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Environmental Energy Technologies Division

November 1997
Presented at the
11th International Conference of Solid State Ionics,
Honolulu, HI,
November 19, 1997,
and to be published in the Proceedings
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This work was supported by the Assistant Secretary for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, Office of Building Technology, State and Community Programs (BTS), Office of Building Systems of the U.S. Department of Energy, under Contract No. DE-AC03-76SF00098.
INFLUENCE OF STOICHIOMETRY ON ELECTROCHROMIC CERIUM-TITANIUM OXIDE COMPOUNDS

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Abstract
CeO$_2$-TiO$_2$ finds use as passive counter-electrode in electrochromic devices. Thin films were produced by dc-sputtering in a wide range of compositions. Influence of total pressure and oxygen partial pressure on the optical constants of TiO$_2$ was investigated. Slightly substoichiometric TiO$_2$ films exhibit a red-shift of the bandgap. The TiO$_2$ content in the compound essentially determines the degree of cathodical coloring upon Li$^+$ intercalation [1]. However, pure TiO$_2$ films with comparable visible transmittance in the clear state behave differently during electrochemical cycling depending on oxygen stoichiometry. Films that are deposited at higher total pressure are more oxygen rich and require initial formatting until current voltage cycles become stable. CeO$_2$-TiO$_2$ films of intermediate compositions have the relatively highest charge capacity. Comparison with atomic force microscopy indicates a correlation of small grain size with high charge capacity.

Keywords: electrochromic cerium titanium oxide, optical constants, TiO$_2$, bandgap, grain size, charge capacity, rms roughness

Introduction
CeO$_2$-TiO$_2$ finds use as optically passive counter-electrode in electrochromic devices. Optically passive means that the change in visible transmittance upon ion intercalation does not exceed a few percent. Pure TiO$_2$ itself is known to be cathodically coloring upon ion insertion. Since CeO$_2$ is only slightly cathodically coloring the TiO$_2$ content in the compound essentially determines the degree of coloration upon Li$^+$ intercalation [1].

Experimental
Films were co-deposited by dc-magnetron reactive sputtering using Ti (99.9%) and Ce (99.9%) targets. The Ar (99.9995%) flow rate was varied between 100-220 sccm. O$_2$ (99.998%)/Ar ratio was varied between 2% and 9%. Deposition pressure ranged from 12 to 36 mTorr, this variation achieved by throttling the turbo pump gate valve. The typical base pressure was below 2.0 x 10$^{-6}$ Torr. Two or three sputter sources inclined about 20 degrees off normal to a common focal point were used for co-deposition, with a target-to-substrate distance of 17 and 13 cm respectively. Compositional variation was achieved by varying power to each gun between 33 and 520 W. Low Ce content films were easily achieved as the Ce deposition rate per Watt (nm/s/W) at 35 W gun power was only 3% of the rate per Watt at 307 W. This disproportionate decrease in rate as Ce power declined is presumably a function of surface oxidation of the target, and was most pronounced at power levels below 90 W.
Films were deposited on In$_2$O$_3$:Sn (ITO) glass and fused silica substrates. Prior to deposition the substrate holder was heated to 120°C with the intention of driving moisture from the substrate surface. Deposition began after the holder had cooled to approximately 50°C. The deposition process maintained the temperature at approximately 50°C for the duration of the run. Film thickness ranged from 170 nm to 510 nm as was determined by step profilometry and ellipsometry.

Optical measurements were made with a variable-angle spectroscopic ellipsometer (VASE) from 280 nm to 1700 nm using an instrument from the J. A. Woollam Co.. Ellipsometric data was taken at three different angles in order to provide data with good signal to noise ratio at each wavelength as well as to over-determine the system of unknown model parameters. To extend the covered spectral range to the whole solar spectrum, transmittance and reflectance measurements from 250 nm to 2500 nm were added; these measurements were taken at near-normal incidence on a Perkin-Elmer Lambda 19 spectrophotometer. The substrate backside was not roughened for ellipsometry to allow later in-situ transmittance control during electrochemical current -voltage cycling. Therefore backside reflections had to be accounted for in the optical model used to extract the optical constants.

