



Micro-kinetic modeling of NH₃ decomposition on Ni and its application to solid oxide fuel cells

Srinivas Appari^a, Vinod M. Janardhanan^{a,*}, Sreenivas Jayanti^b, Lubow Maier^c, Steffen Tischer^c, Olaf Deutschmann^c

^a Department of Chemical Engineering, IIT Hyderabad, Yeddumailaram, Andhra Pradesh 502 205, India

^b Department of Chemical Engineering, IIT Madras, Sardar Patel Road, Adayar, Chennai 600 036, Tamil Nadu, India

^c Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Engesserstr.20, D-76131 Karlsruhe, Germany

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a detailed surface reaction mechanism for the decomposition of NH₃ to H₂ and N₂ on a Ni surface. The mechanism is validated for temperatures ranging from 700 to 1500 K and pressures from 5.3 Pa to 100 kPa. The activation energies for various elementary steps are calculated using the unity bond index-quadratic exponential potential (UBI-QEP) method. Sensitivity analysis is carried out to study the influence of various kinetic parameters on reaction rates. The NH₃ decomposition mechanism is used to simulate SOFC button cell operating on NH₃ fuel.

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1. Introduction

A practical alternative to challenges of H₂ storage for portable and decentralized power generation is to produce it on site from hydrides. Ammonia (NH₃) is considered as a perfect H₂ carrier and has a worldwide distribution infrastructure (Christensen et al., 2006). Recently NH₃ started gaining attention as a source of H₂ for fuel cell applications (Kaisare et al., 2009; Li and Hurley, 2007). The major draw back of NH₃ is its toxicity which imposes stringent regulations on its emission. Otherwise NH₃ has the advantageous over alcohols and hydrocarbon fuels that it is CO free, and therefore a good source of H₂ for polymer electrolyte membrane fuel cells (PEMFC). However, it may be used directly in solid oxide fuel cells (SOFC) without upstream fuel processing (Fuerte et al., 2009). Motivated by application of NH₃ as a fuel for SOFCs and a source of H₂ for PEMFC, this paper presents a detailed kinetic model for the decomposition of NH₃ on Ni.

There are many studies on direct NH₃ solid oxide fuel cells; some of them are on proton conducting systems (SOFC-H) (Ma et al., 2006b, 2006a; Maffei et al., 2005, 2006, 2008; Ni et al., 2008; Zhang and Yang, 2008), and others are on oxygen ion conducting systems (SOFC-O) (Fournier et al., 2006; Fuerte et al.,

2009; Ma et al., 2007; Meng et al., 2007). Based on open circuit potential analysis Fuerte et al. (2009) concluded that NH₃ oxidation is a two stage process in SOFC; decomposition of NH₃ into H₂ and N₂ and then the electrochemical oxidation of H₂ to H₂O.

Decomposition of NH₃ is a mildly exothermic reaction ($\Delta_R H = 45.9$ kJ/mol) and can be achieved catalytically over Pt, Pd, Rh, Ni, Ru, etc. (Papapolymerou and Bontozoglou, 1997; Löffler and Schmidt, 1976; Choudhary et al., 2001; Zheng et al., 2007). There are many studies on NH₃ decomposition over supported metal catalysts. Choudary et al. systematically studied NH₃ decomposition on Ni, Ir, and Ru catalysts. They found Ni to be less active compared to Ir and Ru. Moreover, their study shows that the catalyst support does play a role in the overall catalytic activity (Choudhary et al., 2001). Most of the NH₃ decomposition studies are carried out at very low pressures. For instance Löffler and Schmidt (1976) studied the kinetics of NH₃ decomposition over Pt catalysts and developed a Langmuir–Hinshelwood rate expression which fitted their experimental measurements. However, the experiments were carried out for pressure ranges of 0.01–1.25 Torr.

Choudary et al. (2001) studied the decomposition of NH₃ on supported metal catalysts at high pressures and temperatures and concluded that Ru is a better catalyst compared to Ni and Ir. In another significant work McCabe (1983) studied the kinetics of NH₃ decomposition over Ni wires at high temperatures and low pressures. These two works serve to validate the model developed in this work.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +91 40 2301 6073.
E-mail address: vj@iith.ac.in (V.M. Janardhanan).

2. Kinetic model

The mechanism of NH₃ decomposition has been assumed to consist of the following steps:



Based on the above mechanism the detailed kinetic model presented here is developed based on the unity bond index-quadratic exponential potential (UBI-QEP) method (Shustorovich, 1990). This phenomenological method treats the energetics of atomic and polyatomic adsorbates on transition metal surfaces by using the chemisorption and bond dissociation energies. Therefore, the input data required for the model development are the chemisorption energy and the gas-phase dissociation energy.

