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Effect of donor dopants cerium and tungsten on the dielectric and electrical properties of high Curie point ferroelectric strontium niobate

Huanpo Ning[a,b,*], Haixue Yan[a,b], Zhipeng Gao[a], Xiaoyong Wei[a], Michael J. Reece[a,b]

[a]School of Engineering and Material Science, Queen Mary University of London, London, E1 4NS, UK
[b]Nanoforce Technology Ltd, London, E1 4NS, UK

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Abstract

The perovskite-like layered structure (*PLS*) $A_2B_2O_7$ compound $Sr_2Nb_2O_7$ was doped with donor dopants CeO_2 and WO_3 to explore their doping effect on its *A* and *B* site, respectively. The doped ceramics were prepared by Spark Plasma Sintering. For Ce doping on the *A* site, single phase was maintained up to 5 mol% Ce ($x=0.05$ in $(Sr_{1-x}Ce_x)_2Nb_2O_7$). For W doping on the *B* site, single phase was maintained at 2.5 mol% W ($x=0.025$ in $Sr_2(W_xNb_{1-x})_2O_7$). The cerium and tungsten doping both inhibited grain growth and changed the grain morphology, leading to less anisotropic grains. The Curie point T_c was obtained by measuring the temperature dependence of the dielectric constant and it was found to reduce for both Ce and W doped SNO. The W doped ceramics showed a diffuse ferroelectric phase transition at the Curie point. The DC resistivity of tungsten and cerium doped SNO increased compared to undoped SNO at temperatures below 700 °C. These results showed that both Ce and W had a strong influence on the dielectric and electrical properties of the $Sr_2Nb_2O_7$ ceramics.

Keywords: Ferroelectric; Doping; $A_2B_2O_7$; Strontium niobate; High Curie point

1. Introduction

Ferroelectrics with super-high Curie points are desirable in a number of high temperature applications, such as force, pressure and vibration sensors in materials manufacturing, automotive, aerospace, and nuclear power industries. Strontium niobate ($Sr_2Nb_2O_7$), as well as $La_2Ti_2O_7$, $Nd_2Ti_2O_7$, and $Pr_2Ti_2O_7$, which belongs to the perovskite-like layered structure (*PLS*) family, has been reported to be ferroelectric with a super-high Curie point (1342 °C) [1–4]. $Sr_2Nb_2O_7$ has an orthorhombic symmetry with the space group $CmC2_1$ at room temperature [5]. Recently, the ferroelectric and piezoelectric properties of ceramic $Sr_2Nb_2O_7$ prepared by spark plasma sintering (SPS) were investigated and its Curie point was characterised as 1327 °C [6,7].

Many investigations have shown that the doping of ferroelectrics is an effective approach for improving their properties, by influencing the Curie point, coercive field, and electrical resistivity. There have been some efforts in the past to dope SNO with various types of oxides to explore their effects on the microstructure and dielectric properties. The doping effect of La_2O_3 on $Sr_2Nb_2O_7$ (SNO) was investigated by Brahmaroutu et al. and it was found that the dielectric constant and loss decreased with increasing La^{3+} content [8]. The anisotropic grain growth of SNO was suppressed by the presence of La_2O_3 second phase at the grain boundaries, which pinned the grain boundaries. In other research, textured La doped SNO ceramic showed anisotropic thermal diffusivity and conductivity in the direction parallel and perpendicular to the perovskite layers [9]. Seraji et al. doped SNO with different amounts of V_2O_5, which resulted in an increase in dielectric constant and decrease in tangent loss. The single phase perovskite structure was maintained up to 15 at% vanadium and the doped SNO showed higher densities and the average grain size increased with increasing vanadium content [10]. The increased dielectric

*Corresponding author at: School of Engineering and Materials Science, Queen Mary University of London, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS, UK. Tel.: +44 77 4632 8394; fax: +44 20 7882 3390.
E-mail address: h.ning@qmul.ac.uk.(H. Ning)

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constant was attributed to the fact that accommodating a smaller ion in an almost unchanged crystal unit cell results in more rattling space within the oxygen octahedron and hence increased ionic polarisation [11]. Vanadium ions has a smaller ionic radius (54 pm with coordination number CN of 6) compared with that of Nb^{5+} (64 pm with CN of 6) [12]. Recently, Gao et al. investigated the substitution of Barium on textured SNO ceramics, the T_c decreased with increasing Ba substitution and the highest piezoelectric constant d_{33} were obtained from $Sr_{1.8}Ba_{0.2}Nb_2O_7$ [13].

Donor doping, which uses a dopant with a higher valence than it replaces, has been investigated in many other ferroelectric materials. Cerium doping was shown to improve ferroelectric properties and the fatigue resistance of PZT by impeding the motion of oxygen vacancies [14]. The effects of tungsten doping were investigated for the Aurivillius ferroelectrics $SrBi_2Nb_2O_9$ (SBN) and $SrBi_2Ta_2O_9$ (SBT) [11,15]. For SBN ceramics doped with WO_3 on the *B* site, single phase was maintained when the doping level was below 2.5 mol%. The Curie points decreased while the peak dielectric constants increased after doping. Similar to the structure of SNO, the niobium ion in SBN is also located in the centre of the oxygen octahedron. Tungsten ions (W^{6+}) has a higher valence and smaller ionic radius (60 pm with CN of 6) compared with that of Nb^{5+} (64 pm with CN of 6) [12].

