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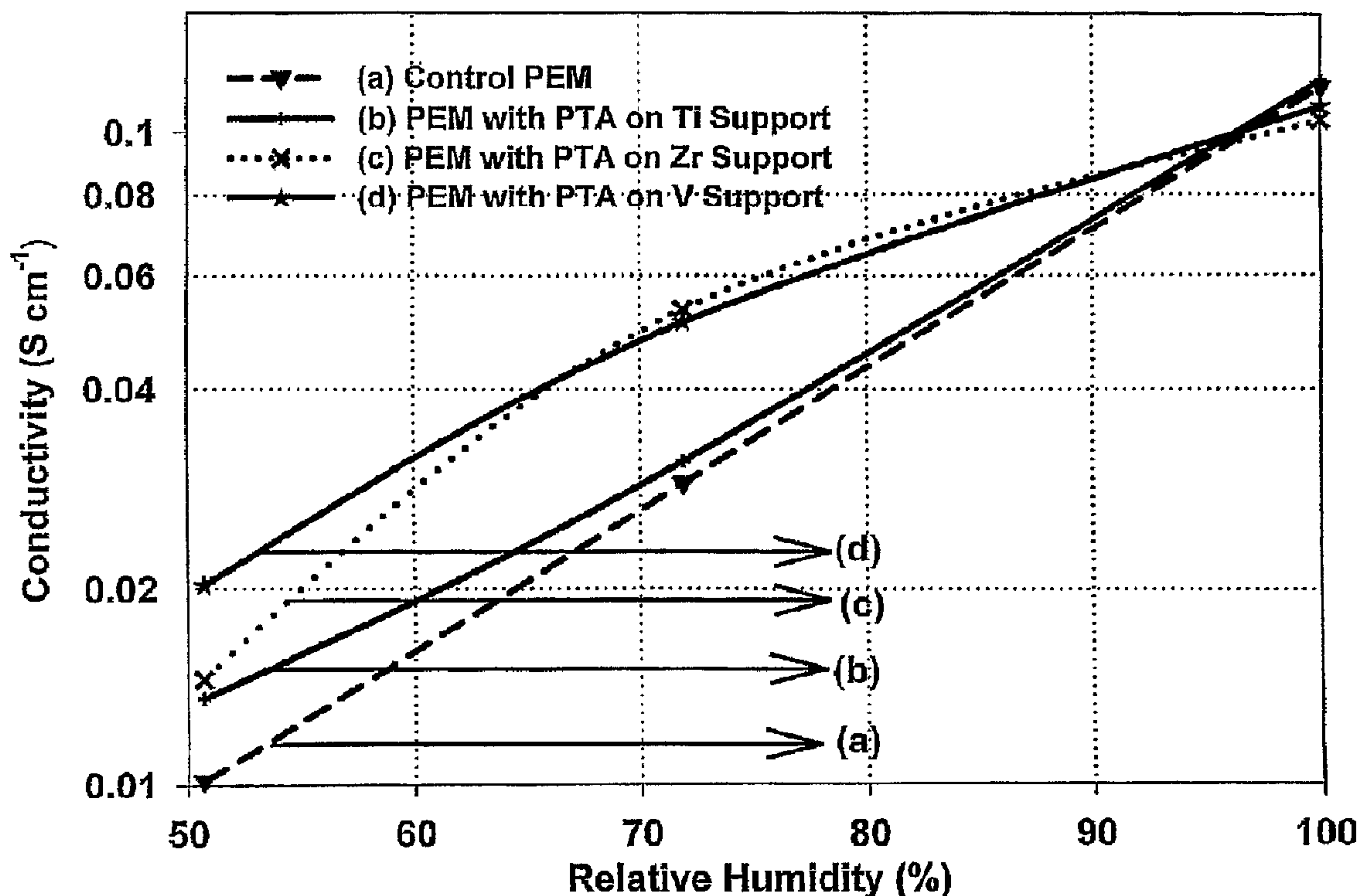
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(54) Titre : COMPOSANTS DE PILE A COMBUSTIBLE COMPRENANT DES HETEROPOLYACIDES IMMOBILISES

(54) Title: FUEL CELL COMPONENTS INCLUDING IMMOBILIZED HETEROPOLYACIDS



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

A fuel cell component is made with a composite including a proton conducting polymer, a water insoluble proton conducting inorganic material, and a heteropolyacid immobilized by chemically bonding to the inorganic material. In another embodiment, the fuel cell component is made with a composite including a non-proton conducting polymer, a water insoluble inorganic material, and a heteropolyacid immobilized by chemically bonding to the inorganic material, the heteropolyacid causing the composite to show proton conductivity. In a further embodiment, the fuel cell component is made with a composite comprising a proton conducting polymer, a water insoluble proton conducting inorganic material, and a heteropolyacid immobilized by chemically bonding to the inorganic material, the composite having substantially identical structure of the unmodified heteropolyacid.

