

Kinetic Behavior of LiFePO_4/C Thin Film Cathode Material for Lithium-Ion Batteries

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Abstract – LiFePO_4 was prepared in a solid state synthesis with various levels of carbon content. LiFePO_4/C thin films were obtained via magnetron sputtering. The surface morphology and structure was examined. Electrochemical properties of LiFePO_4/C were studied, by using cyclic voltammetry, chronopotentiometry and electrochemical impedance spectroscopy. Thin films acquired show a potential use as a cathode in lithium ion batteries, displaying charge capacity up to 34 mAh g^{-1} .

Keywords – electrochemistry, Li-ion batteries, LiFePO_4 , thin films.

I. INTRODUCTION

LiFePO_4 is a cathode material for rechargeable lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries. LiFePO_4 has been recognized as promising due to its good thermal and cycling stability, environmental compatibility, low manufacturing cost and relatively high theoretical charge capacity of 170 mAh g^{-1} [1,2].

As the environmental issues caused by the burning of fossil fuels become more and more urgent, and global warming forces to lower carbon emission, it is necessary to create new, cheaper, safer and less polluting way of storing energy for green technologies such as electric vehicles (EVs). Li-ion batteries offer a relatively easy way of storing energy and have become more and more popular ever since they were first patented in 1991 by Sony [3]. Li-ion batteries are the most popular way of storing energy in EVs, therefore the EV Li-ion battery market is expected to grow from \$ 878 million in 2009 to \$ 8 billion in 2015 [4]. The low cost, high safety and high cyclability of LiFePO_4 make it one of the most promising cathode materials for the use in Li-ion batteries intended for EVs.

The most popular Li-ion battery cathode material is LiCoO_2 [3], other popular cathode materials are LiMn_2O_4 , LiNiO_2 and V_2O_5 [5]. Although it is only recently that the LiFePO_4 batteries have emerged, 10 of 45 EV models manufactured in next 2 years will be supplied with LiFePO_4 batteries, making LiFePO_4 the most popular cathode material in Li-ion batteries intended for EVs [6].

Main problems restricting wider use of LiFePO_4 in Li-ion batteries are its low conductivity and poor rate capability. A possible solution for these problems is the use of the thin film technology and a carbon additive therefore increasing both the surface and the conductivity of the cathode [7,8]. So far little research has been done on the structural and electrochemical characteristics or the kinetics of LiFePO_4 thin films [7, 8, 9, 10, 11].

In this study LiFePO_4/C targets with various carbon content were prepared and sputtered using magnetron sputtering – direct

current (DC), radio frequency (RF) or both combined (DC/RF). The electrochemical characteristics of LiFePO_4/C thin films are related to conditions of preparation, structure, surface morphology and carbon content.

II. EXPERIMENTAL

Pure LiFePO_4 was obtained in a solid state reaction by using stoichiometric amounts of lithium carbonate Li_2CO_3 , iron oxalate $\text{FeC}_2\text{O}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ and ammonium dihydrogen phosphate $\text{NH}_4\text{H}_2\text{PO}_4$ (all from Sigma-Aldrich, $\geq 99.9\%$) as precursor materials. For LiFePO_4/C sucrose or carbon black (both from Aldrich, $\geq 99.9\%$) were added.

The stoichiometric mixture of reagents was first ball milled for 30 minutes. The fine powder obtained was then inserted in a ceramic crucible and heated at a temperature of $650\text{--}750^\circ\text{C}$ for 5–6 hours in a nitrogen atmosphere. A perfectly crystallized LiFePO_4 sample was obtained at 1100°C at N_2 atmosphere.

LiFePO_4/C thin films were deposited on polished stainless steel, glass and silicon by direct current (DC), radio frequency (RF) and combined (DC/RF) magnetron sputtering. The target used for sputtering was obtained by hot pressing the LiFePO_4/C powder on a copper pad (150 mm in diameter) heated to 130°C with a pressure of 20 Pa. The sputtering time and ratio between DC and RF magnetron sputtering were varied in order to obtain various thin film thicknesses of 50 to 1000 nm. A part of the thin films was annealed at 600°C for 1 h in the argon atmosphere to increase the degree of crystallization.

