

Electron optical characterization of a supported rhodium catalyst

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Abstract

Both fresh and reduced V_2O_5 -supported rhodium catalyst prepared by wet impregnation were characterized by temperature-programmed reduction, CO gas chemisorption (CO-GC), X-ray diffraction and IR spectroscopy. Complementary structural and morphological investigations were carried out using scanning (SEM) and transmission electron microscopies (TEM).

Reduction of the catalyst at 250 °C in hydrogen led to a predominant support reduction to V_4O_9 . Rhodium particles with different shapes and sizes were observed on the surface of this support. The distribution of particle sizes determined from TEM images is compared with that obtained from CO-GC.

1. Introduction

Many of the catalysts of scientific and industrial importance consist of small particles supported on carriers. Considerable interest has been directed during the last few years to the use of reducible oxides as carriers [1]. These are known to exert a major influence on metal behaviour by strong interaction [2, 3].

An interest in the mechanisms of metal-support interactions motivated the study of rhodium supported on V_2O_5 . The behaviour of a 1 wt.% Rh/ V_2O_5 catalyst was compared with that of a 1 wt.% Rh/ Al_2O_3 catalyst for the hydrogenolysis of butane, a reaction for which rhodium is known to be one of the most active catalysts [4]. In the present paper, we report the physicochemical characterization of the Rh/ V_2O_5 catalyst. This catalyst, both fresh and reduced, was investigated by temperature-programmed reduction (TPR), CO gas chemisorption (CO-GC), X-ray diffraction (XRD), scanning (SEM) and, predominantly transmission electron microscopies (TEM).

One of the most remarkable attributes of TEM is its versatility. It allows new or established phases to be identified by diffraction or from high resolution images. In addition, it is the most appropriate of physical methods to determine the dispersion of metal particles in metal-supported catalysts [5, 6]. Several reviews have been devoted to the use of TEM for characterization of supported metal catalysts [7–10].

2. Experimental details

The 1% in weight rhodium on V_2O_5 catalyst was prepared by impregnating the support, which was prepared from high purity NH_4VO_3 (Aldrich) [11], with an aqueous solution of $RhCl_3 \cdot xH_2O$ (Johnson Matthey). Following the TPR results, a reduced sample of the catalyst was prepared by heating under a stream of H_2 (50 ml min^{-1}) for 2 h at 250 °C.

In our TPR apparatus a mixture of 6% H_2 –94% N_2 gas (20 ml min^{-1}) was directed through the catalyst which was heated at a rate of 5 °C min^{-1} . H_2 consumption was monitored continuously by a thermal conductivity detector.

CO-GC experiments were carried out at room temperature in a pulse flow system using a 10%CO–90%He gas mixture. The catalyst was activated *in situ* by reduction in flowing H_2 at 250 °C for 2 h.

XRD measurements were carried out with a Philips diffractometer, using $Cu K\alpha$ radiation ($\lambda = 0.015418$ nm) at 40 kV and 20 nA.

The IR absorption spectra were registered on a Perkin-Elmer 580-B spectrophotometer from discs containing 2 mg of sample and 300 mg of KBr.

Suitably thin samples for examination by TEM were prepared ultrasonically from suspensions in ethanol. Specimens were mounted on standard 3 mm copper grids covered with a carbon film. Observations were made with a JEOL 1200EX electron microscope.

SEM was undertaken with a Philips 501B instrument operated at 15 kV. Samples were mounted on aluminium stubs and precoated with gold.

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3. Results and discussion

3.1. Temperature-programmed reduction

The TPR trace of the catalyst (Fig. 1(a)) showed a single peak with its maximum at 155 °C. The uptake of hydrogen measured was far more than was necessary for the reduction of rhodium. This peak can therefore be attributed to the reduction of both rhodium and V_2O_5 . As expected, this peak was absent from the TPR trace of pure V_2O_5 (Fig. 1(b)). The reduction of rhodium, supported on non-reducible oxides such as alumina and silica, was found to occur at 167 °C and 178 °C respectively [12].