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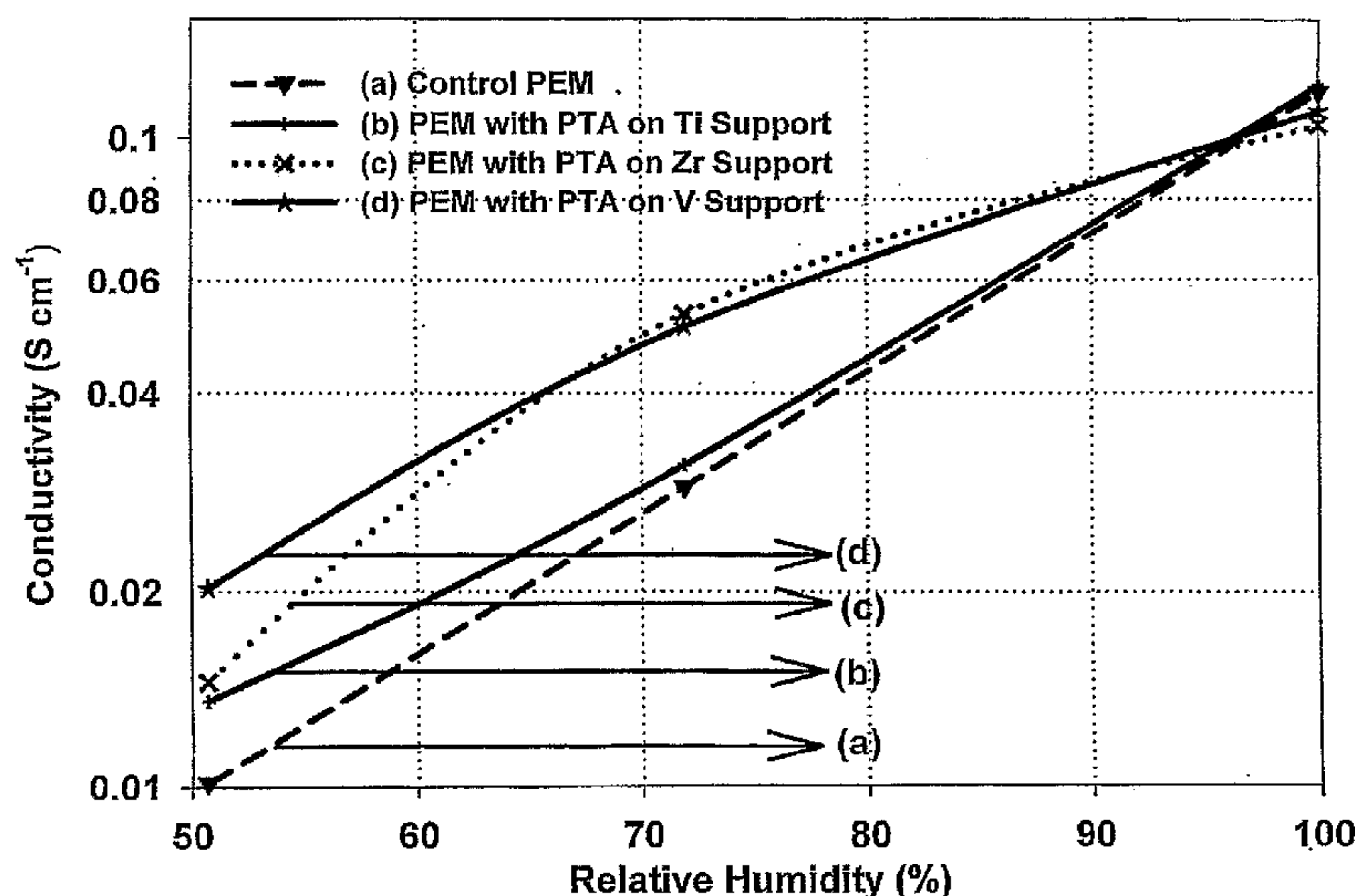
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(54) Title: FUEL CELL COMPONENTS INCLUDING IMMOBILIZED HETEROPOLYACIDS



(57) Abstract: A fuel cell component is made with a composite including a proton conducting polymer, a water insoluble proton conducting inorganic material, and a heteropolyacid immobilized by chemically bonding to the inorganic material. In another embodiment, the fuel cell component is made with a composite including a non-proton conducting polymer, a water insoluble inorganic material, and a heteropolyacid immobilized by chemically bonding to the inorganic material, the heteropolyacid causing the composite to show proton conductivity. In a further embodiment, the fuel cell component is made with a composite comprising a proton conducting polymer, a water insoluble proton conducting inorganic material, and a heteropolyacid immobilized by chemically bonding to the inorganic material, the composite having substantially identical structure of the unmodified heteropolyacid.

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FUEL CELL COMPONENTS INCLUDING IMMOBILIZED HETEROPOLYACIDS

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates in general to fuel cell components, and in particular to polymer-containing fuel cell components such as polymer electrolyte membranes and electrodes. The polymers can include both proton conducting polymers and non-proton conducting polymers.

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Fuel cells are a promising technology for generating electricity with higher efficiency and lower emissions than most current methods. Polymer electrolyte membrane ("PEM") fuel cells include a proton conducting polymer membrane sandwiched between an anode and a cathode. A fuel such as hydrogen or methanol is flowed into contact with the anode where it dissociates into electrons and protons.

25

The electrons, which cannot pass through the membrane, flow from the anode to the cathode through an external circuit containing an electric load, which consumes the power generated by the cell. On the opposite side of the cell, the cathode adsorbs oxygen from the air, generating a potential that pulls the electrons through the external circuit to give them to the adsorbed oxygen. When an adsorbed oxygen receives two

30

electrons it forms a negatively charged oxygen anion. The polymer electrolyte membrane allows the protons to diffuse through the membrane. When two protons

encounter an oxygen anion they join together to form water. In addition to polymer electrolyte membranes, proton conducting polymers can also be used in other fuel cell components. For example, they can be used as binders along with particles of carbon-supported catalyst in the preparation of electrodes for fuel cells.

