Isotope Effects of Electromigration in Molten Lithium-Potassium Sulfate Mixtures

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The difference in mobility of the isotopes of lithium and potassium has been studied in molten sulfate mixtures over the concentration range 41 to 90 equiv. % Li2SO4. For the eutectic composition (80% Li2SO4) the temperature range 625 to 835 °C was covered. The mass effect, \( \mu \), (relative difference in mobility divided by relative difference in mass) was calculated. The accuracy, which is much lower for potassium than for lithium, was not sufficient to provide information on the temperature dependence of the mass effects, but it was evident that the ratio between the mass effects of the two cations depends upon concentration. Thus, while the mass effect for lithium is \( -0.13 \pm 0.02 \) over the whole range, for potassium it is of the order of \( -0.16 \) for the eutectic concentration and \( -0.07 \) for the mixture with 41% Li2SO4. The observed increase of the mass effect at low concentrations is in agreement with results for other systems and can be expected from simple models of the transport mechanism. For lithium the mass effect is the same in the molten sulfate mixtures as in pure fcc lithium sulfate.

We have recently described some electromigration experiments with solid and molten mixtures of lithium sulfate with silver sulfate or potassium sulfate\(^1\). Relative mobilities and transport numbers of the two cations were reported in this paper, called I, and we shall now discuss the isotope effects that were measured in the molten Li2SO4-K2SO4 mixtures. The heavy isotope of both cations was enriched on the anode side of the cell, see Fig. I:4 and I:5, which is in agreement with the isotope effects found in a large number of molten and solid salts.

The same symbols will be used as in I, i.e. \( N = \) equivalents of salt, \( Q = \) total transported charge, Faradays, \( t = \) transport number, \( b = \) ion mobility.

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The subscripts to the right 1, 2 and 3 denote Li, K and SO\(_4\) ions, the superscript 0 marks the initial composition, and, in addition, the subscripts 1 and 2 to the left will indicate the light and heavy isotope of an element. We thus have, e.g. for the relative mobility of the two lithium isotopes\(^2\)

\[
\frac{\Delta b_1}{b_1} = (\frac{N_1}{\bar{N}_1} - \frac{2\bar{N}_1}{2\bar{N}_1}) \cdot \frac{\bar{N}_1}{\bar{Q}} = \mu_1 \frac{m_1}{m_1} (1)
\]

where \( \Delta b_1 = b_1 - \bar{b}_1 \);

\[
\Delta m_1 = 2m_1 - m_1; \quad m_1 = \frac{1}{2} (m_1 + 2m_1)
\]

\( m = \) ion mass, \( \mu = \) mass effect.

The salt samples to be analysed with our mass spectrometer were converted from sulfate to nitrate. As reported in paper I, the difference between the

\(^1\) V. LJUBIMOV and A. LUNDÉN, Z. Naturforsch. 21a, 1592 [1966].

ionic mobilities of the two cations caused considerable changes in the chemical composition. This in turn meant that the samples analysed in the mass spectrometer differed very much in their melting points. For this reason it was for some samples difficult to measure the isotope abundances of both lithium and potassium. Of course, this difficulty could have been overcome by a chemical separation of the sample into a LiNO₃ and a KNO₃ fraction, which then could be analysed separately in the mass spectrometer. However, we desisted from this, partly because there is a risk that a slight isotope fractionation might occur during the chemical manipulations. For each experiment two or three independent series of mass analyses were performed, see Fig. I:4 and I:5, and the mass effect was evaluated separately for each series. The results are given in Table 1. The accuracy is much lower for K than for Li; this has to do both with the accuracy of the mass analyses and with the fact that the transport number \( t \) appears in the denominator of Eq. (1). Considering this latter contribution, it is obvious that errors in our transport number determination (paper I) are of greater importance for the mass effect of a diluted ion (K) than for an abundant ion (Li).

Due to the displacement of the two cations relative to each other, the concentration of K₂SO₄ increased in the upper part of the separation columns for exp. 51—60, cf. Table I:1 and Fig. I:4. Concentration changes of this kind can, in general, be expected to cause density changes, which, in turn, might give rise to convection. This ought not to be a serious problem in the present experiments, since the density at a given temperature is practically the same for all concentrations, e.g. at 750°C an estimation based on recent density measurements gives a difference of 0.5% between the densities of mixtures with 80% and 50% Li₂SO₄. It might be worth mentioning that — in a cell-fixed coordinate system — the volume containing a constant amount (\( N_1 \) equivalents) of Li₂SO₄ increases, while that containing \( N_2 \) equivalents of K₂SO₄ decreases during an experiment (51—60 considered, the opposite occurs for 61). It is of interest in this connection to estimate the practical range of en-