The crystal structure of both thin films and LiFePO_4/C powder was examined by X-ray diffraction (XRD) using a Philips X'Pert Pro MPD diffractometer with CuK_α radiation and by Raman spectroscopy, using an Advantage-785 spectrometer with a laser wavelength of $\lambda=785\text{nm}$. The thin film surface morphology was characterized by scanning electron microscope (SEM) Carl Zeiss EVO 50 XVP. Electrochemical measurements were carried out in a three electrode electrochemical cell was constructed in an argon-filled glove box with a metallic Li as both counter and reference electrodes in a 1 M $\text{LiClO}_4\text{-PC}$ electrolyte (PC – propylene carbonate). The electrochemical measurements of the LiFePO_4/C thin films were performed at 20°C and argon bubbling was performed directly in the cell before each measurement.

Cyclic voltammetry and chronopotentiometry measurements were performed by using Voltalab PGZ-301 potentiostat. Cyclic voltammetry was done for both annealed and non-annealed LiFePO_4/C thin films on a stainless steel substrate. Charge-discharge measurements (chronopotentiometry) were done with

various current densities in a range of 1-100 $\mu\text{A}/\text{cm}^2$. Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) was carried out at various states of charge by applying an AC signal with amplitude of 10 mV in a frequency range from 65kHz to 1 mHz using a Solartron 1287 electrochemical interface with a Solartron 1260 frequency response analyzer.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Structure and Morphology

A mono-crystalline LiFePO_4 sample was synthesized to register the LiFePO_4 reference Raman spectra using 785 nm radiation (Fig. 1). Distinct peaks of Li^+ ion vibrations in the LiFePO_4 orthorhombic olivine structure were observed (362 and 1069 cm^{-1}) as well as sharp peaks of the bonds of PO_4^{3-} tetrahedra ($573, 951, 999\text{ cm}^{-1}$).

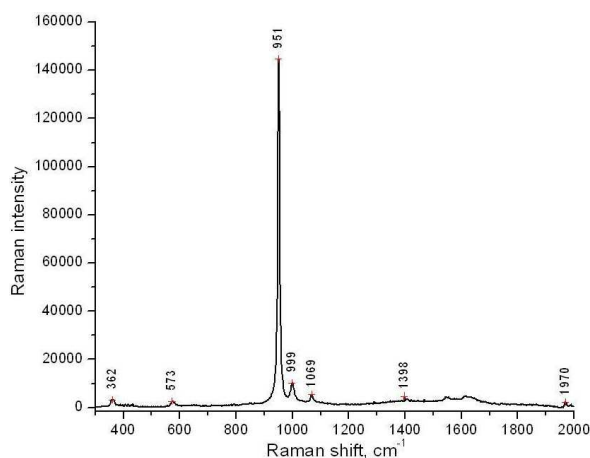


Fig. 1. Raman spectra of pure, highly crystallized LiFePO_4 powder.

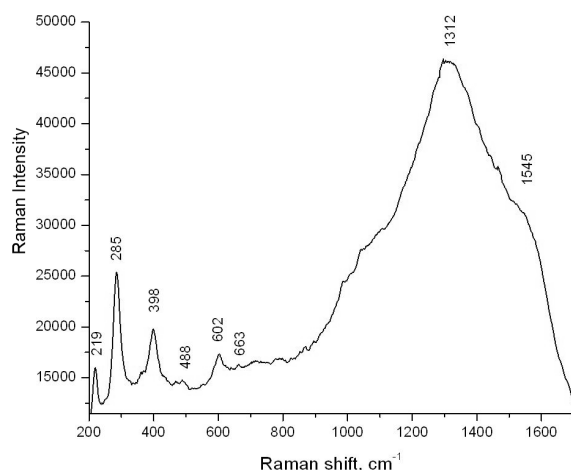


Fig. 2. Raman spectra of LiFePO_4/C powder with 5 wt% carbon content.

