Research of Lithium Iron Phosphate as Material of Positive Electrode of Lithium-Ion Battery

A.A. Chekannikov¹, R.R. Kapaev², S.A. Novikova², T.L. Kulova¹,*, A.M. Skundin¹, A.B. Yaroslavtsev²

¹Frumkin Institute of Physical Chemistry and Electrochemistry of the RAS, 31-4 Leninskii prosp., 119071 Moscow, Russia
²Kurnakov Institute of General and Inorganic Chemistry of the RAS, 31 Leninskii prosp., 119071 Moscow, Russia
*E-mail: tkulova@mail.ru

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In the present paper, samples of pure and doped lithium iron phosphate composite with the following composition: LiFePO₄/C, Li₀.₉⁹Fe₀.⁹₈(CrNi)₀.₀₁PO₄/C were synthesized. The samples were synthesized using the sol-gel method. According to the acquired data, all the obtained samples of lithium iron phosphate are crystallized in the orthorhombic modification of lithium iron phosphate with the structure of olivine. The average particle size of the obtained materials varies in the range of 50-100 nm. The carbon content was 4 wt%. The doping of lithium iron phosphate with trivalent cations of chromium and nickel results in the increase of the discharge capacity at high discharge rates with the simultaneous stability augmentation during the cycling.

Keywords: lithium-ion battery, lithium iron phosphate composite, positive electrode, discharge capacity, doping

1. INTRODUCTION

Materials based on lithium iron phosphate are being widely used for positive electrodes of lithium-ion batteries. The main disadvantage of LiFePO₄ (its low electronic conductivity) was eliminated through the synthesis of the lithium iron phosphate composite with carbon (LiFePO₄/C) [1-4]. The synthesis of LiFePO₄ composites with carbon allows increasing the electronic conductivity by several orders of magnitude [5-8]. Further increase of electronic conductivity can be reached through the synthesis of doped LiFePO₄/C composites. Ions of transition metals, such as Mn [9, 10, 11], V [12, 13, 14], Mg [15, 16], Ni [17], Co [18], Mo [19], La [20], Gd [21], Cr [22] can act as dopants. Further increase of electronic conductivity will allow using doped LiFePO₄/C at forced and pulse loads.
2. EXPERIMENTAL METHODS AND MATERIALS

For the synthesis of lithium iron phosphate samples doped with trivalent cations of nickel and chromium \((\text{Li}_0.99\text{Fe}_{0.98}(\text{CrNi})_{0.01}\text{PO}_4/C)\) with the structure of olivine, \(\text{Li}_2\text{CO}_3, \text{Fe(NO}_3)_3\cdot9\text{H}_2\text{O, (NH}_4\text{)}_2\text{HPO}_4, \text{Cr(NO}_3)_3\cdot9\text{H}_2\text{O Ni(NO}_3)_2\cdot6\text{H}_2\text{O}\) were used. The synthesis was conducted using the sol-gel method. At the first stage, reagents were mixed in stoichiometric ratios in deionized water. The obtained solution was exposed at 70°C for 4 hours with constant stirring to obtain homogeneous suspension. The obtained suspensions were exposed to drying with subsequent annealing in an argon atmosphere at 800°C. As a result, crystalline products of required composition with the structure of olivine were obtained.

To obtain composite materials with carbon based on \(\text{Li}_{1-x}\text{Fe}_{1-2x}\text{Ni}_x\text{Cr}_x\text{PO}_4\) \((x=0; 0.01)\), lithium iron phosphate samples were ground with glucose with post-heat treatment at 800°C in an inert atmosphere for 2 hours.