In this work, $Sr_2Nb_2O_7$ was doped with donor dopants CeO_2 and WO_3 on its *A* and *B* site, respectively. The ceramics were prepared by Spark Plasma Sintering (SPS). The effect of donor doping on its electrical, piezoelectric, ferroelectrics was investigated.

2. Experimental procedures

2.1. Sample preparation

The compositions of undoped and doped SNO were obtained by the mixed oxide route. The starting materials were $SrCO_3$ (99% purity, Avocado research chemicals Ltd), Nb_2O_5 (99.9% purity, Alfa Aesar), WO_3 (99.9% purity, Fluka Analytical), CeO_2 (99.9% purity, Aldrich). For *A* site doped SNO, compositions of $(Sr_{1-x}Ce_x)_2Nb_2O_7$ with $x=0.025$ and 0.05 were prepared from $SrCO_3$, Nb_2O_5 and CeO_2 powder. For *B* site doped SNO, compositions of $Sr_2(W_xNb_{1-x})_2O_7$ were prepared from $SrCO_3$, Nb_2O_5, and WO_3 powders, with $x=0.025$ and 0.05.

The starting powders were weighed according to the stoichiometric formula of the desired composition of the ferroelectric ceramics. They were mixed in a cylindrical nylon pot and ground by a rolling ball mill for 10 h with ethanol as the milling medium. After ball milling, the slurry mixture was dried and then sieved to break the particle agglomerates. The mixture of powders was calcined in an alumina crucible heated in a chamber furnace at 1200 °C for 4 h. The powders were then remilled for 24 h to reduce the particle size and break the agglomerates.

The synthesised powders were sintered by Spark Plasma Sintering SPS (HPD 25/1 FCT, Germany). The calcined powders were pressed in a 20 mm diameter graphite die and sintered at 1350 °C or 1425 °C under 80 MPa for 3 min. A heating rate of 100 °C/min was used for all the samples. The sintered ceramic disks were then annealed at 100 °C below their sintering temperature for 15 hours to remove any carbon contamination and reduction produced during SPS. The bulk density was measured by the Archimedes method.

2.2. Sample characterisation

X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns for the powders were obtained with an X-ray diffractometer (Siemens D5000) using Cu K_α radiation. The microstructures of the ceramic samples were observed using a scanning electron microscope (SEM) (FEI, Inspect F). The samples for SEM were polished then thermally etched at 100 °C below their sintering temperatures for 15 min to reveal their grain structures. Electrodes were fabricated with fired-on platinum paste (Gwent Electronic Materials Ltd., C2011004D5) for electrical properties measurements. The frequency dependence of the dielectric constants and loss tangents was measured using a Precision Impedance Analyser (Agilent, 4294A). The temperature dependence of the dielectric constants and loss tangents were measured using a Precision LCR Meter (Agilent, 4284A) connected to a high temperature tube furnace. Samples for piezoelectric measurements were poled in silicone oil at 200 °C under a DC electric field. The piezoelectric constant d_{33} was measured using a quasi-static d_{33} metre (CAS, ZJ-3B). The accuracy of the d_{33} metre for measuring small coefficients was checked using X-cut quartz ($d_{33}=2.3\pm0.1$) pC/N [16]. The DC resistivity ρ was measured as a function of temperature using an electrometer (KEITHLEY, Model 6517A) with contacts to the samples in a high temperature furnace. All the resistivity data was recorded at 10 V after a 15 min holding time at high temperatures.

3. Results and discussions

Fig. 1(a) and (b) shows the XRD spectra of undoped, CeO_2 doped and WO_3 doped SNO powder, respectively. The single phase is maintained in doped SNO with 2.5 and 5 mol% Ce on the *A* site. For WO_3 doped SNO powder, it can be seen that the single phase is maintained at 2.5 mol% W doping on the *B* site, but an unidentified second phase was found when the doping level increased to 5 mol%. This solubility limit is similar to the case of W doping in Aurivillus material $SrBi_2Nb_2O_7$ [11].

Fig. 2(a)–(f) shows the SEM images of polished and thermally etched surfaces of undoped SNO and CeO_2 and WO_3 doped SNO ceramics sintered at 1350 °C and 1425 °C, respectively. The undoped SNO (Fig. 2(a) and (b)) has plate-liked grains. The 2.5 mol% and 5 mol% Ce doped SNO sintered at 1350 °C (Fig. 2 (c) and (d)) have high densities ($>$ 98%). However, the Ce doped samples sintered at 1425 °C have low densities ($<90\%$) and some large pores are present at the grain boundaries (not shown here), which may be caused by over-sintering. The grains exhibit lower aspect ratio (length/thickness) compared with those of the undoped SNO. Fig. 2(e) and (f) shows the single phase 2.5 mol% W doped SNO samples (densities $>98\%$) sintered at 1350 °C and 1425 °C. These W doped samples also show less anisotropic grain growth compared to undoped SNO. This could be explained by the fact that after doping the dopant segregates to the grain boundaries and impedes the grain growth along the in-