

Original Research

Hydrogen absorption properties of amorphous $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4-y}\text{Ta}_y)_{100-x}\text{Zr}_x$ membranesO. Palumbo^a, F. Trequattrini^{a,b}, N. Pal^c, M. Hulyalkar^c, S. Sarker^c, D. Chandra^c, T. Flanagan^d, M. Dolan^e, A. Paolone^{a,*}^a CNR-ISC, U.O.S. La Sapienza, Piazzale A. Moro 5, 00185 Roma, Italy^b Department of Physics, Sapienza University of Rome, Piazzale A. Moro 5, 00185 Roma, Italy^c Department of Chemical and Materials Engineering, University of Nevada, Reno, NV 89557, USA^d Department of Chemistry, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405, USA^e CSIRO, QCAT, Energy, 1 Technology Court, Pullenvale, QLD 4069, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Amorphous Ni based alloy ribbons
High temperature X-ray diffraction
DTA
Activation energy
Crystallization temperature
Hydrogen solubility

ABSTRACT

Ni based amorphous materials have great potential as hydrogen purification membranes. In the present work the melt spun $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4-y}\text{Ta}_y)_{100-x}\text{Zr}_x$ with $y=0, 0.1$ and $x=20, 30$ was studied. The result of X-ray diffraction spectra of the ribbons showed an amorphous nature of the alloys. Heating these ribbons below $T < 400$ °C, even in a hydrogen atmosphere (1–10 bar), the amorphous structure was retained. The crystallization process was characterized by differential thermal analysis and the activation energy of such process was obtained. The hydrogen absorption properties of the samples in their amorphous state were studied by the volumetric method, and the results showed that the addition of Ta did not significantly influence the absorption properties, a clear change of the hydrogen solubility was observed with the variation of the Zr content. The values of the hydrogenation enthalpy changed from ~ 37 kJ/mol for $x=30$ to ~ 9 kJ/mol for $x=20$. The analysis of the volumetric data provides the indications about the hydrogen occupation sites during hydrogenation, suggesting that at the beginning of the absorption process the deepest energy levels are occupied, while only shallower energy levels are available at higher hydrogen content, with the available interstitial sites forming a continuum of energy levels.

1. Introduction

Novel Ni-Nb-Zr amorphous alloys are potential candidates as hydrogen permeation membranes to separate H_2 from CO_2 and other gases obtained from water shift reaction of coal-derived syngas [1]. Typically, commercial Pd/Pd-23Ag (at%) crystalline membranes are widely used for this purpose, but due to the high cost of Pd, replacement with inexpensive metals/alloys is necessary. In this framework, the amorphous alloys formed from a combination of Ni and one or more early transition metals show great promise for this application [1]. In particular, the hydrogen permeability of $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4})_{80}\text{Zr}_{20}$ and $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4})_{70}\text{Zr}_{30}$ membrane were 8.3×10^{-9} and $1.4 \times 10^{-8} \text{ mol m}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1} \text{ Pa}^{-0.5}$ measured in pure hydrogen at 400 and 450 °C, respectively [2]. These values are comparable to those measured for pure Pd or Pd-23%Ag ($1-2 \times 10^8 \text{ mol m}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1} \text{ Pa}^{-0.5}$ at 450 °C). The addition of other alloying metals in the Ni-Nb-Zr systems, such as Ta, Hf or Co, has been exploited in order to find possible higher

hydrogen permeation values or a better resistance to embrittlement [1]. Previous studies reported that the addition of Ta in Ni-Nb-Zr amorphous ribbon increases the devitrification temperature associated with decrease in embrittlement [3,4]. Moreover, it has been previously reported that with the addition of Ta, permeability undergoes only a moderate decrease: for example $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.3}\text{Ta}_{0.1})_{80}\text{Zr}_{20}$ and $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.3}\text{Ta}_{0.1})_{70}\text{Zr}_{30}$ exhibit permeability as 3.8×10^{-9} and $1.2 \times 10^{-8} \text{ mol m}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1} \text{ Pa}^{-0.5}$ respectively at 450 °C [2]. However, in Ta added Ni-Nb-Zr alloys the permeability performances degrade as a function of time more slowly than in Ta-free membranes, possibly due to the stabilizing effect of Ta [2]. Therefore, the Ta containing alloys seem to have some advantages in comparison with Ta-free membranes.