5 Heteropolyacids ("HPAs") are proton conducting solids often used as additives with a polymer electrolyte membrane to improve the conductivity of the membrane. Unfortunately, HPAs are highly soluble in water and as a result, if they are added by mixing with a proton conducting polymer to prepare a polymer electrolyte membrane, they may be washed away from the membrane during fuel cell operation over a period
10 of time. This may adversely affect the performance of the fuel cell. HPAs with low water solubility such as zirconium hydrogen phosphate have been explored to make polymer composite membranes.

The literature describes composite polymer electrolyte membranes made with HPAs, polymer, and an inorganic material. The composite membranes reported in the
15 literature are either made by a sol-gel process [Grot, W.G.; Rajendran, G. in PCT Int. Appl.; (Du Pont, USA, WO 96/29752, 1996] or by direct mixing of inorganic filler to a polymer solution [Nunes, S.P.; Ruffmann, B.; Rikowski, E.; Vetter, S.; Richau, K. J. Membr. Sci 2002, 203, 215-225]. The sol-gel process leads to uniform distribution of inorganic particles in the polymer matrix. However, controlling the ratio of polymer
20 to inorganic filler is difficult. The direct mixing process adequately controls the amount of inorganic filler in the polymer matrix but it is very difficult to obtain homogeneous distribution of inorganic particles. Furthermore, the particle size obtained from this procedure is large and as a result the membranes do not have adequate strength.

25 M.L. Poncea, L.A.S. de A. Pradoa, V. Silva, S.P. Nunes Desalination 162 (2004) 383-391, describes organic-inorganic membranes for direct methanol fuel cell application prepared from sulfonated polyether ether ketone, containing heteropolyacids and an oxide phase either generated by hydrolysis of amino-modified silanes or by dispersion of surface-modified fumed silica. The heteropolyacid
30 contained epoxy groups that reacted with the amino-groups in the oxide phase. The

reaction provided a covalent bond between the heteropolyacid and the insoluble oxide phase, resulting in its fixation in the membrane.

Ramani et al (Electrochimica Acta 50 (2005) 1181–1187) describes a method for making water insoluble HPA by ion exchanging protons of HPA with cations such as ammonium, cesium, rubidium and thallium. The water insoluble additives are formed first and then they are added to PEM. The particle size of the additives dispersed in the PEM is around a few microns. Furthermore, a 5 weight percent (wt%) loss of these additives occurs in aqueous media.

It would be advantageous to provide improved fuel cell components including polymers and heteropolyacids.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to a fuel cell component made with a composite comprising a proton conducting polymer, a water insoluble proton conducting inorganic material, and a heteropolyacid immobilized by chemically bonding to the inorganic material.

In another embodiment, the invention relates to a fuel cell component made with a composite comprising a non-proton conducting polymer, a water insoluble inorganic material, and a heteropolyacid immobilized by chemically bonding to the inorganic material, the heteropolyacid causing the composite to show proton conductivity.

In a further embodiment, the invention relates to a fuel cell component made with a composite comprising a proton conducting polymer, a water insoluble proton conducting inorganic material, and a heteropolyacid immobilized by chemically bonding to the inorganic material, the composite having substantially identical structure of the unmodified heteropolyacid.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 shows plots of 4-point direct current ionic conductivity versus relative humidity at 80 °C for several different composite polymer electrolyte membranes in air at 0 psig as described in the Examples.

Fig. 2 shows plots of intensity versus Raman shift of a sample of an HPA immobilized on a metal phosphate in comparison with the neat HPA and the neat metal phosphate.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

A fuel cell component according to the invention is made with a composite comprising a proton conducting polymer, a water insoluble proton conducting inorganic material, and a heteropolyacid immobilized by chemically (e.g., covalently) bonding to the inorganic material. The immobilization of the heteropolyacid on the inorganic material prevents it from being washed away from the fuel cell component.

Any suitable heteropolyacid or combinations of different heteropolyacids can be used in the composite. Many different types of heteropolyacids are known and will be developed in the future, and the invention is not limited to any particular type. In some embodiments, the heteropolyacid includes tungsten or molybdenum. Some nonlimiting examples of heteropolyacids include tungsten-based or molybdenum-based heteroatom polyacids such as phosphotungstic acid, phosphomolybdic acid and silicotungstic acid. Some specific nonlimiting examples of heteropolyacids include $H_4SiW_{12}O_{40}$, $H_4SiMo_{12}O_{40}$, $H_5SiV_{11}Mo_{10}O_{40}$, $H_6SiV_2Mo_{10}O_{40}$, $H_7SiV_3Mo_9O_{40}$, $H_3PW_{12}O_{40}$, $H_3PMo_{12}O_{40}$, $H(VO)PMo_{12}O_{40}$, $H(VO)PW_{12}O_{40}$, $H_6PV_3Mo_9O_{40}$, $H_5PV_2Mo_{10}O_{40}$, $H_5PV_2W_{10}O_{40}$, $H_4PVMo_{11}O_{40}$, $H_4PVW_{11}O_{40}$, and $HBiPVMo_{10}O_{40}$. The heteropolyacids may be commercially available or may be prepared by a variety of methods. For example, general syntheses of the polyoxometallates and heteropolyacids are described in Pope et. al., *Heteropoly and Isopoly Oxometallates*, Springer-Verlag, New York (1983).

Any suitable water insoluble proton conducting inorganic material, or combinations of different materials, can be used in the composite. In some embodiments, the inorganic material is a metal compound or a combination of different metal compounds. Some nonlimiting examples of metal compounds include metal halides and metal oxy halides. Any suitable metal or combinations of different metals can be used in the metal compound. Some nonlimiting examples include transition metals such as Ti, V, Mn, Fe, Co, Ni, Cu, Zn, Zr, Mo, Ru, Rh, Pd, Ag, Cd,

W, Pt and Au, and non-transition metals such as B, Al, Ga, In, Tl, Si, Ge, Sn, Se and Te.