In the Raman spectra of synthesized LiFePO_4/C powder (Fig. 2) peaks corresponding to those of LiFePO_4 reference spectra can barely be seen in the background of the very intense and broad peaks at 1312 cm^{-1} and 1545 cm^{-1} corresponding to amorphous carbon G and D bands. It was

impossible to register any Raman spectra for the LiFePO_4 thin films before annealing, while after annealing small Raman scattering was observed. It was too weak, however, to be interpreted.

The XRD pattern of both synthesized LiFePO_4/C powder and thin films are shown in Fig. 3. All observed diffraction peaks can be indexed with the orthorhombic olivine-type structure (space group Pnmb) in agreement with the well-crystalline single phase LiFePO_4 . Diffraction peaks of the thin film are less explicit than those of the powder sample. Nevertheless, they still indicate the same orthorhombic olivine-type structure of the single phase LiFePO_4 .

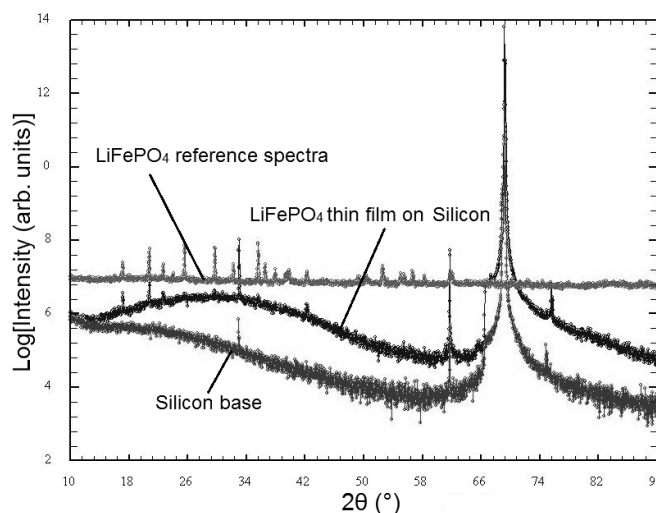


Fig 3. XRD pattern for LiFePO_4/C thin films with 5 wt% carbon black content sputtered on a silicon base.

It is also noteworthy that no Fe_2P phase was observed in synthesized samples even after prolonged periods of heating in elevated temperatures as it is reported in some publications [12].

Morphological research of the LiFePO_4 thin film surface by SEM shows that the thin film formed on a stainless steel substrate is uniform (Fig. 4). It also stays homogenous after the annealing at 600°C . However, some LiFePO_4 microcrystals and bubble-like areas with lower LiFePO_4 densities were also observed after the annealing. It is worth noting, that on silicon substrate the nano-crystalline thin film LiFePO_4 material is trying to condense into larger mono-crystals thus disarranging the structure of the thin film.

The Quadrant back-scattered electron detection (QBSD) analysis of annealed LiFePO_4/C thin film also showed that there is a layer of lighter elements (carbon additive) formed on top of the heavier elements of LiFePO_4 (Fig. 4), which proves that carbon is also deposited during the magnetron sputtering process.

It was shown by the energy-dispersive X-ray analysis, that the annealed film consists of phosphorous, oxygen and iron in relation corresponding to a stoichiometric LiFePO_4 (lithium is too light to be detected with this method).

