Observation of Electronic State Related to Fe Bonding in Fe-N-C Catalyst by X-ray Emission Spectroscopy

Shogo Kusano¹, Daiju Matsumura², Hirofumi Kishi³, Tomokazu Sakamoto³, Susumu Yamaguchi⁴, Kenji Ishii⁴, Hirohisa Tanaka¹, and Jun’ichiro Mizuki¹
(¹Graduate School of Science and Technology, Kwansei Gakuin University, 2-1 Gakuen, Sanda, Hyogo 669-1337, Japan. ²Materials Sciences Research Center, Japan Atomic Energy Agency, SPring-8 1-1-1 Koto, Sayo, Hyogo 679-5148, Japan. ³Research and Development Center, Daihatsu Motor Co., Ltd., 3000 Yamanoue, Ryuo, Gamo, Shiga 520-2593, Japan. ⁴Synchrotron Radiation Research Center, National Institutes for Quantum and Radiological Science and Technology, 1-1-1 Kouto, Sayo, Hyogo, 679-5148, Japan.)
mahilu12h01m@kwansei.ac.jp

Oxygen reduction reaction (ORR) on cathode catalyst is an important electrochemical reaction related to fuel cell performance. Fe-N-C catalysts are well known as non-noble cathode catalysts, and their active sites have been discussed by X-ray methods such as X-ray absorption fine structure (XAFS) analysis [1]. However, it is difficult for XAFS to distinguish coordination elements of carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen atoms around Fe. To solve this problem, we have employed a method of the valence-to-core X-ray emission spectroscopy (XES) that is known as a method of the observation of electronic state related to ligands around an absorption atom. Kβ′′ and Kβ2,5 emission specially reflect ligand information because of transition from ligand ns and np to metal 1s [2]. In this work, we have observed Kβ emission to investigate the electronic state of several real catalysts having Fe-N-C structures. Then, we will show better indexes to develop Fe-N-C catalysts based on the information on the electronic state related to Fe-bonding obtained by XES.

XES was carried out at BL11XU in SPring-8. Incident X-ray from undulator was monochromatized by double crystal monochromators made of Si (111), and its energy was fixed at 8100 eV, which is about 1000 eV above the Fe K-edge. The energy of Kβ emission X-rays from the pelletized sample was analyzed by three focusing crystals with Ge (620), and was detected using PILATUS located on the Rowland circle. As-prepared catalysts were Fe-PpmA, Fe-Ncb, Fe-AAPy and Fe-Phen made from pipemidic acid, nicarbazin, aminoantipyrine, and phenanthroline precursors, respectively. In measurement of the reference samples, the incident and emission angles were set at 80° and 10° measured from the sample surface, respectively. In the case of in situ measurement, Fe-PpmA sprayed on the carbon paper was placed at the carbon electrode as a working electrode in 1 M KOH. Both the incident and emission angles were 45°.

Carbon steel, iron nitride and iron oxides have Kβ′′ peak assigned as Fe-C (at 7099 eV), Fe-N (at 7094 eV) and Fe-O (at 7092 eV). In particular, the energy position of Kβ′′ peak in iron oxides was found to be almost the same each other. This indicates the Kβ′′ is insensitive to oxidation states of Fe and structures, and is sensitive to a kind of ligands. Moreover, potassium ferrocyanide (II) and potassium ferricyanide (III) have broad Kβ′′ peak at 7092 eV, which is close to the energy of Kβ′′ of Fe-O although they have no oxygen atom. This peak is considered as transition from hybridized orbital of CN 2s2s σ to Fe-1s state [3]. Kβ′′ peak position of Fe-CN is lower than that of Fe-N, which is affected by hybridization. Phthalocyanine iron (II) have also broad Kβ′′ peak between Fe-N and Fe-O position at 7093 eV. This peak could be caused by a transition from hybridized orbital of NC 2s2s σ, the same as Fe-CN. Fe-PpmA have stronger
Kβ” peak at Fe-N-C than Fe-AAPyr. This result indicates Fe-PpmA have more Fe-N-C structures than Fe-AAPyr. Details of catalysts, Kβ2,5 and in situ experiment will be discussed in the presentation.

In summary, we demonstrate XES is a powerful method for observation of electronic states related to ligand bonding with metals. Coordination elements of carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen atoms around Fe can be distinguished, and we have found that Fe-N-C structures in real catalyst can be observed from Kβ” peak.


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