Crystal structure was characterized by X-ray diffraction (XRD) with CuK\(_\alpha\) radiation performed on a Rigaku D/MAX 2200 diffractometer. The Rigaku Application Data Processing software package was used for spectra processing. The obtained experimental diffraction patterns were compared with the PDF 2 ICDD diffraction standards database. Lattice parameters were updated using the Checkcell debugging tool. The size of coherent scattering regions (CSR) was calculated from the broadening of diffraction peaks using the Scherrer formula:

\[
\frac{d}{\beta} = \frac{k\lambda}{(\beta - \beta_0)\cos \theta}
\]

where \(d\) is crystallite size, \(\lambda\) is radiation wavelength \(\lambda(\text{CuK}\_\alpha) = 1.5406\ \text{Å}\), \(\theta\) is diffraction angle of peak position (rad.), \(\beta\) is peak width at half-height (rad.), \(\beta_0\) is instrumental broadening (rad.), \(k = 0.9\) is the Scherrer constant.

Microstructures and elemental composition of obtained materials were examined with the help of Carl Zeiss NVision 40 scanning electron microscope SEM (micrographs were obtained at an accelerating voltage of 7 kV), equipped with an Oxford Instruments X-MAX energy-dispersive X-ray (EDX) analyzer operating at an accelerating voltage of 30 kV.

Electrodes for electrochemical researches were prepared by a standard paste method. The cathode paste consisted of 85% active material, 10% carbon black and 5% polyvinylidenfluoride dissolved in anhydrous \(N\)-methylpyrrolidone. A stainless steel mesh with a welded stainless steel wire terminal served as a current collector. Electrochemical cells were assembled in a glove box (SPEKS, Russia) in a dry argon atmosphere. Water and oxygen content in the compartment did not exceed 10 ppm. Electrochemical cells contained one working electrode (lithium iron phosphate composite), one lithium counter electrode and one lithium reference electrode. The mass of active material in the working electrode was 10–15 mg/cm\(^2\). Electrochemical researches were conducted in galvanostatic and potentiodynamic modes. The current density in galvanostatic measurements ranged from 20 to 3200 mA/g. The potential scan rate ranged from 0.1 to 1.0 mV/s. The 1 M LiPF\(_6\) solution in a mixture
of ethylene carbonate-diethyl carbonate-dimethyl carbonate (1:1:1) served as an electrolyte. Water content in the electrolyte did not exceed 20 ppm.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the data of XRD, synthesized materials of LiFePO₄/C and Li₀.⁹⁹Fe₀.⁹⁸Ni₀.₀₁Cr₀.₀¹PO₄/C compositions are crystallized in the orthorhombic modification of LiFePO₄. The fragments of diffraction patterns of obtained materials are presented in Fig. 1. Reflexes on diffraction patterns correlate with those of LiFePO₄ (Card No. 81-1173 PDF2 ICDD, triphylite, orthorhombic modification, Pnma space group). Reflexes of other phases are not detected. The particle sizes calculated based on XRD results using the Scherrer formula by order of magnitude were 50 nm.

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1.** Fragments of diffraction patterns: 1 – LiFePO₄/C; 2 – Li₀.⁹⁹Fe₀.⁹⁸Ni₀.₀₁Cr₀.₀¹PO₄/C.

The electron micrographs of the synthesized sample of LiFePO₄/C are presented in Fig. 2. The average size of particles of the LiFePO₄/C composite is 100 nm, whereas there are particles in the material ranging from 50 to 400 nm. A closer look at micrographs shows that there are also individual agglomerates up to 3 µm in the sample (Fig. 2 a, b). The electron micrographs of the Li₀.⁹⁹Fe₀.⁹⁸Ni₀.₀₁Cr₀.₀¹PO₄/C doped sample are presented in Fig. 3. Morphology of the doped sample is similar to that of LiFePO₄/C, at the same time it is established that the doping results in the reduction of agglomerated particles size to 1 µm. The average size of particles of the doped composite is also reduced and is about 50 nm.