3.2. X-ray diffraction

The XRD pattern of the fresh catalyst (Fig. 2(a)) was in good agreement with that found for pure V_2O_5 [13, 14]. The reduced sample exhibited an XRD pattern (Fig. 2(b)) with peaks corresponding to both V_2O_5 and V_4O_9 [15]. It can be seen from the relative intensities that the support was predominantly reduced to V_4O_9 .

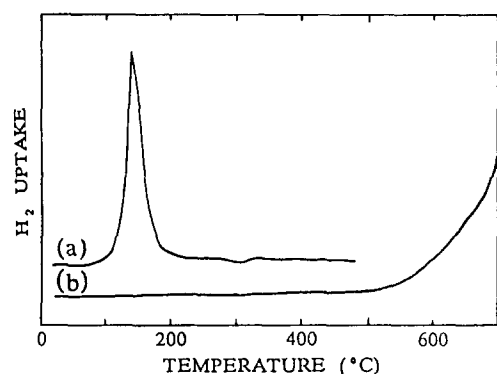


Fig. 1. TPR traces for (a) the fresh catalyst and (b) pure V_2O_5 .

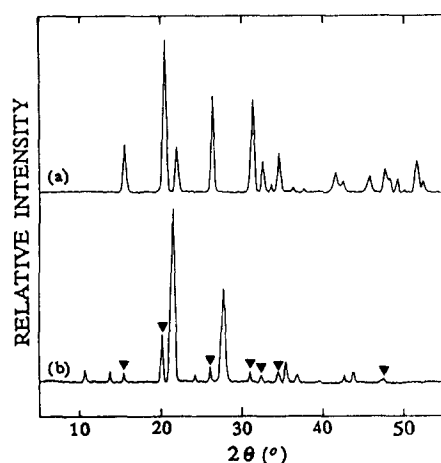


Fig. 2. XRD patterns corresponding to (a) V_2O_5 for the fresh catalyst and (b) a mixture of V_2O_5 (▼) and V_4O_9 for the reduced catalyst.

This reduction was catalysed by the presence of rhodium, as no reduction occurred within detectable limits when pure V_2O_5 was treated under the same conditions.

3.3. IR spectroscopy

The fresh catalyst exhibited an IR spectrum (Fig. 3) which was similar to that found for pure V_2O_5 [14]. Typical of this compound are the bands at 1020 and 995 cm^{-1} which were attributed to the stretching vibration of unshared V=O bonds [16, 17].

The IR spectrum of the reduced sample (Fig. 3) corresponded with that of V_4O_9 [18]. The greater number of peaks in this spectrum, compared with that of V_2O_5 , can be attributed to the fact that vanadium and oxygen atoms occupy more different crystallographic sites in V_4O_9 than in V_2O_5 [19]. In addition, the spectrum represents a V_4O_9 compound with which a certain amount of V_2O_5 is mixed. The considerable weakening of the high frequency bands (1020 and 995 cm^{-1}) after reduction can be explained by the fact that oxygen atoms of the vanadyl groups, which are known to be the most reactive [20], are more affected by the reduction process.

3.4. Transmission electron microscopy

The crystals which were investigated showed lattice images and electron diffraction patterns (EDPs) of corresponding phases characterized by XRD and IR.