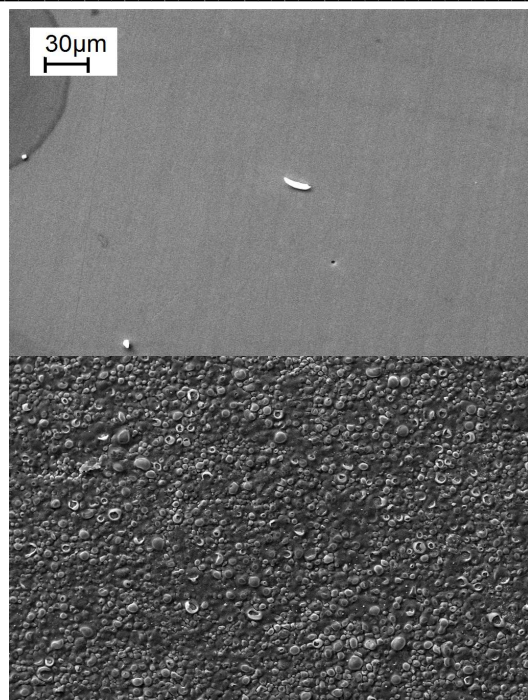


Fig. 4. SEM BQSD image of non-annealed (above) and annealed (below) 50 nm thick LiFePO_4 thin film on a stainless steel substrate.

B. Electrochemical Properties

A distinct couple of anodic and cathodic peaks are observed at 3.3 V and 3.6 V respectively for LiFePO_4/C thin films at the scan rate of 1 mV s^{-1} (Fig. 5) which characterize the electrochemical lithium insertion and extraction reactions from LiFePO_4 [1]. No other red-ox peaks were observed, which indicates that the thin films annealed at 600°C consist of single-phase LiFePO_4 .

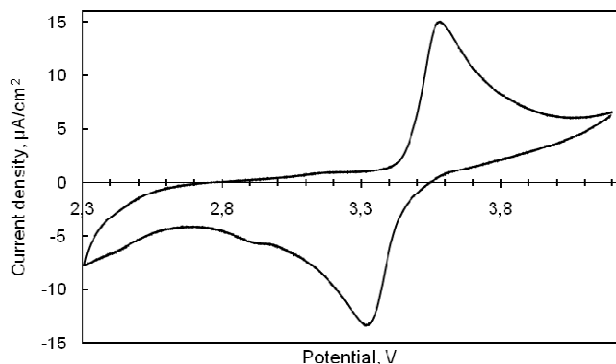


Fig. 5. Cyclic voltammogram of annealed 500 nm LiFePO_4/C (5 wt%) thin film (scanning rate 1 mV/s).

Weak or no red-ox peaks are observed for the non-annealed LiFePO_4 thin films (shown in Fig. 6), showing that lithium insertion and extraction from non-annealed LiFePO_4 thin films are faint or almost not present.

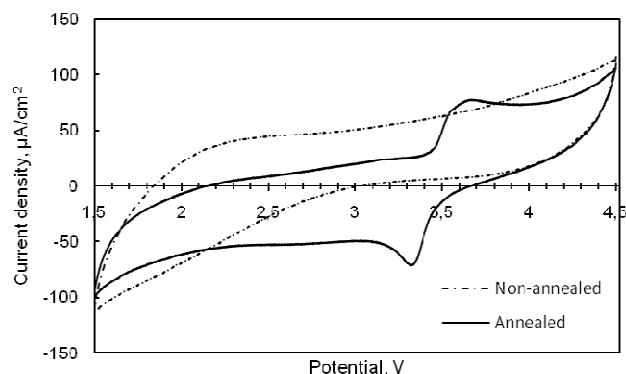


Fig. 6. Cyclic voltammogram of annealed and non-annealed 60 nm LiFePO_4/C (5 wt%) thin film (scanning rate 10 mV/s).

Chronopotentiometry or charge-discharge curves of LiFePO_4/C (5 wt%) 500 nm annealed thin film at a current density of 10 μA/cm^2 are shown in Fig. 7. The obtained discharge capacity at a cut-off voltage of 3.0 V is $34 \pm 5 \text{ mAh g}^{-1}$, which is comparable to results mentioned in other publications [9]. It was assumed that after the voltage of 3.0 V the discharge process might be shifting to other electrochemical reactions (Fig. 5).