Closed shell molecules such as NH₃ establish a weak bonding with the metal atom and for such cases the chemisorption energy is calculated according to Eq. (7) (Shustorovich and Bell, 2001):

$$Q_{AB} = \frac{Q_{0A}^2}{(Q_{0A}/n) + D_{AB}}. \quad (7)$$

Here Q_{0A} corresponds to the maximum M–A two center bond energy (Shustorovich, 1990). For an ad-atom in an n -fold site the maximum two center bond energy is given by

$$Q_A = Q_{0A}(2 - 1/n), \quad (8)$$

where n is the number of nearest metal atoms. For strongly bonded radicals such as NH and NH₂ the chemisorption energy is calculated according to

$$Q_{AB} = \frac{Q_A^2}{Q_A + D_{AB}}. \quad (9)$$

Based on Eq. (7) we determined the chemisorption energy of NH₃ on Ni to be 75.3 kJ/mol, which is in good agreement with experimental (83.6 kJ/mol) and ab initio calculation (71.1–79.4 kJ/mol) reported, respectively, by Klauber et al. (1985) and Chattopadhyay et al. (1990). The calculated chemisorption energy for NH, NH₂ and NH₃ is given in Table 1.

The mechanism of NH₃ decomposition involves the adsorption of NH₃ from the gas phase on to the Ni surface (Eq. (3)) and the subsequent hydrogen abstraction steps given by Eqs. (4)–(6). The hydrogen and nitrogen atoms recombine to form gas-phase hydrogen and nitrogen (Eqs. (1) and (2)).

Once the chemisorption and dissociation energies of all chemical species are known the activation energy barriers for various

adsorption, desorption, and recombination steps can be evaluated from general thermodynamic relationships. However, in the following treatment, we assign sticking coefficient for adsorption reactions. The sticking coefficient for NH₃ is taken from McCabe (1983). For recombination of chemisorbed A_s and B_s to chemisorbed AB_s or for the associative desorption of chemisorbed A_s and B_s to AB_g the activation barriers $\Delta E_{A-B,s}^*$ and $\Delta E_{A-B,g}^*$ may be the same or different depending on the sign of gas-phase dissociation barrier (Shustorovich, 1990), i.e.,

$$\Delta E_{A-B,s}^* = \Delta E_{A-B,g}^* = Q_A + Q_B - D_{AB} + \Delta E_{AB,g}^* \quad \text{if } \Delta E_{AB,g}^* > 0 \quad (10)$$

and

$$\Delta E_{A-B,g}^* = \Delta E_{A-B,s}^* - \Delta E_{AB,g}^* = Q_A + Q_B - D_{AB} \quad \text{if } \Delta E_{AB,g}^* > 0. \quad (11)$$

The gas-phase dissociation barrier $\Delta E_{AB,g}^*$ can be evaluated according to

$$\Delta E_{AB,g}^* = \frac{1}{2} \left(D_{AB} + \frac{Q_A Q_B}{Q_A + Q_B} - Q_{AB} - Q_A - Q_B \right). \quad (12)$$

The detailed surface reaction mechanism developed here consists of two parts. The first part deals with the catalytic decomposition of NH₃, which has 12 reactions among three gas-phase species and five surface adsorbed species. In the second part additional reactions for H₂ oxidation is considered so that the mechanism can be used for direct NH₃ SOFC as well. The reactions in the second part are taken from Janardhanan and Deutschmann (2006). The complete mechanism is listed in Table 2. Reactions R1–R12 are steps for the decomposition of NH₃ on Ni surface and reactions from R13 to R22 are for hydrogen oxidation on Ni. One needs to consider all the reactions for direct NH₃ SOFC, while reactions from R1 to R12 are sufficient to study NH₃ decomposition on Ni. There are slight variations in the rate parameters for R13–R22 as reported by Janardhanan and Deutschmann (2006). These slight variations are made to ensure that the entire mechanism is thermodynamically consistent. The thermodynamic consistency is explained in the following section.