The heteropolyacid can be immobilized on the inorganic material and combined with the polymer in any suitable manner to prepare the composite. In one method, an immobilization reaction of the heteropolyacid and the inorganic material is carried out in a solution including the polymer, and the materials are formed into a composite membrane. In another method, an immobilization reaction of the heteropolyacid and the inorganic material is carried out in the polymer film. As a result of the immobilization reaction, in some nonlimiting examples the heteropolyacid is immobilized on a water insoluble metal phosphate or a water insoluble metal phosphonate, or combinations thereof. For example, these may include metal phosphate, metal phosphonate, metal hydrogen phosphate, metal hydrogen phosphonate, metal pyrophosphate, and/or metal sulpho phenyl phosphate.

Preferably, the composite of the polymer, the inorganic material and the heteropolyacid has substantially identical structure of the unmodified heteropolyacid that keeps the associated water molecules in a cage-like structure. As a result of this structure, the composite has a higher acidity, and has a higher conductivity at low humidity. In one embodiment, the composite has an acidity characterized by very high ion exchange capacity greater than 1.0 meq/g. In one embodiment, the composite has a conductivity of at least 0.0001 S/cm at a relative humidity of 50%, for example between about 0.01 and about 0.2 S/cm. Further, any fuel cell components, such as a polymer electrolyte membrane, may have this conductivity.. Preferably, the heteropolyacid and the inorganic material do not include functional groups before they are chemically bonded together; this helps to retain the structure of unmodified heteropolyacid.

The heteropolyacid and the inorganic material can be used in any suitable amounts in the composite. In one embodiment, the amount of immobilized HPA varies from about 0.5% to about 75% by total weight of the composite (the HPA, inorganic material and polymer), preferably from about 0.5% to about 50 wt%, and most preferably from about 0.5% to about 25 wt%. In one embodiment, the weight

ratio of HPA to inorganic material ranges between about 0.1 and about 25, preferably between about 1 and about 20, and most preferably between about 3 and about 12.

The HPA immobilized in the composite preferably has one or more of the following properties: (a) the acidity of the immobilized HPA and the unmodified HPA (before being bonded to the inorganic material in the composite) are substantially identical; (b) the surface area of immobilized HPA is substantially identical to or greater than unmodified HPA; (c) the porosity of immobilized HPA is substantially identical to or greater than unmodified HPA. The HPA in the composite is preferably immobilized to the extent that it is substantially not soluble and substantially not extractable by one or more of the following: (a) liquid water; (b) 1.5 M sulfuric acid; (c) liquid methanol, ethanol, butanol and higher alcohols; (d) hydrogen peroxide; (e) formic acid.

Any type of proton conducting polymer or a combination of different polymers can be used in the invention. In some embodiments, the polymer is a thermoplastic or thermoset aromatic polymer. Some groups of these aromatic polymers include the following: polysulfone (PSU), polyimide (PI), polyphenylene oxide (PPO), polyphenylene sulfoxide (PPSO), polyphenylene sulfide (PPS), polyphenylene sulfide sulfone (PPS/SO₂), polyparaphenylene (PPP), polyphenylquinoxaline (PPQ), polyaryletherketone (PEK) and polyetherketone (PEK) polymers. The polysulfone polymers include polyarylethersulfone (PAS), polyethersulfone (PES), polyetherethersulfone (PEES), polyarylsulfone, polyphenylsulfone (PPSU) and polyphenylenesulfone (PPSO₂) polymers. The polyetherketone polymers include polyetherketone (PEK), polyetheretherketone (PEEK), polyetherketoneketone (PEKK), polyetheretherketoneketone (PEEKK) and polyetherketoneetherketoneketone (PEKEKK) polymers. The polyimide polymers include the polyetherimide polymers and fluorinated polyimides.

Other examples of proton conducting polymers include the following:

- 1) Polymers which have structures with a substantially fluorinated carbon chain optionally having attached to it side chains that are substantially fluorinated. These polymers contain sulfonic acid groups or derivatives of sulfonic acid groups, carboxylic acid groups or derivatives of carboxylic acid groups, phosphonic acid

groups or derivatives of phosphonic acid groups, phosphoric acid groups or derivatives of phosphoric acid groups and/or mixtures of these groups. Perfluorinated polymers include Nafion®, Flemion®, and Aciplex® commercially available from E. I. DuPont de Nemours, Asahi Glass KK and Asahi Chemical Industry respectively. 2)

5 Perfluorinated or partially fluorinated polymers containing aromatic rings which have been functionalized with SO₃H, PO₂H₂, PO₃H₂, CH₂PO₃H₂, COOH, OSO₃H, OPO₂H₂, OPO₃H₂. Also included are radiation or chemically grafted perfluorinated polymers, in which a perfluorinated carbon chain, for example, PTFE, fluorinated ethylene-propylene (FEP), tetrafluoroethylene-ethylene (ETFE) copolymers,

10 tetrafluoroethylene-perfluoroalkoxy (PFA) copolymers, poly (vinyl fluoride) (PVF) and poly (vinylidene fluoride) (PVDF) is activated by radiation or chemical initiation in the presence of a monomer, such as styrene, which can be functionalized to contain an ion exchange group. 3) Fluorinated polymers containing a polymeric chain with pendant saturated cyclic groups and at least one ion exchange group which is linked to

15 the polymeric chain through the cyclic group. 4) Nonfluorinated polymers including hydrocarbons such as styrene-(ethylene-butylene)-styrene, styrene-(ethylene-propylene)-styrene and acrylonitrile-butadiene-styrene co- and terpolymers where the styrene components are functionalized with sulphonate, phosphoric and/or phosphonic groups. 5) Nitrogen containing polymers, for example, polybenzimidazole alkyl

20 sulphonic acid and polybenzimidazole alkyl or aryl phosphonate.