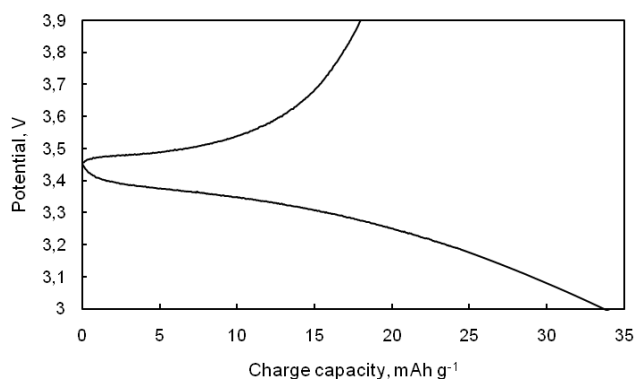


Fig 7. Charge-discharge curves of 500 nm LiFePO_4 thin film annealed at 600°C .

Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) measurements which were performed for LiFePO_4/C thin films in three-electrode cell $\text{LiFePO}_4/1\text{M LiClO}_4\text{-PC/Li}$ with metallic lithium as a reference and a counter electrode. The measurements in an open circuit state, charged and discharged states and during charging and discharging processes were carried out. In order to better describe the processes happening at the LiFePO_4/C electrode - electrolyte interface, equivalent circuits consisting of two resistances (R_e and R_{ct}), constant phase element (CPE) and Warburg element (W_0) were constructed (Fig 8). This equivalent circuit agrees with other publications [10].

During the charging and discharging processes a simplified equivalent circuit without Warburg impedance was obtained (Fig. 9) which means that under the polarization conditions the Li^+ ion diffusion is not the limiting process.

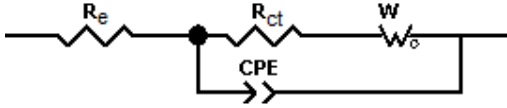


Fig 8. Equivalent circuit used for fitting experimental data for LiFePO₄ at various constant potentials.

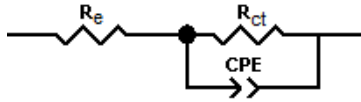


Fig 9. Equivalent circuit used for fitting experimental data for LiFePO₄ during charging and discharging.

Fig. 11, 12 and 13 show the Nyquist plots of the cathode at open circuit potential (OCP), discharged state and with applied charging current respectively. An intercept at the Z' axis in high frequency region represents the ohmic resistance R_e (resistance of cables, electrodes, electrolyte and LiFePO₄/C thin film). The semicircle in the middle frequency range indicated the charge transfer resistance (R_{ct}) of the lithium intercalation reaction. Due to the fact that the semicircle is compressed, a constant phase element CPE is introduced representing the double layer capacitance as well as in inhomogeneities on electrode/electrolyte interface. Finally, the low frequency range represents the Warburg impedance W associated with lithium-ion diffusion in LiFePO₄ particles.

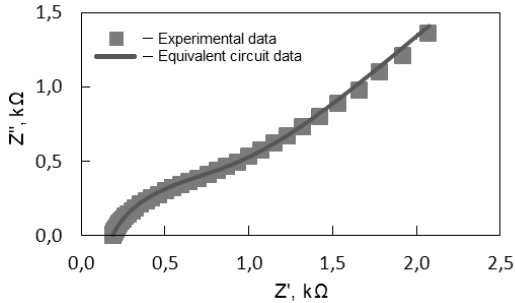


Fig. 11. Nyquist plot and equivalent circuit data for LiFePO₄/C 500 nm thin film at 3.4 V potential.

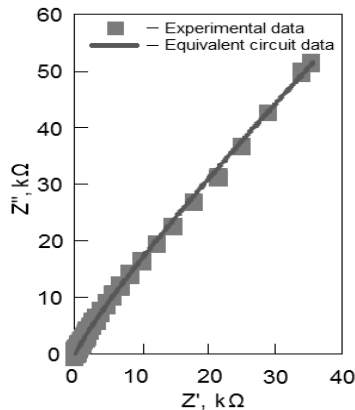


Fig. 12. Nyquist plot and equivalent circuit data for LiFePO₄/C 500 nm thin film at 2.7 V potential.