The permeability of the amorphous membranes is the key parameter for their potential use in the production of ultrapure hydrogen; however, one should also consider that permeability is strictly linked to hydrogen solubility. First of all, it must be considered that during the permeation tests and the application as purification membranes, these

Peer review under responsibility of Chinese Materials Research Society.

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Received 3 November 2016; Accepted 30 November 2016

Available online 28 January 2017

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amorphous materials undergo hydrogenation. Moreover, the knowledge of the hydrogenation properties is fundamental, since the formation of hydrides under certain operation conditions can lead to eventual failure of the membrane because of increased brittleness, and indeed it is a well known limitation of the Pd-based membranes [1]. Finally, solubility and permeability can be obtained one from the other mathematically, as the hydrogen flux through a membrane is linked to the shape of the pressure composition isothermal curves of the material [3].

Some previous studies on hydrogen solubility on membranes for hydrogen purification are available. Pd and Pd-Ag alloys with various contents of Ag were investigated by Flanagan et al., by Hara et al. and by Serra et al. [4–6]. A hydrogenation enthalpy of ~40 kJ/mol is reported [4–6]. The hydrogen solubility in other alloys containing Pd, such as Pd-V and Pd-M-Al (M= Rh, Ni, Pt, Cr, Ag), was investigated by Alimov et al. and by Wang et al. [7,8].

Many studies of the solubility of hydrogen in membranes for hydrogen purification concern vanadium based alloys, as V possesses one of the highest hydrogen diffusion coefficients. Binary, ternary and even quaternary V alloys were studied [9–14]. In one case a semi-empirical methodology for predicting the permeability and solubility of hydrogen in metallic alloys was proposed and compared with experiments [13].

Only a few reports about the solubility of hydrogen in amorphous membranes based on Ni, Nb and Zr are available [15,16]. Hao et al. reported pressure-composition curves measured at 573 K for $\text{Ni}_{60}\text{Nb}_{40}$, $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4})_{50}\text{Zr}_{50}$ and $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4})_{70}\text{Zr}_{30}$ [16]. The hydrogen content increases as the Zr content increases, reaching 1.1 mass% for $p \approx 0.6$ MPa [16]. Also Yamaura et al. showed a pressure-composition curve of $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4})_{70}\text{Zr}_{30}$ measured at 573 K, and, moreover, introduced methods combining density functional theory calculations and statistical mechanics to make predictions of the properties of interstitial H in amorphous metals [15].

However, to the best of our knowledge, a systematic investigation of the hydrogen absorption and formation enthalpies of $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4-y}\text{Ta}_y)_{100-x}\text{Zr}_x$ materials is still missing. In order to fill the lack of such information, in this study we measured the activation energies for crystallization of two Ta containing membranes by differential thermal analysis (TGA-DTA) and we also measured the hydrogen absorption properties of four $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4-y}\text{Ta}_y)_{100-x}\text{Zr}_x$ ribbons with $y=0, 0.1$ and $x=20, 30$ by volumetric method. The absorption data also provided indications about the hydrogen occupancy in the membrane, which is one of the controlling parameters for the hydrogen permeation through the bulk of the alloy membranes.

2. Materials and methods

The alloy buttons of $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4-y}\text{Ta}_y)_{100-x}\text{Zr}_x$ ($x=20$ or 30 ; $y=0$ or 0.1 compositions) were prepared by arc melting in a purified argon atmosphere at AMES Laboratory Iowa, USA. A melt spinning apparatus was used to fabricate these glassy membranes at the CSIRO laboratory, Brisbane, Australia. Typically the amorphous ribbons were ~30–70 μm thick and 30 mm wide [2,17]. In the paper we will use the following labels to indicate the four samples here investigated: Zr20 ($(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4})_{80}\text{Zr}_{20}$), Ta8Zr20 ($(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.3}\text{Ta}_{0.1})_{80}\text{Zr}_{20}$), Zr30 ($(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4})_{70}\text{Zr}_{30}$) and Ta7Zr30 ($(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.3}\text{Ta}_{0.1})_{70}\text{Zr}_{30}$). The X-ray diffraction patterns were obtained using a PANalytical X'Pert pro θ - θ diffractometer. The ribbons were not coated with Pd. This instrument was equipped with a heating stage with Anton Paar XRK 900. Hydrogen gas was introduced into the heating chamber via a home-made volumetric apparatus. The sample was placed inside the chamber and first evacuated using the turbo pump PFEIFFER model number TSH071E. Simultaneous TGA-DTA measurements were conducted by means of a Setaram Sensys Evolution 1200 TGA system [18] under a high purity argon flux (60 ml/min) at ambient pressure. For each experiment, a sample mass of ~10 mg was used. Different temperature