The net molar production rate \dot{s}_k of a gaseous or surface adsorbed species due to heterogeneous reaction is given by

$$\dot{s}_k = \sum_{i=1}^{R_s} \nu_{ki} k_{fi} \prod_{k=1}^{N_g + N_s} [X_k]^{v_{ki}}. \quad (13)$$

Here R_s is the number of surface reactions; N_g and N_s , respectively, represent the number of gas-phase species and surface species, $[X_k]$ is the concentration of species k , k_{fi} is the forward rate constant for reaction i , and ν_{ki} is the difference in stoichiometric coefficient for species k between the products and reactants in reaction i . $[X_k]$ will have the unit of mol m⁻³ for gas-phase species and mol m⁻² for surface species.

Based on the mean field approximation the forward rate constant is expressed in the Arrhenius form as

$$k_{fi} = A_i T^\beta \exp\left(-\frac{E_{ai}}{RT}\right) \prod_{k=1}^{N_s} \theta_k^{\mu_{ki}} \exp\left(-\frac{\varepsilon_{ki} \theta_k}{RT}\right). \quad (14)$$

Here A_i is the pre-exponential factor and E_{ai} is the activation energy, μ_i is the order dependency, θ is the surface coverage, β is the temperature exponent, R is the gas constant, T is the temperature, and ε is the coverage-dependent activation energy.

3. Thermodynamic consistency

The equilibrium of a chemical reaction

$$\sum_k \nu'_{ki} A_k \rightleftharpoons \sum_k \nu''_{ki} A_k, \quad (15)$$

Table 1

Heats of chemisorption and total bond energies in the gas phase (D) and chemisorbed ($D+Q$) states on Ni(1 1 1).

Adsorbate	D	Q	$D+Q$
H	–	263.5	263.5
N	–	564.8	564.8
NH	338.9	355.6 ^a	694.5
NH ₂	707.0	251.0 ^a	958.1
NH ₃	1167.3	75.3 ^b	1351.4

All energies are in kJ/mol.

^a Calculated according to Eq. (9).

^b Calculated according to Eq. (7).

Table 2
Detailed kinetic model for NH₃ decomposition for SOFC applications.

R no.	Reaction	A (cm, mol, s)	β	E_a^a
NH ₃ decomposition				
R1	H ₂ + (Ni) + (Ni) → H(Ni) + H(Ni)	0.01 ^b	0	0
R2	NH ₃ + (Ni) → NH ₃ (Ni)	0.011 ^b	0	0
R3	N ₂ + (Ni) + (Ni) → N(Ni) + N(Ni)	1.000 × 10 ^{-06b}	0	0
R4	H(Ni) + H(Ni) → H ₂ + (Ni) + (Ni)	3.315 × 10 ¹⁹	0	82.21
R5	NH ₃ (Ni) → NH ₃ + (Ni)	8.210 × 10 ¹⁴	0	78.63
R6	N(Ni) + N(Ni) → N ₂ + (Ni) + (Ni)	4.442 × 10 ²²	0	210.84
R7	NH ₃ (Ni) + (Ni) → NH ₂ (Ni) + H(Ni)	5.723 × 10 ²²	0	78.99
R8	NH ₂ (Ni) + H(Ni) → NH ₃ (Ni) + (Ni)	1.320 × 10 ²⁴	0	48.81
R9	NH ₂ (Ni) + (Ni) → NH(Ni) + H(Ni)	2.718 × 10 ²²	0	75.74
R10	NH(Ni) + H(Ni) → NH ₂ (Ni) + (Ni)	3.702 × 10 ¹⁹	0	74.87
R11	NH(Ni) + (Ni) → N(Ni) + H(Ni)	6.213 × 10 ¹⁹	0	22.93
R12	N(Ni) + H(Ni) → NH(Ni) + (Ni)	2.070 × 10 ¹⁹	0	156.04
H ₂ oxidation (Janardhanan and Deutschmann, 2006)				
R13	O ₂ + (Ni) + (Ni) → O(Ni) + O(Ni)	0.01 ^b	0	0
R14	O(Ni) + O(Ni) → O ₂ + (Ni) + (Ni)	3.928 × 10 ²³	0	473.41
R15	H ₂ O + (Ni) → H ₂ O(Ni)	0.1 ^b	0	0
R16	H ₂ O(Ni) → (Ni) + H ₂ O	4.747 × 1 ¹²	0	62.09
R17	O(Ni) + H(Ni) → OH(Ni) + (Ni)	5.00 × 10 ²²	0	97.90
R18	OH(Ni) + (Ni) → O(Ni) + H(Ni)	1.761 × 10 ²¹	0	36.00
R19	OH(Ni) + H(Ni) → H ₂ O(Ni) + (Ni)	3.000 × 10 ²⁰	0	42.70
R20	H ₂ O(Ni) + (Ni) → OH(Ni) + H(Ni)	2.068 × 10 ²¹	0	91.07
R21	OH(Ni) + OH(Ni) → O(Ni) + H ₂ O(Ni)	3.000 × 10 ²¹	0	100.00
R22	O(Ni) + H ₂ O(Ni) → OH(Ni) + OH(Ni)	5.871 × 10 ²³	0	210.27

^a Arrhenius parameters for the rate constants written in the form: $k = AT^\beta \exp(E/RT)$. The units of A are given in terms of moles, centimeters, and seconds. E is in kJ/mol.