Films were tested by cyclic voltammetry in 1M LiClO$_4$/propylene carbonate electrolyte at 1 mV/s over the range 1.8 to 4.0 V using lithium foil for both reference and counter electrodes. The optical transmittance of the films in the visible range was monitored during testing.

Composition and thickness of the samples were characterized by Rutherford backscattering spectrometry (RBS) using a 1.95 MeV $^4$He$^*$ beam in the 165$^\circ$ backscattering geometry. In addition X-ray Photoelectron Spectroscopy (XPS) was used to determine the Ti/O ratio due to its higher sensitivity to light elements. The XPS measurements were performed with PHI Photoelectron Spectrometer system. This system includes a hemispherical electron analyzer, an UHV system and a standard Mg K$_\alpha$ source.

Surface morphology was investigated by atomic force microscopy (AFM). Measurements were performed on a Park Scientific M5 instrument. Typical scans were taken over 2 x 2 $\mu$m at scan frequencies of 1 Hz. A 0.6 $\mu$m Si tip was operated at repulsive forces between 10 and 100 nN in contact mode. Whole images were corrected for slope in fast and slow scan directions and analyzed without filtering.

Results

Optical data was fitted to a structural model containing a parametric dispersion layer for the metal oxide layer and a surface layer simulating the effect of roughness. Details were described in an earlier paper [2]. Fig.1.a,b,c shows the excellent agreement between calculated and experimental data for a TiO$_2$ film on fused silica substrate. For better readability only every fifth calculated data point is shown.
The spectral refractive index of TiO\textsubscript{2} is a sensitive function of deposition conditions [3-12]. Fig.2a,b shows the optical constants from 0.5 to 5 eV (corresponding to 2500-250 nm) of TiO\textsubscript{2} films grown at different chamber pressures. They decrease when the deposition total pressure increases. This is mainly due to decreasing film density. Due to the increased mean free path at low total pressures the ejected titanium atoms undergo less collisions with other particles before they hit the target. At equal sputtering power the energy of the sputtered titanium atoms arriving at the substrate is therefore higher at lower pressures. This leads to a more compact film structure.

Note the different scale for real and imaginary parts of the refractive index in Fig.2a,b. The extinction coefficient of TiO\textsubscript{2} is zero below 3 eV thus rendering the films transparent throughout the visible spectrum. Our 400 nm thick TiO\textsubscript{2} films on ITO substrate usually have a visible transmittance of 80%. The optical constants for mixed CeO\textsubscript{2}-TiO\textsubscript{2} compounds were reported recently [1].

To accurately measure the bandgap of TiO\textsubscript{2} films were deposited on fused silica substrates. Those kind of substrates do not only simplify the structural optical model for the fits over the usual ITO coated glass substrate, but they also exhibit an energetically higher absorption edge. To use substrates other than ITO

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coated glass for extracting the bandgap is legitimate since only a comparison of bandgap energies is made. To transfer absolute values to films deposited on ITO one may have to consider differences in thermal expansion coefficients and influence of surface roughness.

The bandgap was determined by from the absorption coefficient assuming an indirect allowed transition [13]:

\[ (E - E_g) \propto \sqrt{E \cdot \alpha}, \]

where \( E \) is the energy, \( E_g \) is the bandgap energy and \( \alpha \) is the absorption coefficient.

A weak red-shift of the bandgap was observed for films deposited at low total pressure (\( E_g \) being 3.35 eV at 12 mTorr versus 3.42 eV at 36 mTorr). This is in agreement with a smaller lattice parameter of a more compact film structure.