The X-ray spectroscopic microanalysis (EDX) of the Li₀.⁹⁹Fe₀.⁹⁸Ni₀.₀₁Cr₀.₀¹PO₄/C sample showed that the distribution of elements in the structure is even and corresponds to the initial load (Fig. 4 and 5). Fig. 4 shows the sites at which X-ray microanalysis was carried out. The results of EDX along with relative error are presented in Table 1. The EDX result of Li₀.⁹⁹Fe₀.⁹⁸Ni₀.₀₁Cr₀.₀¹PO₄/C for spectrum 5 (Fig. 5) indicates that the element composition of particle includes Fe, P, O, C, Ni and Cr, thus no other impurity is introduced to the as-prepared samples during the preparation process. The results of EDX at other sites were similar.
Figure 2. SEM micrographs of LiFePO$_4$/C taken at different magnification (a, b).

Figure 3. SEM micrographs of Li$_{0.99}$Fe$_{0.98}$Ni$_{0.01}$Cr$_{0.01}$PO$_4$/C taken at different magnification (a, b).

Figure 4. Electronic image of Li$_{0.99}$Fe$_{0.98}$Ni$_{0.01}$Cr$_{0.01}$PO$_4$/C, the areas where the EDX microanalysis was performed are marked with a rectangles.
The content of elements in the Li$_{0.99}$Fe$_{0.98}$Ni$_{0.01}$Cr$_{0.01}$PO$_4$/C sample (in atomic %).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spectrum</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Cr</th>
<th>Fe</th>
<th>Ni</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calculated</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data spread</td>
<td>±2.5</td>
<td>±8</td>
<td>±3</td>
<td>±1.5</td>
<td>±3</td>
<td>±1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The discharge capacity evolution of the analyzed samples during the cycling and the charge-discharge curves at the second cycle are presented in Fig. 6. At the first cycle the discharge capacity of pure lithium iron phosphate at the current density of 20 mA/g was about 147 mA/g, which is approximately 87% of the theoretical capacity of LiFePO$_4$/C. Based on the results of the cycling, it was determined that the doping of LiFePO$_4$/C results in the lowering of its discharge capacity: thus, for the Li$_{0.99}$Fe$_{0.98}$Ni$_{0.01}$Cr$_{0.01}$PO$_4$/C sample the discharge capacity was about 139 mAh/g.

The comparison of the charge-discharge curves of the samples of pure and doped lithium iron phosphate showed that the doping results in the shift of the charge and discharge potentials and reduction of the difference between them ($\Delta V$): from 66 mV for LiFePO$_4$/C to 53 mV for the doped sample at the current density of 20 mA/g (Fig. 6b). Moreover, for the Li$_{0.99}$Fe$_{0.98}$Cr$_{0.01}$Ni$_{0.01}$PO$_4$/C sample, a minor change in the charge-discharge curve was noted at the end of discharge. It is worth mentioning that the effect of polarization diminution due to doping is documented in a number of papers. For instance, the average difference between charge and discharge voltage for LiFe$_{0.99}$V$_{0.01}$PO$_4$ is less than that for plain LiFePO$_4$ by 10 mV, and this effect is higher for higher vanadium content [14]. Similar effects are described in [21] for LiFePO$_4$ doping by Gd, and in [23] for LiFePO$_4$ doping by Mn and Ni simultaneously. In particular, it is shown that $\Delta V$ for LiFePO$_4$/C amounts to 97 mV, whereas for doped samples LiFe$_{1-x-y}$Ni$_x$Mn$_y$PO$_4$/C ($x$=0.01, 0.02, 0.03 and 0.04; $x + y = 0.05$) $\Delta V$ is
equal to 65, 60, 53 and 36 mV, respectively. The effect of the polarization diminution can be explained by increase of electron conductivity of doped samples.

\[ Q = Q_0 / i^\alpha \]

\( Q \) is the discharge capacity, \( Q_0 \) is the discharge capacity at low current density, \( i \) is the current density, and \( \alpha \) is the Peukert’s equation.

