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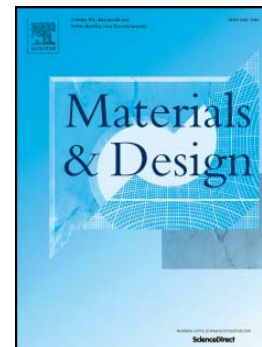
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Elastic properties of silicon nitride ceramics reinforced with graphene nanofillers

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Abstract

Elastic constants of silicon nitride composites with variable content (3-18 wt.%) of two kinds of graphene fillers (nanoplatelets and reduced graphene oxide sheets) are determined using resonant ultrasound spectroscopy. The corresponding Young's modulus (E), shear modulus (G) and Poisson's ratio (ν) are calculated for each material. Composites show a noticeable anisotropy that grows stronger with the graphene filler content, owing to the preferential alignment of the graphene layers and to their own anisotropy as well. E and G monotonically decrease with the filler concentration for both types of fillers, showing a maximum decrease in E of 75% along the direction perpendicular to the graphene plane for the composite with the highest filler content (Si_3N_4 -18 wt% GNP) and a reduction in G of 63% for shear along the graphene plane for the same composite. Influence on the fracture pattern of the composites is also addressed.

1. Introduction

Ceramic composites reinforced with multilayer graphene nanofillers and consolidated by Spark Plasma Sintering (SPS) can reach significant toughening enhancement and exhibit electrical conduction as well, thus becoming attractive multifunctional composites. Most of the studies about these composites are devoted to the toughness enhancement in a gamut of ceramic matrices owing to these fillers [1-4]. Nevertheless, not much attention has been paid to examine their elastic properties [5-7], which are fundamental for their structural performance. Actually, this performance can be particularly affected when a preferential orientation of the fillers occurs, such as it happens for graphene/ceramic composites fabricated by SPS [5, 8]. It has been shown that the preferred orientation of the graphene layers induces anisotropy of the electrical and thermal properties of Si_3N_4 /graphene composites [9, 10] but also of their elastic constants [6].

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