For example, some specific examples of polymers that may be used in the invention are taught in PCT Publication No. WO/2002/025764, published March 28, 2003, and the corresponding U.S. Patent Publication No. 2002/0091225 A1, published July 11, 2012, entitled “Ion-Conducting Sulfonated

25 Polymeric Materials”, and the preferred materials are, in particular, BPSH-xx (Bi Phenyl Sulfone) and 6F-XX-BPSH-XX (Hexafluoro Bi Phenyl Sulfone). As well, other polymers that may be used in the present invention are taught in PCT Publication No. WO/2003/082956, published October 9, 2003, and the corresponding U.S. Patent Publication No. 2006/0036064 A2, published February 16, 2006 ,

30 entitled “Sulfonated Polymer Composition for Forming Fuel Cell Electrodes”; PCT Publication No. WO/2003/067691, published

August 14, 2013, entitled "Polymer Electrolyte
Membranes for Use in Fuel Cells". Other polymers that may be used are disclosed in
U.S. Patent No. 6,670,065 B2, issued December 30, 2003, U.S. Patent No. 6,893,764
B2, issued May 17, 2005, and U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2005/0031930
5 A1, published February 10, 2005. Further polymers that may be used are disclosed in
PCT/US2006/038281, entitled Polymers for Use in Fuel Cell Components.

10

The present invention may be advantageously used with the materials
described therein, which include the materials referred to as Battellion™.

15 For example, PCT/US2006/038281 includes the
following claims: (a) A proton conducting hydrocarbon-based polymer including an
aromatic hydrocarbon polymer main chain, side chains attached to the main chain, and
acid groups attached to the side chains, wherein the acid groups are attached to atoms
on the side chains that are between 7 and 12 atoms away from the main chain. (b) A
20 proton conducting hydrocarbon-based polymer including a semi-fluorinated aromatic
hydrocarbon polymer main chain and side chains attached to the main chain, wherein
the side chains include at least one -CF₂- group in the side chain and an acid group
attached to the side chain. (c) A proton conducting hydrocarbon-based polymer
including an aromatic hydrocarbon polymer main chain and side chains attached to the
25 main chain, wherein the side chains include at least one -CH₂-CF₂- group in the side
chain and an acid group attached to the side chain. (d) A proton conducting
hydrocarbon-based polymer including an aromatic hydrocarbon polymer main chain
and side chains attached to the main chain, and including acid groups attached to both
the main chain and the side chains wherein less than about 65 wt% of the acid groups
30 are attached to the side chains. (e) A proton conducting hydrocarbon-based polymer
including an aromatic hydrocarbon polymer main chain, side chains attached to the

main chain that include at least one aryl ring, and acid groups attached to both the main chain and to the aryl groups of the side chains. (f) A proton conducting hydrocarbon-based polymer including an aliphatic hydrocarbon polymer main chain, side chains attached to the main chain that include at least one deactivating aryl ring, and acid groups attached to the deactivating aryl rings of the side chains. (g) A proton conducting hydrocarbon-based polymer including an aliphatic hydrocarbon polymer main chain, and side chains attached to the main chain that include -CF₂- groups in the chain and an acid group attached to the side chain. (h) A proton conducting polymer capable of forming a complex with an acid and having a metal phosphate or a metal phosphonate chemically bonded to the polymer.

In one embodiment, the proton conducting or non-proton conducting polymer used in the composite has functional groups causing the polymer to act as a steric stabilizer during production of the composite thereby stabilizing the growing particles. For example, the functional groups may be sulfonate groups or any other suitable groups. The steric stabilization helps to create composite particles having a desirably small particle size.

The composite of the polymer, the inorganic material, and the heteropolyacid may be in any suitable form. In one embodiment, the composite is in the form of desirably small particles to improve the properties of the composite. Preferably, the composite particles have an average diameter less than about 30 nanometers.

As described above, the composite can be made with a non-proton conducting polymer. Any suitable non-proton conducting polymer can be used, including any of the non-proton conducting thermoplastic or thermoset polymers known in the art. For example, polymers that are suitable for making films or membranes may be useful for making polymer electrolyte membranes according to the invention. In one embodiment, the chemical bonding of the heteropolyacid to the inorganic material, and its inclusion in the composite, surprisingly causes the composite as a whole to show proton conductivity. When the fuel cell component is a polymer electrolyte membrane, preferably the membrane has a conductivity as mentioned above.

The invention can apply to any types of fuel cell components in which the composites are determined to be useful. Some nonlimiting examples include

membrane electrode assemblies, membranes, electrodes, catalyst inks, gas diffusion layers, and binders for making membrane electrode assemblies.

The fuel cell component, such as a polymer electrolyte membrane, in addition to having improved conductivity, may be able to operate at high temperatures and low humidity. The membrane may have reduced methanol crossover in a direct methanol fuel cell. In addition, the component may have enhanced mechanical and dimensional stability under fuel cell operating conditions.