The physical meaning of the \( \alpha \) index for two-phase electrodes is subject to a particular examination. It is worth noting that the general result of the present work on beneficial effect of LiFePO\(_4\) doping agrees by and large with results documented in [9–22]. Indeed, all these papers report on enhancement of discharge capacity of doped LiFePO\(_4\) at rather high currents (> 3C-rate). For instance, recalculation of data of [22] gives the \( \alpha \) value as low as 0.11 for Li\(_{0.97}\)FeCr\(_{0.01}\)PO\(_4\)/C at low discharge current. Recalculation of data [23] for LiFe\(_{0.95}\)Ni\(_{0.02}\)Mn\(_{0.03}\)PO\(_4\)/C gives \( \alpha \) values 0.05 for currents less than 2C-rate and 0.14 for currents from 2C-rate to 10C-rate. At the same time \( \alpha \) values for non-doped LiFePO\(_4\) were equal to 0.08 and 0.19 for...
low and high C-rates. The doping of LiFePO$_4$ by magnesium leads to decrease of $\alpha$ from 0.18 to 0.05 and from 1.5 to 0.29 for different current densities [15]. Therefore these results confirm our conclusion about complex character of $Q$ vs. $i$ dependence with different $\alpha$ index in different current ranges.

As to the irreversible capacity at the first cycle, calculated by the difference between the charge and discharge capacity, for undoped lithium iron phosphate and the doped Li$_{0.99}$Fe$_{0.98}$Cr$_{0.01}$Ni$_{0.01}$PO$_4$/C sample the irreversible capacity was about 5% of the reversible capacity, which is conditioned by oxidation of the electrolyte with the formation of a solid electrolyte interface.

Degradation during the cycling of undoped lithium iron phosphate was about 0.1% per cycle. For the doped sample this value was less than 0.05%. The similar results were reported in [23], namely capacity loss was about 0.08% per cycle for non-doped lithium iron phosphate and less than 0.015% for LiFe$_{0.95}$Ni$_{0.02}$Mn$_{0.03}$PO$_4$/C. Authors [15] reported that the capacity loss ratio was 47.2% after 300 cycles of pure LiFePO$_4$ sample and the capacity loss ratio was 2.9% after 300 cycles of LiFe$_{0.96}$Mg$_{0.04}$PO$_4$/C sample. The good cycle behavior is mainly ascribed to the enhancement of the electronic conductivity of sample due to doping together with almost uniform carbon coating.

The cyclic voltamograms of the Li$_{0.99}$Fe$_{0.98}$Cr$_{0.01}$Ni$_{0.01}$PO$_4$/C sample, obtained at various potential scan rates ($v$), are given in Fig. 8. The shapes of these curves are similar to that reported in [12, 13, 15, 18, 20]. One can see strongly pronounced peaks in anodic and cathodic areas.

The increase of the $v$ results in the increase of the currents in the maximum of the voltamogram, both in the cathode and anode regions, and some shift of the potential of the maximum to the anode and cathode sides for lithium extraction and insertion processes, accordingly. The discharge capacity, calculated from the area under the curve during the cathode half-cycle at the potential scan rate of 0.1 mV/s, was 137.3 mA/g, which is well agreed with the results of the galvanostatic cycling.
Figure 8. The cyclic voltamograms of Li_{0.99}Fe_{0.98}Cr_{0.01}Ni_{0.01}PO_4/C sample. Potential scan rates (V/s): 1 – 0.0001, 2 – 0.0002, 3 – 0.0004, 4 – 0.0008, 5 – 0.001. Weight of the sample is 0.015 g. Visible area of the electrode surface is 2.25 cm^2.

