

The Effect of Ion, Solvent and Thermal Interaction Coefficients on Battery Voltage. The Case of the Lithium-ion Battery Electrolyte

Øystein Gullbrekken^{1, S}, Astrid Fagertun Gunnarshaug², Signe Kjelstrup³, Anders Lervik¹ and Sondre K. Schnell^{1, C}

¹NTNU, Trondheim, Norway

²HYDS - Hydrogen Solutions, Stord, Norway

³PoreLab, Trondheim, Norway

sondre.k.schnell@ntnu.no

The operation of electrochemical cells like batteries creates internal gradients in chemical potentials, temperature, and electric potential. This brings out central questions like: how do these gradients influence the energy conversion and performance of the cell? And, how do we define and measure this impact? In other words, how do we describe the interplay between the various fluxes of heat, mass and charge? Most often the cell is treated as being isothermal, while this is clearly not the case when electric current is drawn. A systematic thermodynamic procedure is not only useful to model energy conversion and transport. It is needed, as current models and procedures frequently are insufficient. We have chosen to describe the energy conversion using non-equilibrium thermodynamic theory [1]. This classical theory offers a consistent way to obtain flux-force relations, whether they are based on ionic fluxes and their driving forces, or on the neutral component fluxes and their conjugate driving forces. The full set of transport coefficients can be derived directly from the entropy production [1], as well as from corresponding fluctuation dissipation theorems [2].

Using the lithium battery electrolyte as an example, we first demonstrate how the various transport coefficients are interrelated [3]. Entropy production invariance is applied to convert the description using ions as components, to one using neutral salts. The last description is related to experiments. We next present numerical values for a typical ternary battery electrolyte as obtained from molecular dynamics simulations. Electrolyte models, assuming independent movement of ions, fail to capture the Onsager conductivities by a large amount. Using the solvent ethylene carbonate as a frame of reference, the co-solvent diethyl carbonate is moving across the electrolyte, contrary to current views, and create chemical potential gradients that need be overcome during operation. In addition, it is also likely that thermal gradients have an impact on battery voltage [4].

References

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