The EDP obtained from the fresh catalyst crystals showed rings and/or spots which could be indexed in agreement with the orthorhombic structure of V_2O_5 . High resolution electron microscopy examination of these crystals showed that the support exposed predominantly the (001) plane, with lattice fringes shown in Fig. 4 corresponding to (200) and (110) planes in V_2O_5

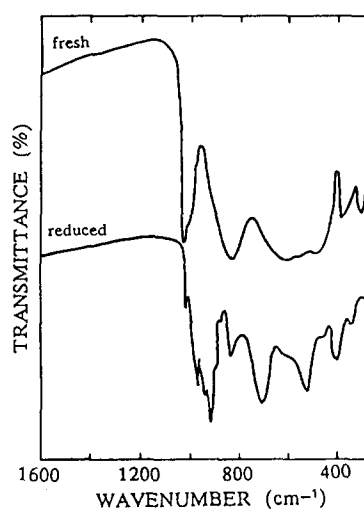


Fig. 3. IR spectra of the fresh and reduced catalysts.

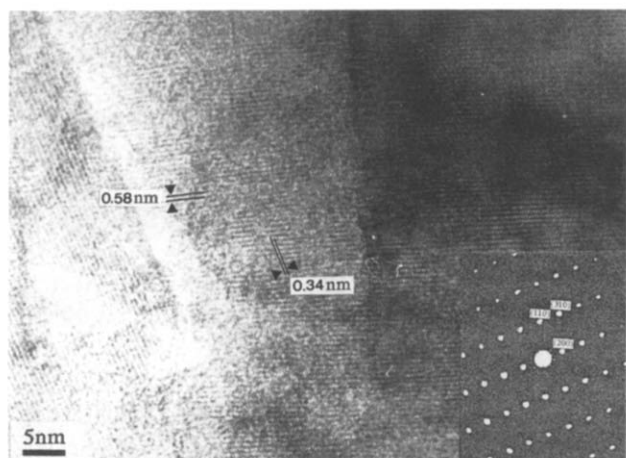


Fig. 4. High resolution electron micrograph of the fresh catalyst with 0.58 nm (200) and 0.34 nm (110) lattice fringes of V_2O_5 . Inset: typical selected area EDP of V_2O_5 .

(a different notation in which the b and c axes are permuted is also used for V_2O_5 [21]).

The reduced catalyst gave an EDP with spotty rings which were difficult to index. The complexity of these EDPs might be due to the fact that they contained reflections arising from both polycrystalline V_4O_9 and V_2O_5 . However, structure determination was possible using selected area electron diffraction. The measured angles of 52° and 38° between the (011) and (002) planes and the (011) and (020) planes (Fig. 5) are close to the calculated values of 51.4° and 38.6° for the tetragonal unit cell, described by Theobald *et al.* [15] for V_4O_9 , and are inconsistent with the orthorhombic structure described by Grymonprez *et al.* [22] for the

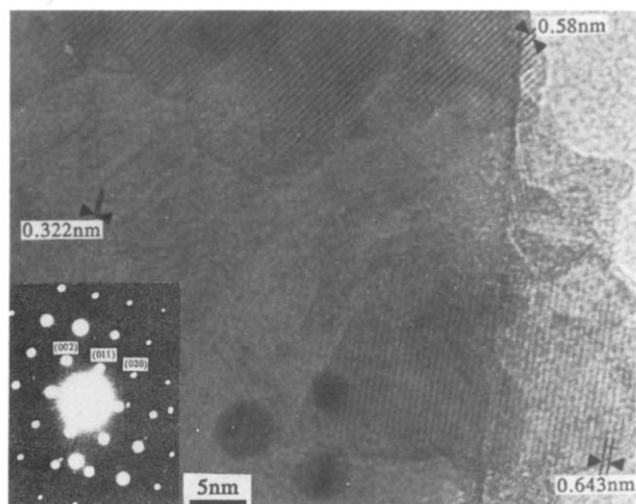


Fig. 5. High resolution electron micrograph of the catalyst reduced at 250°C showing rhodium particles and single crystals corresponding to V_4O_9 (0.643 nm (011) and 0.322 nm (220)) and V_2O_5 (0.58 nm (200)). Inset: selected area EDP of a V_4O_9 single crystal.

same compound. In addition, lattice fringes corresponding to both V_4O_9 and V_2O_5 were observed by TEM (Fig. 5).