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### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exp. no.</th>
<th>Temp., °C</th>
<th>Li, %</th>
<th>K, %</th>
<th>( \frac{\Delta b}{b} )</th>
<th>Li—K</th>
<th>Li—K</th>
<th>( \mu_L - \mu_K )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>653a</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>635a</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>608a</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>635a</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>723a</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.56c</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.56c</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.56c</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>935</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.56c</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>1035</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.56c</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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richment, defined as

\[ x_{\text{max}} = (\pi D_{\text{eff}} \tau)^{1/2} \]

where \( D_{\text{eff}} \) is the effective coefficient of diffusion, and \( \tau \) is the duration. We have previously used this relation to estimate diffusion coefficients in i.a. molten lithium halides and solid lithium sulfate from a determination of the length of the separation column over which a change in composition can be detected. Of course this length depends on the accuracy of the analyses, and the concept of \( x_{\text{max}} \) thus is ambiguous, but we have estimated this entity for the separation of the two cations, as well as for the two isotope effects, see Table 1. With a couple of exceptions \( x_{\text{max}} \) (Li-K) is the same as \( x_{\text{max}} \) (6-7), while \( x_{\text{max}} \) (39-41) is much smaller. According to Eq. (2) the corresponding \( D_{\text{eff}} \) are of the order of \( 10^{-3} \) to \( 5 \times 10^{-3} \) cm² s⁻¹ for \({^6}\text{Li} - {^7}\text{Li}\), which is much higher than what we found for the molten lithium halides: \((0.3 - 1.3) \times 10^{-3} \) cm² s⁻¹. This indicates that the efficiency of the separation columns was not as good in the present experiments with mixtures as in previous work with pure salts. In a few cases \( x_{\text{max}} \) approaches the column length, and we can then expect that the obtained values for \( Ab/b \) and \( \mu_{Li} \) are low. For \(^{39}\text{K} - ^{41}\text{K}\) a calculation gives \( D_{\text{eff}} \) ranging from \( 10^{-5} \) to nearly \( 2 \times 10^{-3} \) cm² s⁻¹, but these results are to be considered as qualitative, only.

For at least three of the experiments (51, 53 and 55) an anomalous distribution of the K-isotopes was found. Thus after the first zone next to the anode with the expected enrichment of \(^{40}\text{K}\), there followed a zone where the light isotope \(^{39}\text{K}\) was enriched, and then the rest of the column appeared to have the initial composition, cf. Fig. 1:4. As already stated above, the accuracy of the mass analysis is not as good as would be desired for the quantitative interpretation of the isotope effects for K, but the existence of an anomalous enrichment of \(^{39}\text{K}\) is evident for three of the experiments, while it is not established for the experiments at temperatures above 700°C. This anomaly in a mixture seems to be more difficult to interpret than the slight enrichment of the light isotope at the bottom of the separation column, which has been significantly established for pure LiNO₃ and KNO₃. This latter non-ideal behaviour of separation columns is discussed elsewhere; concerning the anomaly reported now, we are currently investigating if it can be detected in other mixtures.

Run 54 differs from the other experiments in several aspects. While the other cells were made entirely of Supremax glass, this cell had its separation column packed with Pyrex glass. The temperature dependence of physical properties of glass is usually denoted by a number of temperatures, which are defined in a rather arbitrary way. E.g. the annealing point, corresponding to a viscosity of \( 10^{13.6} \) poise, is 565°C for Pyrex and 715°C for Supremax. Thus, for run 54 the Pyrex packing was used at about 200°C above this temperature, while of the separation columns packed with Supremax glass, three (no 57, 58, 60) were run slightly above, and one (no 59) about 100° above the annealing point. The Pyrex powder used in run 54 was very strongly corroded, and the salt from the column, i.e. the water-soluble fraction, contained about 10% of oxide.

In this run, and also in 51-53, the separation column was U-shaped, with the lowest point about 8 cm below the opening towards the large reservoir. (The columns used for 55-61 were designed as shown in Fig. 1:1). For run 54 strange distributions were obtained for the two cations as well as for the isotopes. Thus the highest concentration of K as well as enrichment of \(^{7}\text{Li}\) were found at the bend of the column, instead of towards the anode. These strange distributions are probably due to the strong interaction between the Pyrex glass and the sulfate melt. Of importance is that the electrical conductivity of Pyrex is much higher (three orders of magnitude, or perhaps still more) than for Supremax at these high temperatures. This supports our view that ion migration through the Pyrex is by no means negligible in comparison with the transport in the melt. When migrating through the glass, the alkali ions are more “diluted” than when they are in the sulfate melt. It has been observed in different connections, see below and cit11, that the isotope effect increases when an ion is diluted below a critical concentration. This fact might help to explain why the relative mobility of the two cations (\( Ab/b \)) as well as both isotope effects (the accuracy of the mass effect for potassium is, however, low) are higher for run 54 than for any of the other more normal experiments. The observations made for run 54 suggest that the packing of the column can have an influence on the separation effects, but a series of experiments would be required to establish under which conditions this might be the case.