TiO\(_2\) was also deposited at varying oxygen partial pressures. The bandgap slightly increases as a function of oxygen partial pressure. The behavior is observable in the high-energy end of transmittance spectra [Fig.3.a]. Fig.3.b shows values for \( E_g \) that were determined by extrapolating \( \sqrt{E \cdot \alpha} \) from the regime of linear proportionality to lower energies. The bandgap energies found are in good agreement with reported values for amorphous TiO\(_2\) that lie around 3.4 eV [14-19].

![Fig.3a) Transmittance of TiO\(_2\) on fused silica at the absorption edge; 3b) Bandgap energy and rms roughness of TiO\(_2\) as a function of deposition oxygen partial pressure](image)

AFM measurements showed an increasing surface roughness with higher oxygen partial pressure [Fig.3.b]. Results on roughness are taken from films on fused silica deposited at 36 mTorr. Feature size was about 50 nm. Mixed CeO\(_2\)-TiO\(_2\) films interestingly showed the root-mean-square roughness \( \delta_{\text{rms}} \) to be lower for intermediate compositions than for the pure components. This could hint to a more pronounced amorphous character in the compound material. Fig.4.a,b,c,d show AFM scans of CeO\(_2\)-TiO\(_2\) grown at 25 mTorr on ITO. The typical feature size varies from about 100 nm for the mixed compounds to about 150 nm for the pure components.
The charge capacity of CeO$_2$-TiO$_2$ films as a function of cerium content shows that it is higher for intermediate compositions [Fig.5]. From AFM results we know the grain size to be smaller for these films. Therefore the increased Li$^+$ ion uptake might be explained by grain boundary assisted diffusion: A higher number of grain boundaries will facilitate ion intercalation.
Rutherford backscattering revealed a relative decrease in oxygen content of TiO$_2$ films grown at low pressures. No absolute values could be obtained for the oxygen content due to the technique’s reduced energy selectivity to light elements. However, there seems to be a general oxygen super-stoichiometry due to contamination of the films with carbonates that were identified by XPS measurements, and most likely by water.

Films with comparable visible transmittance can behave differently during electrochemical cycling. Reversible switching of over 70% transmittance was observed for a 470 nm thick TiO$_2$ film grown at 18 mTorr with a 4.5% O$_2$/Ar gas flow ratio. The coloration efficiency in the visible is 23 cm$^2$/C.

Films that were deposited at higher total pressure required initial formatting until current-voltage (C-V) cycles became stable. Formatting consisted of an irreversible Li$^+$ uptake over the first cycles. As those films are more contaminated (by water and other elements present in the chamber) than the low pressure films a possible reason for the initial irreversible Li$^+$ uptake is the increased amount of oxygen present in the films.

After formatting, coloration efficiency became about 23 cm$^2$/C for those TiO$_2$ films, too.

**Conclusions**

The optical constants of TiO$_2$ were seen to decrease substantially as a function of total pressure. Films grown at higher pressures are less dense and contain more oxygen mainly due to higher contamination levels. The bandgap of TiO$_2$ increases with higher total pressure as well as with higher oxygen partial pressures. Bandgap energies for reactively sputtered TiO$_2$ films on fused silica lie around 3.4 eV.

AFM measurements on CeO$_2$-TiO$_2$ films revealed a smaller feature size in mixed CeO$_2$-TiO$_2$ than for the components CeO$_2$ and TiO$_2$. This effect is clearly visible in the smaller rms roughness. The intermediate films were also found to have a higher charge capacity for Li$^+$ intercalation. Together this may indicate a grain boundary assisted ion diffusion.

Electrochemical cycling of TiO$_2$ showed films with higher oxygen stoichiometry to require initial formatting until current voltage cycles became stable. After that the coloration efficiency of 23 cm$^2$/C compared to TiO$_2$ with lower oxygen content.
Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Assistant Secretary for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, Office of Building Technology, State and Community Programs (BTS), Office of Building Systems of the U.S. Department of Energy under Contract No. DE-AC03-76SF00098.

The help of R. Roth with the XPS measurements is thankfully acknowledged.

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