^b Sticking coefficient. Total available surface site density is $\Gamma = 2.49 \times 10^{-9}$ mol/cm².

is completely defined by the thermodynamic properties of the participating species. Expressed in terms of the equilibrium constant K_{pi} , the equilibrium activities a_k^{eq} obey the equation

$$K_{pi} = \prod_k (a_k^{\text{eq}})^{v_{ki}} = \exp\left(-\frac{\Delta_i G^0}{RT}\right). \quad (16)$$

Here R is the gas constant and T is the absolute temperature. The change of free enthalpy ΔG^0 at normal pressure p^0 is given by

$$\Delta_i G^0 = \sum_k v_{ik} G_k^0(T). \quad (17)$$

When the heat capacity is expressed as a fourth order polynomial function of temperature T , then the standard free enthalpies can be expressed in terms of seven coefficients, $a_{0,i} \dots a_{6,i}$ as

$$G_k^0 = a_{0,k} + a_{1,k}T + a_{2,k}T^2 + a_{3,k}T^3 + a_{4,k}T^4 + a_{5,k}T^5 + a_{6,k}T \ln T. \quad (18)$$

In order to predict the correct equilibrium, the rate coefficients for forward and the reverse reaction must obey the equation

$$\frac{k_{fi}}{k_{ri}} = K_{pi} \prod_k (c_k^0)^{v_{ki}}, \quad (19)$$

c_k^0 are the reference concentrations at normal pressure, i.e., $c_k^0 = p^0/RT$ for gas-phase species and $c_k^0 = \Gamma/\sigma_k$ for surface species; here Γ is the total surface site density and σ_k are the site occupancy number for species k . However, one problem in setting up a reaction mechanism is the difficulty to define the thermochemistry data for intermediate species. Therefore, when the thermochemistry data for the intermediate species are unknown Eq. (19) cannot be used to calculate the reverse reaction rate constants. The forward and reverse reaction rates are then defined separately with their own rate laws. Nevertheless, these rates cannot be chosen independently.

Assuming an initial estimate for the rate parameters of a surface reaction mechanism, the rate coefficient for the forward and reverse reactions may be adjusted separately to make the entire mechanism thermodynamically consistent. Suppose that the thermodynamic data for species $1 \dots N_u$ out of N species are

unknown. For each pair of a reversible reactions we can calculate the equilibrium constant according to Eq. (19) and, logarithm of Eq. (16) yields change of free enthalpy. Separation of the known and unknown variables in Eq. (17) leads to

$$\Delta_i G^0 = \sum_{k=1}^{N_u} v_{ki} \tilde{G}_k^0(T) + \sum_{k=1+N_u}^N v_{ki} G_k^0(T), \quad (20)$$

which is a linear equation system for the unknown free enthalpies G_k^0 . Since most species are involved in more than one reaction, this system is usually over-determined. Eq. (18) for several temperatures T_j gives a system of linear equations in the unknown coefficients $\tilde{a}_{i,k}$ (Maier et al., in press):

$$\sum_{k=1}^{N_u} \sum_{l=0}^6 v_{ki} t_{ij} \tilde{a}_{l,j} = g_{ij}, \quad (21)$$

here

$$g_{ij} = \Delta_i G^0(T_j) - \sum_{k=N_u+1}^N v_{ki} G_k^0(T_j), \quad (22)$$

and

$$t_{ij} = \begin{cases} T_j^l & \text{if } l < 6, \\ T_j \ln T_j & \text{if } l = 6. \end{cases} \quad (23)$$

An optimal set of parameters $\tilde{a}_{i,k}$ is determined by a weighted least-square approximation. The weights can be chosen individually for each pair of reactions according to a sensitivity analysis of the reaction mechanism. This guarantees that the equilibrium of crucial reaction steps will be shifted less than others after the adjustment.