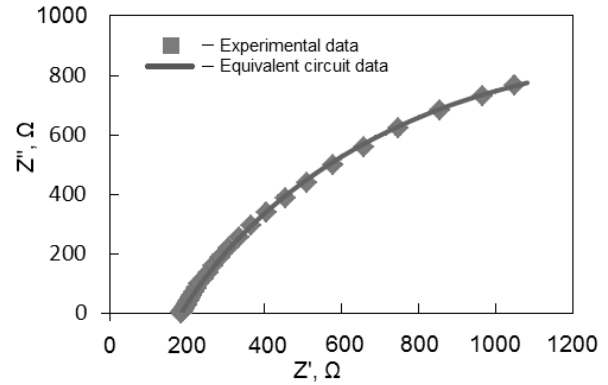


Fig. 13. Nyquist plot and equivalent circuit data for LiFePO₄/C 500 nm thin film with applied charging current (100 μ A).

The parameters of the equivalent circuit obtained by computer simulations are presented in Table 1. The minimum value of the charge transfer resistance is acquired in a discharged state which corresponds to the maximum concentration of Li⁺ ions in lithium iron phosphate. During charging, Li⁺ ions are extracted from the LiFePO₄/C electrode which is accompanied with an increase of R_{ct} . Obviously, the highest charge transfer resistance should be when FePO₄ phase is dominating in LiFePO₄/C electrode.

TABLE 1
NUMERICAL VALUES OF THE ELEMENTS FROM EQUIVALENT CIRCUITS

	Potential E=3.4V	Potential E=2.7V	Potential E=2.9V-4.1V
R_e, Ω	188	190	187
R_{ct}, Ω	762	473	2601
$W2-\sigma, \Omega/s$	1080	17012	-
$CPE-Q, F$	$7.2 \cdot 10^{-5}$	$5.9 \cdot 10^{-5}$	$1.11 \cdot 10^{-4}$
$CPE-n$	0.77	0.82	0.726

IV. CONCLUSION

The LiFePO₄/C powder was synthesized and sputtered on various materials using DC, RF and DC/RF magnetron sputtering methods. Compositional and morphological research of LiFePO₄ thin films by SEM showed that the thin LiFePO₄ films are carbon coated and have coalesced into a uniform nano-structured layer after annealing. Cyclic voltammograms of LiFePO₄ displayed explicit red-ox reaction peaks of 3.3 and 3.6 V. Obtained thin film discharge capacity was 34 mAh g⁻¹. An analysis of electrochemical impedance spectroscopy was conducted, and the three element equivalent circuit gave evidence that under the polarization conditions the Li⁺ ion diffusion is not the limiting process in the LiFePO₄ thin film. The minimum value of charge transfer resistance is acquired in a discharged state which corresponds to the maximum concentration of Li⁺ ions in lithium iron phosphate while the highest charge transfer resistance can be achieved when discharged FePO₄ phase is dominating in the thin film electrode.

V. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by Solid State Institute of Physics, University of Latvia and Scientific Project Contest of Student Council, University of Latvia.

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Gints Kučinskis, Gunars Bajars, Jānis Kleperis, Jānis Šmits. LiFePO_4/C plāno kārtiņu litija jonu bateriju katodmateriāla kinētiskās īpašības

Litija dzelzs fosfāts (LiFePO_4) ir daudzsoļos litija jonu bateriju katodmateriāls tā lielā uzlādes – izlādes reižu skaita, augstās drošības, zemo izmaksu un labās teorētiskās lādinietilpības dēļ. Pēdējā laikā tas kļūst īpaši populārs kā katodmateriāls elektriskajiem automobiļiem paredzētajos litija jonu akumulatoros. Tā galvenais trūkums ir zemā elektrovadītspēja, kas neļauj attīstīt augstu jaudu maza un vidēja izmēra baterijām.