The current dependence in the cathode maximum at the potential scan rates of 0.1, 0.2, 0.4, 0.8 and 1 mV/s in the coordinates $I_p = f(\nu^{1/2})$ is shown in Fig. 9. The dependence goes through the origin of coordinates, which evidences of meeting the condition of semi-infinite linear diffusion. Formally, this dependence can be considered satisfying the Randles-Sevcik equation that for the temperature of 25°C and diffusion of a single-charged particle is as follows:

$$I_p = 2.69 \times 10^5 ScD^{1/2}\nu^{1/2}$$

where $S$ is true area of electrode surface, $c$ is initial concentration of diffusing material, mole/cm^3, $D$ is its diffusion coefficient, cm^2/s, and $\nu$ is potential scan rate, V/s, and numerical coefficient has dimensions A*s*mole^{-1} V^{-1/2}. Exactly the same approach was used, e.g. in the papers [12, 13, 18, 24–27]. However, the equation (2) was derived on the assumption that the electrode potential depends on the concentration of the diffusing material under the Nernst equation, i.e. assuming that the activity coefficient of the potential-determining material is strictly equal to one. Objectively, the activity coefficient of diffusing lithium differs markedly from unity. Moreover, when deriving the equation (2), it was assumed that the diffusion coefficient does not depend on the concentration of the diffusing material, while in the two-phase system under discussion it is far from being the case. In the present paper, the approach suggested in the paper [28, 29] was used to analyze voltammetric results. The dependence of the potential on the lithium concentration is described in this case by the updated Nernst equation

$$E = E_0 + (RT/nF)\ln c$$
where \( z \) is adjustable parameter.

The correctness of such approach is proved by the fact that the cathode curve of galvanostatic lithiation, obtained at a relatively low current, with sufficient approximation is linearized in the coordinates \( E, \log c \) in the interval of working potentials (Fig. 10). In this case, the equation (2) should be replaced with the updated equation

\[
I_p = 2.69 \times 10^5 \, Scz^{1/2}D^{1/2}v^{1/2}
\]  

(4)

**Figure 9.** Dependence of the cathode current in the maximum of the voltamogram on the square root of the potential scan rate.

**Figure 10.** Dependence of the electrode potential based on Li_{0.99}Fe_{0.98}Cr_{0.01}Ni_{0.01}PO_4/C on the lithium concentration (cathode curve adjustment)

The slope of straight line in Fig. 10 and equation (3) imply that \( z = 6.68 \). The lithium concentration is 0.02 mole/cm\(^3\). The slope of the straight line in Fig. 9 is 0.22 \( A \, s^{1/2} \, V^{-1/2} \). The visible area of the electrode is 2.25 cm\(^2\). There is considerable uncertainty as to how the true area of the surface on which the diffusion occurs might be assessed. The characteristic crystallite size of the
material being studied amounts to dozens of nanometers. The size of agglomerates can be assessed (by order of magnitude) as 1 µm. In this case, the diffusion front surface is 150 cm².

Calculation using the equation (4) in such case estimates \( D \approx 1.2 \cdot 10^{-14} \text{ cm}^2/\text{s} \), which is agreed for instance with the values obtained in [23, 27, 29, 33, 38]. It should be emphasized that the so calculated lithium diffusion coefficient represents a certain effective value that corresponds to the situation of particle diffusion in isotropic media. The longest diffusion time in the described voltammetric experiments (at the minimum potential scan rate) is 16,000 s. It corresponds to the depth of the front diffusion penetration \( \approx 5 \cdot 10^{-5} \text{ cm} \), which is 10 times less than the characteristic particle size, and does not contradict the assumed plane semi-infinite geometry of the diffusion. It is high time to stress the fact that a wide range of lithium diffusion coefficient in LiFePO₄ (from \( 10^{-15} \text{ to } 10^{-11} \text{ cm}^2/\text{s} \)) have been reported [12, 13, 18, 24–39]. The lack of consistency in literature is likely to be caused by wide variety of synthesis conditions, as well as by errors in diffusion coefficients measurements.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As can be seen from the above, the doping of lithium iron phosphate with trivalent cations of chromium and nickel results in the increase of the discharge capacity at high discharge rates with the simultaneous stability augmentation during the cycling. This effect, at partially, least can be explained by the enhanced electronic conductivity of the material and reduced size of particles in the synthesized material.

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References