transfer resistance of methanol oxidation, and the x-axis intercept of the loop represents the magnitude of charge-transfer resistance.29,39-41 whereas it has been postulated that the presence of the pseudoinductive loop is an indication that the oxidative removal of COads is the rate-determining step for methanol oxidation on Pt-Ru at DMFC anodes.30,42 The improvement in the methanol oxidation kinetics with increasing potential is probably because at higher potentials, Pt sites, beside Ru, supply active oxygen-containing species for COads oxidation.43
depends heavily on temperature. Figure 10 shows the dependence of methanol oxidation on temperature for flame-synthesized Pt-Ru. The onset potential varies from $-400$ mV to $-250$ mV at $90^\circ$C. The decrease in the initial activation overpotential with temperature may be because of enhanced hydroxyl species formation on Pt at higher temperature, providing more OH$_{ads}$-like species for the removal of CO$_{ads}$ or other surface-blocking species. The Nyquist plots at 0.5 V vs DHE show a huge shrinkage of both the first and forth quadrant loops when the temperature is increased from 50 to 80$^\circ$C at 0.5 V (Fig. 11). This could be an indication of lower charge-transfer resistance of methanol oxidation caused by the improved CO$_{ads}$ oxidation kinetics. An interesting feature in the plot is the temperature dependence of the ohmic resistance, which is given by the interception of the high-frequency curve with the x axis. The ohmic resistance decreases from 1.34 Ω cm$^2$ at 50$^\circ$C to 0.96 Ω cm$^2$ and 0.89 Ω cm$^2$ at 80 and 90$^\circ$C, respectively. Arrhenius plots of current density ($i$) obtained from potentials below 0.5 V are given in

![Figure 8](image)

**Figure 8.** Overpotential vs log($i$) at different temperatures for methanol oxidation: 1 mL/min, 1.0 M CH$_3$OH at the anode, and 5 mL/min humidified H$_2$ at the cathode. Anode: ~1.5 mg/cm$^2$ PtRu. Cathode: ~2 mg/cm$^2$ 20% Pt/Vulcan carbon (E-TEK).

![Figure 9](image)

**Figure 9.** Nyquist plots showing the effect of anode potential vs DHE on the methanol oxidation kinetics at the DMFC anode as determined by impedance spectroscopy. Anode: ~1.5 mg/cm$^2$ PtRu1. Cathode: ~2 mg/cm$^2$ 20% Pt/Vulcan carbon (E-TEK).

![Figure 10](image)

**Figure 10.** Methanol oxidation overpotential vs current density at different temperatures. Anode: ~1.5 mg/cm$^2$ PtRu1. Cathode: ~2 mg/cm$^2$ 20% Pt/Vulcan carbon (E-TEK).

![Figure 11](image)

**Figure 11.** Nyquist plots showing the effect of temperature on methanol oxidation kinetics as determined by impedance spectroscopy at a dc voltage of 0.5 V vs DHE. Anode: ~1.5 mg/cm$^2$ PtRu1. Cathode: ~2 mg/cm$^2$ 20% Pt/Vulcan carbon (E-TEK).
Fig. 12. The activation energy is 49 kJ/mol at 0.3 V, 53 kJ/mol at 0.4, and 37.6 kJ/mol at 0.5 V. The value at 0.5 V is slightly higher than the 30 kJ/mol reported for PtRu/C obtained at 0.5 V in a genuine fuel cell environment as in this article.44 However, the average of the three activation energies on our catalyst is smaller than the average value (58 kJ/mol) below 0.5 V reported on Ru decorated Pt(111)45 and polycrystalline PtRu (60 kJ/mol).3,43

A comparison of performance between flame-synthesized PtRu1 and 1:1 PtRu/C (10% metal loading) is shown in Fig. 13. The supported Pt-Ru catalyst has been chosen for comparison because we wanted to observe the difference between a well-alloyed metallic Pt-Ru catalyst and the flame-synthesized catalyst. The unsupported Pt-Ru has been reported to have lesser degree of alloying and a significant presence of RuO2 compared to carbon-supported Pt-Ru from E-TEK.46 The potentials in Fig. 13a have been corrected for iR losses. Even though the onset potentials are similar, the MEA prepared from the flame-synthesized catalyst performs better than the E-TEK catalyst with similar catalyst loading for all higher current densities. At 400 mV, the current density for PtRu1 is ~1.6 times higher than the current density obtained from the MEA with anode made from E-TEK catalyst. For the sake of completeness, we also present the comparison of performance when the fuel cell is producing power, i.e., when O2 is fed at the cathode and CH3OH at the anode (Fig. 13b). Again, the performance is better for the MEA that has flame-synthesized PtRu1 anode. It is worthwhile to mention that in this mode of operation, the data obtained could be affected by oxygen reduction kinetics at the cathode and methanol crossover from anode to the cathode, which could be different for two different catalyst layers at the anode.

One has to be careful during comparison of the performance data for catalysts having different physical and chemical properties and prepared by different methods. Besides the difference in the catalytic properties of the active elements, other factors could also affect the performance. The E-TEK PtRu1/C catalyst has a particle size of 2–3 nm, whereas the flame-synthesized PtRu1 catalyst has an average particle size of ~10 nm. Because of smaller particle size, the E-TEK catalyst has ~10 times higher specific metal surface area than flame-prepared PtRu1. However, the electrochemically active surface could well be smaller for the anode prepared from the E-TEK catalyst, resulting in the lower current density. Moreover, the anode catalyst layer prepared from carbon-supported catalyst could have a higher thickness than the unsupported flame-prepared anode, and as a consequence, mass-transfer resistance could be higher in the carbon-supported anode. However, at a low current density, i.e., just above the onset potential, mass-transfer resistance should not have a significant contribution. At an overpotential of 280 mV, the current density obtained from the MEA with anode prepared by E-TEK catalyst is 9 mA/cm2, whereas that for MEA with anode fabricated from our method is 14 mA/cm2, i.e., ~1.6 times higher.

XPS data suggest that a significant fraction of Pt and most of the Ru is present as oxides in as-prepared PtRu1 catalyst. However, during conditioning, when the catalyst was exposed to H2 and subsequently to CH3OH at 90°C, the metal oxides could be reduced significantly to metallic state.8 This left us with several possible
speculations about the state of the catalyst after conditioning. Even though there is no bulk alloying, the metals could be partially alloyed at the surface layer. The so-called surface decoration of Ru on Pt particles could also be possible. However, with the current results and considering the complexity of the material, we are not in a position to make any definite conclusion about the physical and chemical state of the catalyst at the operating conditions.

Conclusion

We have successfully demonstrated a one-step catalyzation method for preparation of the DMFC anodes. The as-prepared nanocomposites are a mixture of fcc, mostly unalloyed Pt crystalline phase, and an amorphous surface layer, postulated to be a mixture of Pt and Ru oxides. Comparison with commercially available 10%Pt–Ru/C E-TEK catalyst demonstrated that even though the onset potential for methanol oxidation at 90°C on both catalysts are similar (∼250 mV), the flame-prepared Pt1Ru1 has 60% higher activity at 0.4 V. However, the exact nature of the physical and chemical state of the flame-synthesized mixed-phase nanocomposite during the methanol oxidation in a fuel cell is yet to be established and is a subject of our ongoing research.

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