EXAMPLES

10 Example 1: Immobilization of phosphotungstic acid (3 parts) on Zirconium Phosphate (1 part) in the presence of sulfonated poly(aryl ether sulfone)

In cylindrical reaction jar, weighed 6.1 grams of sulfonated poly(aryl ether sulfone) with 35 % degree of sulfonation and added 50 grams of N,N'-dimethylacetamide and stirred well at room temperature to get a clear homogenous solution. To this solution added 0.64 gram of $\text{ZrOCl}_2 \cdot 8\text{H}_2\text{O}$ and stirred at room temperature for 2 hours followed by drop wise addition of 5 grams of N,N'-dimethylacetamide containing 1.8 gram of phosphotungstic acid. The reaction mixture was heated to 60 °C and maintained the temperature for 30 minutes to obtain a clear product.

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Example 2: Immobilization of phosphotungstic acid (6 parts) on Zirconium Phosphate (1 part) in the presence of sulfonated poly(aryl ether sulfone)

In cylindrical reaction jar weighed 10 grams of the product obtained from Example 1 and added under agitation 0.5 gram of N,N'-dimethylacetamide containing 0.25 gram of phosphotungstic acid. The reaction mixture was heated to 60 °C and maintained the temperature for 30 minutes to obtain a clear product.

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Example 3: Immobilization of phosphotungstic acid (12 parts) on Zirconium Phosphate (1 part) in the presence of sulfonated poly(aryl ether sulfone)

30

In cylindrical reaction jar weighed 10 grams of the product obtained from Example 1 and added under agitation 1.0 grams of N,N'-dimethylacetamide

containing 0.5 gram of phosphotungstic acid. The reaction mixture was heated to 60 °C and maintained the temperature for 30 minutes to obtain a clear product.

Example 4: Immobilization of phosphotungstic acid in a polymer film

5 (Method A)

A known dimension (4 cmX4 cm) of sulfonated poly(aryl ether sulfone) membrane with % sulfonic acid ~ 35 % was taken in a beaker and added 50 milliliter (ml) aqueous solution of $\text{ZrOCl}_2 \cdot 8\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (10 weight/volume %). The contents were heated to 60 °C for 2 hours. The film was removed and the excess solution on the
10 surface of the film wiped using a Whatman 4 filter paper and immersed in 10 weight/volume % aqueous phosphotungstic acid solution. The contents were heated to 60 °C for 2 hours. The sample was then taken out and immersed in 1 N H_3PO_4 for 2 hours at 60 °C. Finally the film was washed well with water till the washings are neutral to litmus paper.

15 (Method B)

A known dimension (4 cmX4 cm) of sulfonated poly(aryl ether sulfone) membrane with % sulfonic acid ~ 35 % was taken in a beaker and added 50 ml aqueous solution of phosphotungstic acid (10 weight/volume %). The contents were heated to 60 °C for 2 hours. The film was removed and the excess solution on the
20 surface of the film wiped using a Whatman 4 filter paper and immersed in 50 ml of $\text{ZrOCl}_2 \cdot 8\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (10 weight/volume %) aqueous solution. The contents were heated to 60 °C for 2 hours. The sample was then taken out and immersed in 1 N H_3PO_4 for 2 hours at 60 °C. Finally the film was washed well with water till the washings are neutral to litmus paper.

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Example 5: Immobilization of phosphotungstic acid (6 parts) on Vanadium Phosphate (1 part) in the presence of sulfonated poly(aryl ether sulfone)

In cylindrical reaction jar, weighed 22.48 grams of 15 wt% sulfonated poly(aryl ether sulfone) in N,N'-dimethylacetamide with 50 % degree of sulfonation
30 and added drop wise 2.52 grams of N,N'-dimethylacetamide containing 1.5 grams of dried phosphotungstic acid. To this mixture added very carefully 0.5 ml of vanadium

oxy chloride and stirred well at room temperature. The reaction mixture was heated to 60 °C and maintained the temperature for 30 minutes and then cooled down to room temperature. The product thus obtained poured on a Teflon mold and dried at 60 °C for 12 hours to get free standing film. The film thus obtained is boiled in 1.5 M sulfuric acid and washed several times with distilled water. The proton conductivity of this film at various humidity conditions is presented in Fig 1.

Example 6: Immobilization of phosphotungstic acid (6 parts) on Titanium Phosphate (1 part) in the presence of sulfonated poly(aryl ether sulfone)

In cylindrical reaction jar, weighed 15.04 grams of 15 wt% sulfonated poly(aryl ether sulfone) in N,N'-dimethylacetamide with 50 % degree of sulfonation and added drop wise 1.67 grams of N,N'-dimethylacetamide containing 1.0 gram of phosphotungstic acid. To this solution added very carefully 1.48 grams of 15 wt% titanium oxy chloride in HCl and stirred well at room temperature. The reaction mixture was heated to 60 °C and maintained the temperature for 30 minutes and then cooled down to room temperature. The product thus obtained poured on a Teflon mold and dried at 60 °C for 12 hours to get free standing film. The film thus obtained is boiled in 1.5 M sulfuric acid and washed several times with distilled water. The proton conductivity of this film at various humidity conditions is presented in Fig 1. The data in Fig. 1 clearly show that the immobilized sample has improved conductivity at lower humidity compared to the control sample, while they have the same conductivity at higher humidity.

Example 7: Immobilization of phosphotungstic acid on zirconium phosphate

To a stirred reaction vessel charged 5 ml of aqueous 10 weight/volume % phosphotungstic acid and added 1 ml of $\text{ZrOCl}_2 \cdot 8\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (10 weight/volume %) aqueous solution. A white precipitate was formed. The product was heated to 60 °C for 30 minutes and cooled to room temperature. The precipitate was washed with distilled water, isolated by filtration and dried to get a free flowing powder product. The Raman spectra of the immobilized sample is compared with neat zirconium phosphate and neat phosphotungstic acid (Fig 2). It is evident from the spectral data that

phosphotungstic acid is successfully immobilized on water insoluble inorganic phosphate support.

