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CO₂ reduction to alcohols in a polymer electrolyte membrane co-electrolysis cell operating at low potentials

David Sebastián^a, Alessandra Palella^a, Vincenzo Baglio^a, Lorenzo Spadaro^a, Stefania Siracusano^a, Piero Negro^b, Francesca Niccoli^b, Antonino S. Aricò^{a,*}

^a CNR-ITAE, Istituto di Tecnologie Avanzate per l'Energia "Nicola Giordano", Via Salita S. Lucia sopra Contesse 5, 98126, Messina, Italy

^bInnovation Laboratory, Global Product Innovation, Italcementi s.p.a. c/o i.lab - Via Stezzano, 87 - 24126 Bergamo, Italy

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +39 090624237; fax: +39 090624247. E-mail address: arico@itae.cnr.it (A.S. Aricò).

Highlights

- Low temperature co-electrolysis can provide an effective route for CO₂ recycling
- Low temperature CO₂ reduction to alcohols occurs at high voltage efficiency (~90%)
- Ru-based electrocatalysts show enhanced current efficiency for CO₂ reduction
- CO₂ electroreduction is strongly promoted by the increase of cell temperature
- Alcohol formation is maximized at 1.25 V cell voltage in a co-electrolysis system

ABSTRACT

The electrocatalytic reduction of CO₂ to alcohols was investigated in a co-electrolysis cell based on a solid polymer electrolyte. PtRu/C and Ru/C catalysts were used in gas diffusion cathodes for the reduction of humidified CO₂. An IrRuO_x catalyst was used for the oxygen evolution from liquid water at the anode. This electrochemical reactor employed a perfluorosulfonic acid membrane electrolyte separator (Nafion[®]) and it was operated in a temperature range from 30°C to 95°C. The cathode catalysts were characterized by well-dispersed metal nanoparticles (2 nm mean particle size) on a carbon black support. Electrochemical polarization tests were carried out in the presence of CO₂ or with humidified inert gas for comparison. The results evidenced that direct CO₂ reaction on the catalysts surface was essentially occurring at low cell voltages (< 1.6 V), whereas the occurrence of water splitting (hydrogen evolution) was largely prevailing at high cell voltages. Methanol for the

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