As said above, two or three independent series of measurements of the isotope abundances were made for each run. Specially for K the calculation of the mass effect can be very sensitive to how the normal composition is evaluated. In order to study how the accuracy of the calculations is influenced by the

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precision of the mass analysis as well as by the estimation of the normal composition, for each series of analyses we made several choices of which samples that should be considered as having the normal composition. On an average \( \mu_K \) was computed 11 times and \( \mu_{Li} \) 8 times for each experiment. The ranges within which the mass effects were obtained under reasonable assumptions are quoted in Table 1 for most of the experiments. For each series of analyses the mass effect based on the most plausible assumption regarding the normal composition was chosen, and the average of these \( \mu \)-values was taken as the best value for the mass effect, see Table 1.

For some of the experiments the calculation of \( \mu_K \) is complicated by the enrichment of \(^{39}\)K that was detected in a part of the separation column. In the beginning of such an experiment the isotope composition certainly was the normal one along the whole column. If by some obscure mechanism, see discussion above, an enrichment of \(^{39}\)K is gradually built up in part of the column at the same time as \(^{41}\)K is enriched at the anode side due to the ordinary isotope effect, sooner or later an initial zone with normal composition situated between the two zones with opposite enrichments will disappear. From then on, the enrichment of \(^{41}\)K will proceed with a new reference composition, which probably will be time-dependent. For three experiments we made a calculation of \( \mu_K \) also under the extreme assumption that the hump with a high \(^{39}\)K concentration should be considered as the reference. These \( \mu_K \)-values are in parentheses in Table 1; for all other calculations the possible existence of a hump in the separation column is neglected.

Although the values for both mass effects spread considerably from experiment to experiment, it is possible to draw some conclusions. Six runs (53, 55—59) with an initial concentration of about 80\% Li\(_2\)SO\(_4\) covered the temperature range 625—835 °C. For neither element is the accuracy sufficient to provide evidence on the existence of a temperature dependence of the isotope effect, although, if we assign different weights to the runs (no 58 for which a disturbance occurred during the experiment, gives low results for \( \Delta b/b \) as well as for both mass effects; \( \mu_{Li} \) for no 53 falls far below the other values), there might be an indication that the mass effect for potassium increases with increasing temperatures, while \( \mu_{Li} \) does not show any pronounced temperature dependence. Previous investigations of temperature dependences show that the cation mass effects of molten KCl, KNO\(_3\) and LiCl increase strongly when the temperature is raised\(^{12-14}\), while the \( \mu_{Li} \) of solid Li\(_2\)SO\(_4\) and molten LiNO\(_3\) hardly are affected by the temperature\(^{6,13}\).

The average value of \( \mu_{Li} \) for runs 55, 56, 57 and 59 is \(-0.137\), while \(-0.139\) was obtained as the average for 9 experiments with solid Li\(_2\)SO\(_4\) in the range 600—790 °C. This good agreement might of course be fortuitous, but the closely related isotope effect for the electrical conductivity (pure \(^6\)Li\(_2\)SO\(_4\) versus \(^7\)Li\(_2\)SO\(_4\)) was also found to be the same for the solid and liquid states\(^{15}\); neither is there any temperature dependence over the range 575—930 °C. These observations indicate that the mechanism for cation transport is similar in the two states. On the other hand the relative mobility of cations of two different elements (e.g. Li and K) changes at the melting point, cf. I and cit\(^{16}\).