Example 8: Immobilization of phosphotungstic acid on vanadium phosphate

5 To a stirred reaction vessel we charged 10 grams phosphotungstic acid, 25 ml dimethyl acetamide followed by very slow addition of 5 ml of vanadium oxy chloride. A reddish brown precipitate thus formed was stirred at room temperature for 1 hour followed by heating at 60 °C for 30 minutes. The precipitate was washed with isopropyl alcohol first and then with distilled water, isolated by filtration and dried to
10 get a free flowing powder product.

Example 9: Immobilization of phosphotungstic acid on titanium phosphate

To a stirred reaction vessel we charged 5 ml of aqueous 10 weight/volume % phosphotungstic acid and added 5 ml of 15 wt% titanium oxy chloride in HCl
15 solution. The pH of the resultant solution was raised to 6.5 using 1N NaOH. The product formed as a white precipitate was heated to 60 °C for 30 minutes and cooled to room temperature. The precipitate was washed with distilled water, isolated by filtration and dried to get a free flowing powder product.

CLAIMS

1. A fuel cell component made with a composite comprising a proton conducting polymer, a water insoluble proton conducting inorganic material, and a heteropolyacid (HPA) immobilized by direct covalent bonding to the inorganic material, the weight ratio of the heteropolyacid to the inorganic material being within a range between 1 and 20, wherein the composite comprises particles having an average diameter less than 30 nanometers.
2. The fuel cell component defined in claim 1 wherein the proton conducting polymer has functional groups causing the polymer to act as a steric stabilizer during production of the composite thereby stabilizing the growing particles.
3. The fuel cell component defined in claim 1 wherein the immobilization of heteropolyacid is carried out in polymer solution or in polymer film.
4. The fuel cell component defined in claim 1 wherein the heteropolyacid includes tungsten or molybdenum.
5. The fuel cell component defined in claim 1 wherein the inorganic material is a metal compound.
6. The fuel cell component defined in claim 1 wherein the inorganic material is metal phosphate or metal phosphonate.

7. The fuel cell component defined in claim 1 wherein the amount of immobilized HPA varies from 0.5 to 75 wt%.

8. The fuel cell component defined in claim 1 wherein the acidity of the immobilized HPA is identical to the acidity of HPA of the same type that has not been immobilized.

9. The fuel cell component defined in claim 1 wherein the immobilized HPA is not soluble and/or extractable by liquid water.

10. The fuel cell component defined in claim 1 wherein the composite has a high acidity characterized by an ion exchange capacity greater than 1.0 meq/g.

11. The fuel cell component defined in claim 1 wherein the inorganic material is selected from the group consisting of metal halides, metal oxy halides, metal phosphates and metal phosphonates.

12. The fuel cell component defined in claim 1 wherein the fuel cell component is a membrane electrode assembly and the composite is used as a binder in the membrane electrode assembly.

13. The fuel cell component defined in claim 1 wherein the fuel cell component is a polymer electrolyte membrane having a conductivity of at least 0.01 S/cm at a humidity of 50%.

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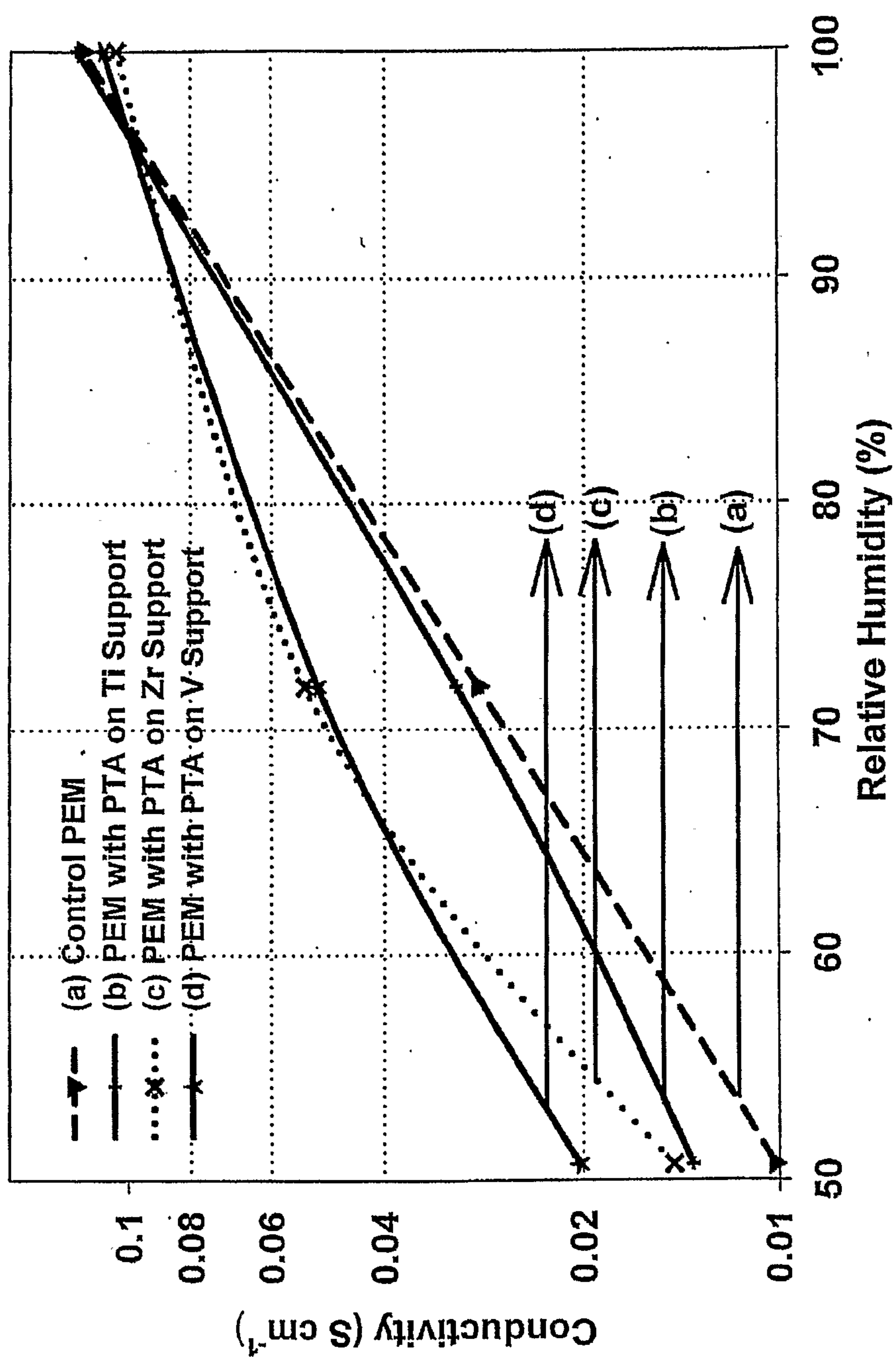