Rhodium particles were also observed on the surface of the support (Fig. 6(a)). The shape of these particles was not easy to define. However, many of them presented a hexagonal shape in projection. Such faceting, via the formation of atomically dense crystallographic planes, is said to be indicative of the most stable situation [23]. The particle size distribution, measured from about 1000 particles (Fig. 6(b)), gave an arithmetic mean diameter of 4.3 nm. This value is a little higher than that determined from CO-GC experiments which was found to be 3.8 nm. This is probably due to non-detection of very small particles by TEM. The visibility of very small particles is known to be affected by strongly scattering supports [8], such as in the present case.

3.5. Scanning electron microscopy

Examination of the fresh catalyst by SEM (Fig. 7(a)) revealed that the crystals present the same

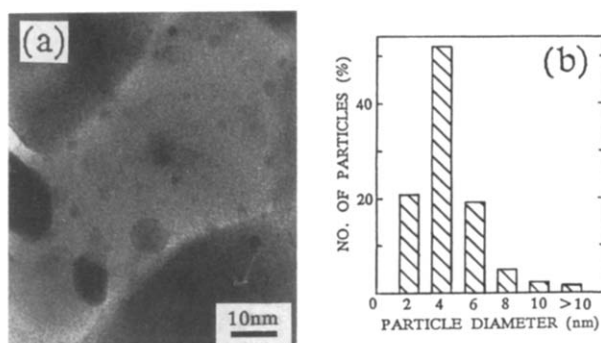


Fig. 6. (a) TEM image of rhodium particles on the reduced catalyst and (b) the corresponding rhodium particle size distribution histogram.

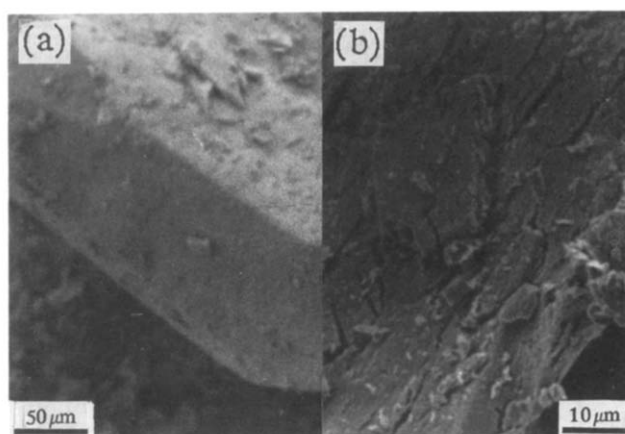


Fig. 7. Scanning electron micrographs of (a) the fresh catalyst and (b) the catalyst reduced at 250°C showing crack formation.

morphological features as those observed for pure V_2O_5 [14, 24]. Reduction of the catalyst at 250 °C resulted in the formation of cracks at its surface (Fig. 7(b)). The presence of these cracks could be explained by loss of mass due to evolution of oxygen from the bulk of the support during the reduction process and structural rearrangement of atoms to form the lower oxide. Similar morphology observations were made by TEM.

4. Conclusions

A 1%Rh/ V_2O_5 catalyst was prepared by impregnation. Consequent to TPR results, it was reduced at 250 °C in hydrogen.

Structural investigation by XRD, IR and TEM showed that the support was reduced largely to V_4O_9 when the catalyst was reduced.

Rhodium particles with different shapes and sizes were observed on the surface of the support for the reduced sample. Their arithmetic mean diameter, determined by TEM, was higher than that obtained from CO-GC, owing probably to problems of detection of very small particles by TEM.

Observations of the morphology of the catalyst by TEM and SEM showed that the support suffered severe shrinkage resulting from mass loss and structural rearrangement of atoms to form lower oxides during the reduction process.

Acknowledgment

Thanks are due to Mr M. Zamama (Faculty of Science Marrakech) for useful discussions.

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