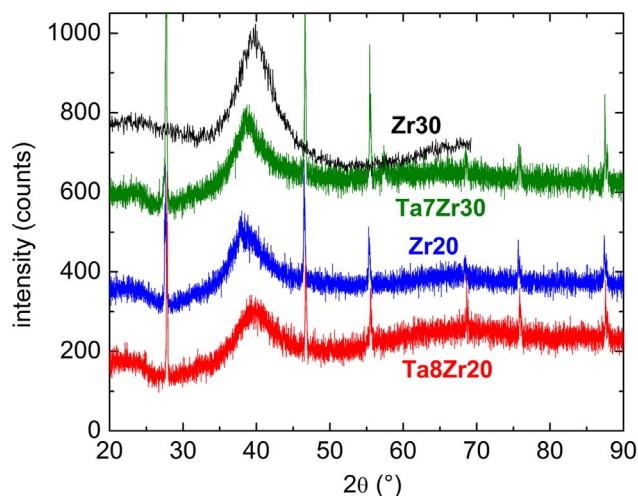


Fig. 1. X-ray diffraction plots of Zr30, Ta7Zr30, Zr20 and Ta8Zr20 samples at room temperature before hydrogen exposure.

rates, between 4 and 20 $^{\circ}\text{C}/\text{min}$, were used for each sample in order to calculate the activation energy of the crystallization process. The hydrogen absorption curves of Zr20, Ta8Zr20 and Ta7Zr30 were recorded by the home-made Sieverts apparatus at Sapienza University of Rome described in Ref. [19,20]. The experiments were performed on specimens with a mass of ~300 mg. For sample Zr30 a different home-made fully automated Sieverts apparatus [21] was used at University of Nevada, Reno.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. X-Ray diffraction measurements on as produced and hydrogenated ribbons

To ascertain whether the ribbons are fully amorphous, we performed X-ray diffraction (XRD) analysis on Zr20, Zr30, Ta8Zr20 and Ta7Zr30. Room temperature XRD patterns were obtained in as-prepared melt-spun condition without any addition of hydrogen (Fig. 1). All the samples showed a broad hump with the highest intensity at 20–38 $^{\circ}$. The crystalline Bragg peaks of Si visible in the spectra of Zr20, Ta8Zr20 and Ta7Zr30 are due to the addition of internal standard sprinkled on the samples. Similar results have been observed by Qiang [22].

In the next set of experiment, we examined the Ta8Zr20 and Ta7Zr30 samples under hydrogen atmosphere at 300–400 $^{\circ}\text{C}$ and 1–10 bar to observe if there are any structural changes. X-ray diffraction results showed the nature of the amorphous material did not change significantly with the addition of hydrogen in the above mentioned conditions (Figs. 2a and b). In case of Ta7Zr30 we even varied the time and did not observe any structural changes (Fig. 2a).

3.2. The crystallization process

A Differential Thermal Analysis apparatus was used to determine the crystallization temperature of Ta added alloys. The crystallization temperature (T_c) of the alloys without any Ta had already been measured in our group; T_c and the activation energies, E_a , of the $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4})_{80}\text{Zr}_{20}$ were 583 $^{\circ}\text{C}$ and 549 kJ/mol, respectively, while for $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4})_{70}\text{Zr}_{30}$ they were $T_c=535$ $^{\circ}\text{C}$ and $E_a=542$ kJ/mol [19,23].

The samples $(\text{Ni}_{0.6}\text{Nb}_{0.4-y}\text{Ta}_y)_{100-x}\text{Zr}_x$ with $y=0.1$ and $x=20, 30$, here investigated for the first time, show more than one exothermic peak (see Fig. 3). In the case of the Ta7Zr30, one can observe two well defined peaks in Fig. 3, while for Ta8Zr20 three peaks are visible (Fig. 3). All of them shift towards higher temperature as the heating rate is increased, indicating a thermally activated character of all

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