Fig. 1

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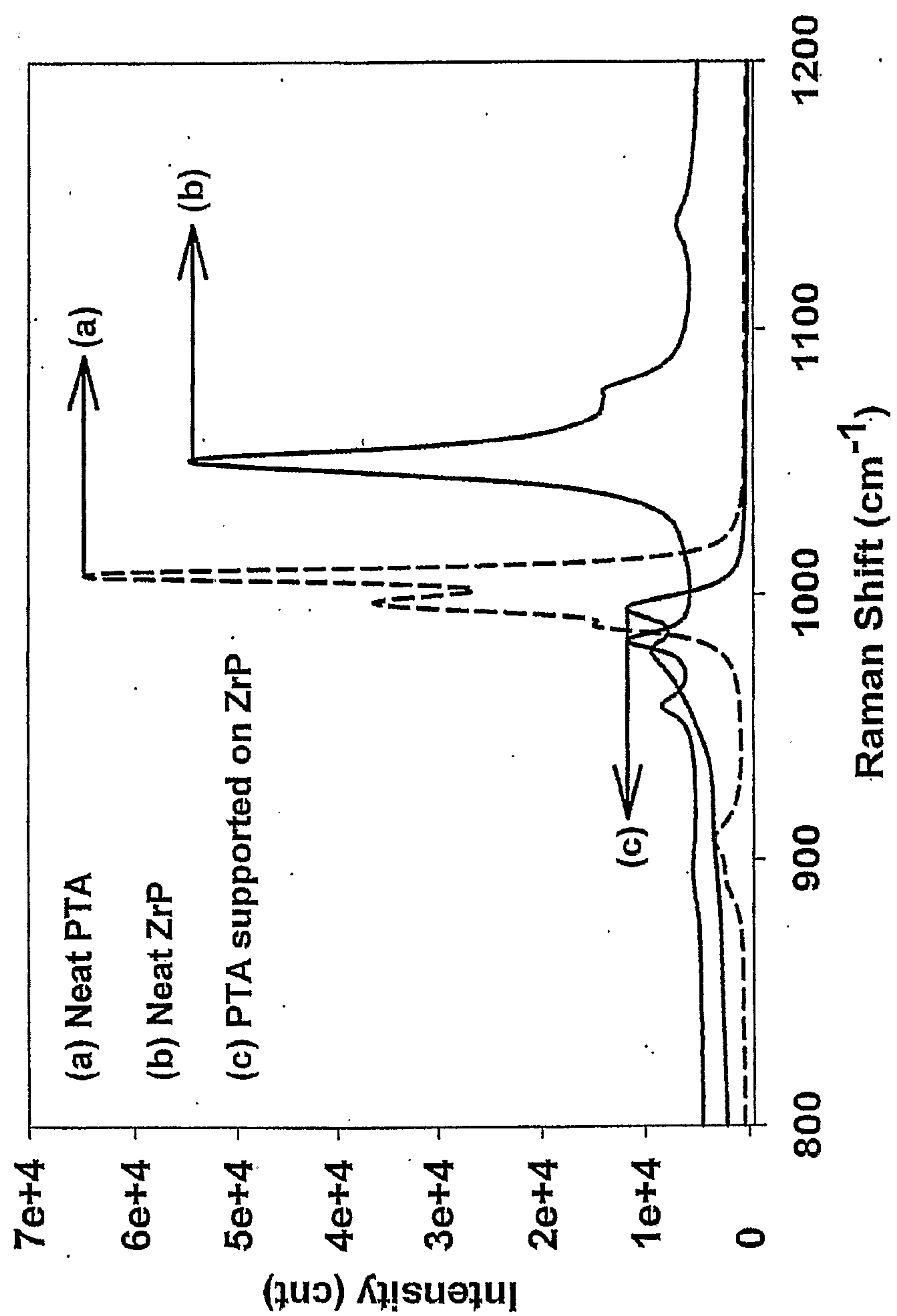


Fig. 2