Darbā LiFePO_4 ir sintezēts no Li_2CO_3 , $\text{FeC}_2\text{O}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ un $\text{NH}_4\text{H}_2\text{PO}_4$ cietvielu sintēzes ceļā. Ir veikta LiFePO_4 struktūras analīze. Ar līdzstrāvas, radiofrekvences un kombinēto magnetrona izpūtinašanas metodi iegūtas LiFePO_4 plānās kārtiņas (60 nm – 1500 nm biezas), daļa no tām tiek kristalizētas. Kārtiņām ir veikta sastāva, struktūras un morfoloģijas analīze. Darbā ir izdarīti elektroķīmiskie mērījumi LiFePO_4/I M $\text{LiClO}_4\text{-PC/Li}$ elektroķīmiskajā šūnā ar Li references elektrodu: cikliskā voltamperometrija, izlāde-uzlāde (hronopotenciometrija), elektroķīmiskā impedances spektroskopija (EIS). Ir konstruētas EIS rezultātus aprakstošas ekvivalentās shēmas.

Veiktā cikliskā voltamperometrija LiFePO_4 plānajām kārtiņām uzrādīja stabilu Li^+ jonu interkalācijas spriegumu 3,45 V ar uzlādes un izlādes reakciju maksimumiem atbilstoši pie 3,6 V un 3,3 V. Iegūto plāno kārtiņu gravimetriskā ietilpība (līdz 34 mAh g^{-1}) ir salīdzināma ar literatūrā minēto. Elektroķīmiskās impedances spektroskopijas rezultāti liecina, ka lādiņa pārneses pretestība ir lielāka, ja Li^+ jonu daudzums LiFePO_4 ir mazāks, tātad lādiņa pārneses pretestība palielinās līdz ar FePO_4 fāzes īpatsvara palielināšanos LiFePO_4 .

Гинтс Кучинскис, Гунарс Баярс, Янис Клеперис, Янис Шмитс. Кинетические характеристики LiFePO_4/C тонких пленок как катодного материала в литий-ионных батареях

Литий-железофосфат (LiFePO_4) является перспективным катодным материалом для литий-ионных батарей ввиду достаточно большого срока эксплуатации, высокого уровня безопасности, низкой стоимости и хорошей теоретической емкости заряда. В последние время LiFePO_4 становится особенно популярным катодным материалом в литий-ионных аккумуляторах, предусмотренных для электромобилей. Его основным недостатком является низкая электропроводность, которая препятствует развитию высокой мощности батареи малых и средних размеров.

В данной работе LiFePO_4 синтезирован из Li_2CO_3 , $\text{FeC}_2\text{O}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ и $\text{NH}_4\text{H}_2\text{PO}_4$ методом твердофазного синтеза. Проведен анализ структуры LiFePO_4 . Тонкие пленки (60 нм - 1500 нм) LiFePO_4 получены разными методами магнитного распыления, некоторые из них дополнительно кристаллизованы. Для тонких пленок LiFePO_4 проведен анализ состава, структуры и морфологии. Электрохимические измерения проводились в электрохимической ячейке LiFePO_4/I M $\text{LiClO}_4\text{-PC/Li}$ с Li электродом сравнения: циклическая вольтамперометрия, кривые разряда-заряда, электрохимическая импедансная спектроскопия (ЭИС). Моделированы эквивалентные схемы, описывающие результаты ЭИС.

Исследования LiFePO_4 циклической вольтамперометрии показали стабильный потенциал интеркаляции ионов лития в области 3,45 В с максимумами тока при 3,6 В и 3,3 В для зарядки / разрядки соответственно. Гравиметрическая емкость тонких пленок (до 34 mAh g^{-1}) сравнима с литературными данными. Результаты электрохимической импедансной спектроскопии показали, что сопротивление переноса заряда больше, если количество Li^+ ионов в LiFePO_4 меньше, следовательно, сопротивление переноса заряда возрастает с увеличением доли фазы FePO_4 в LiFePO_4 .