The experiments cover the concentration range 41 to 90 equiv. \%, Li, i.e. Li\(^+\) is the abundant ion in all experiments but one. The mass effect for this ion does not change significantly with concentration, but a concentration dependence is evident for K\(^+\). There is thus a significant difference regarding \( \mu_K \) between the experiments 51—59 where this ion was diluted and the experiments 60 and 61 where the concentrations of both cations were about the same. It has been observed in several systems, that the mass effect of an ion increases when its concentration is reduced below a certain limit. The first systematical investigation of this concentration effect was made by KLEMM and MONSE who studied \( \mu_{Li} \) in the LiCl—PbCl\(_2\) system\(^{17}\), covering the range 5—100 equiv. \%, Li. When comparing their results and ours, there appears to be a difference in one aspect, namely regarding the range in which the mass effect depends on the concentration. Thus while their \( \mu_{Li} \) was nearly constant over the range 20—100\% Li, our \( \mu_K \) at 20\% K is at least twice as great as at higher concentrations. This difference might be due to the fact that they studied the mass effect of the lighter

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13 A. EKHE and A. LUNDEN, unpublished.
16 Although there is reason to believe that there are significant differences between the mechanisms for electromigration and for diffusion, it might be of interest to note that it has been found also for thermal diffusion that the isotope effects have the same direction in all phases, while the relative displacement of two different cations might change its sign at the melting point, cf. A. LUNDEN and J. E. OLSSON, Z. Naturforsch., in press.
of the two cations in the mixture, while we are considering the heavy cation. The mass effect (in a good conductor, at least) is always less than the ideal value, \( \mu = -0.5 \), since ion motion in a condensed phase involves interaction between a number of particles. This is the common basis for the different models and theories which have been developed by Klemm\(^{11,12,17,18} \). For our discussion it is sufficient to consider the simple model where the ions make two kinds of jumps in a quasilattice\(^{18} \), viz. spontaneous and induced jumps. The number of the first type depends on the vibration frequency of the ion, i.e. on its mass, while the induced jumps are caused by processes in the surrounding of the ion, and their number is not depending on the mass of the isotope. We shall simplify the argument by considering only two-particle interaction. For a mixture of two cations (A\(^+\), B\(^+\)) with a common anion (C\(^-\)) we can distinguish between three types of induced jumps for an A\(^+\) ion, corresponding to A—A, A—B and A—C interaction. If \( n_s \) denotes the number of spontaneous, and \( n_i \) the number of induced jumps per unit time, the mass effect for ion A is thus proportional to \( n_s/(n_s + n_i) \), where

\[
 n_1 = n_{AA} + n_{AB} + n_{AC}.
\]

E.g. the subscript AB corresponds to all interactions where a B\(^+\) ion causes an A\(^+\) ion to make a jump. Regarding the concentration dependence of the mass effect we can distinguish between several cases.

An extreme case is when cation-anion interaction dominates over cation-cation interaction, i.e. \( n_1 \approx n_{AC} \). In this case both \( n_s \) and \( n_i \) are proportional to the concentration \( c_A \), and the mass effect should thus be independent of \( c_A \), loc. cit.\(^{19} \). If cation-anion interaction, and thus also \( n_{AC} \), is negligible, the problem is reduced to an estimation of the relative importance of \( n_{AA} \) and \( n_{AB} \). These terms depend not only on the concentration (being, at least as a first approximation, proportional to \( c_A^2 \) and \( c_A c_B \), respectively) but also on other factors such as the masses \( m_A \) and \( m_B \) of the two ions. This latter fact is obvious if we consider a simple type of interaction, where a hole that has been created when a cation makes a spontaneous jump, is filled by a neighbouring cation which either is "dragged" or "pushed" into the hole. If the A\(^+\) ions are diluted, the number of induced jumps due to A—A interaction is small, while the number of A—B interactions should depend on the ratio between the two masses \( m_A \) and \( m_B \). If \( m_A \ll m_B \) the probability of A—B induced A-jumps is likely to be relatively high, while it should be low if \( m_A \gg m_B \). If we thus study the concentration dependence of both the cation mass effects (\( \mu_A \) and \( \mu_B \)) over the entire range it is probable that the mass effect of the light cation remains about the same over nearly the whole concentration range, while the heavy cation starts to show an increase in the mass effect already at a moderate dilution. Klemm and Monse measured the mass effect only for a very light cation, while we have done so for both cations. However, due to the high melting point of K\(_2\)SO\(_4\)-rich mixtures, we could not extend the present investigation to lower concentrations of Li than 40\%. Due to their low melting points alkali nitrate systems seem to be the most suitable ones to check whether the concentration dependence of the mass effects is asymmetrical in the way we predict here.

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Since the anions often are of a much larger size than the cations, one could have expected a rather efficient screening. Further evidence of cation-cation interaction is given by the fact that the isotope effect for electrical conductivity is larger than for the electromigration studied in this investigation, cf. cit.\(^{18} \).

\(^{18} \) A. KLEMM, E. LINDHOLM and A. LUNDÉN, Z. Naturforsch. 7a, 560 [1952].

\(^{19} \) The fact that we have a concentration dependence in the systems studied so far might thus be taken as evidence that cation-cation interaction always is of importance, in spite of the cations only being next-nearest neighbours.