The newly adjusted polynomial coefficients are then used to calculate the change of free enthalpy for each reaction (Eq. (20)), the equilibrium constant, and the rate coefficient for the reverse reaction. In case the reverse reaction shall be expressed in terms of Arrhenius coefficients, another least-square approximation using the rate constants at the discrete temperatures, T_j , is performed.

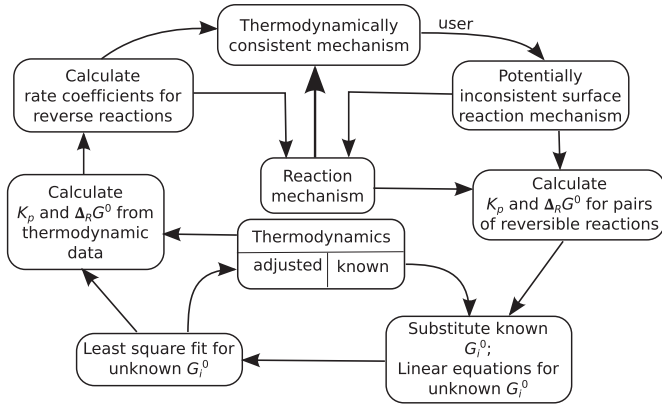


Fig. 1. Illustration of the adjustment algorithm to set up thermodynamically consistent surface reaction mechanisms.

Table 3
Thermochemistry data for various surface adsorbed species at different temperatures.

Species	Enthalpy (kJ/mol)			Entropy (J/mol/K)		
	H_{1123}^0	H_{1023}^0	H_{923}^0	S_{1123}^0	S_{1023}^0	S_{923}^0
H	−30.4	−31.9	−33.5	41.86	40.4	38.8
NH ₃	26.1	19.6	13.4	130.7	124.7	118.3
NH ₂	116.3	112.1	108.2	88.2	84.3	80.26
NH	202.3	200.0	197.8	73.4	71.3	69.1
N	99.1	97.5	96.0	70.1	68.6	67.0

Since we prefer to write surface reaction mechanisms as pairs of irreversible reactions, this procedure has to be repeated during mechanism development after modification of rate coefficients belonging to any of these pairs. Fig. 1 illustrates the algorithm. The difference between this method and the scheme proposed by Mhadeshwar et al. (2003) is that there is no need for the user to select a linearly independent set of reactions. Instead of distinguishing reactions between linear base and linear combinations, all reactions are treated equally by solving the same linear problem using a least-square fit. The thermodynamic properties of the surface adsorbed species at different temperatures after the fitting procedure is given in Table 3.

4. Reactor model

A packed bed reactor model is used to validate the reaction mechanism. An isothermal packed bed reactor model is implemented in FORTRAN assuming

- axial diffusion of any quantity is negligible compared to corresponding convective term,
- there are no variations in the transverse direction.

The species transport equation in one dimension is modeled as

$$\frac{d(\rho u Y_k)}{dz} = a_v W_k S_k. \quad (24)$$

Here a_v is the specific area of the catalyst, u is the superficial velocity within the porous media and W_k is the molecular weight of the species k . Summing the species transport equation over all species N_g leads to the total continuity equation as

$$\frac{d(\rho u)}{dz} = a_v \sum_{k=1}^{N_g} W_k S_k. \quad (25)$$

The pressure in the reactor is calculated according to

$$\frac{dp}{dz} = f \frac{\rho u^2}{d_p}, \quad (26)$$

where d_p is the characteristic dimension of the packing and the density ρ is calculated from ideal gas equation:

$$\rho = \frac{p\bar{M}}{RT}. \quad (27)$$

The friction factor f in Eq. (26) is calculated from Ergun's equation as

$$f = \frac{1-\varepsilon}{2\varepsilon^3} \left[1.75 + \frac{150(1-\varepsilon)}{Re} \right], \quad (28)$$

where Re is the Reynolds number and ε is the porosity. The characteristic dimension d_p of the packing is used to calculate the Reynolds number. The packed bed reactor model is a part of DETCHEM software (Deutschmann et al., 2007).

5. Fuel cell model

Modeling the fuel cell requires the coupled solution of porous media transport, catalytic chemistry and electrochemistry. The porous media transport is modeled using dusty gas model and the catalytic chemistry is implemented using the mechanism developed in this work. The electrochemistry is implemented using a modified Butler–Volmer equation assuming single step electron transfer reactions. More details about the electrochemistry, porous media transport, and the single channel model used in this work are published elsewhere (Zhu et al., 2005). The modified Butler–Volmer equation for the anode side charge transfer is defined as

$$i = i^0 \left[\exp\left(\frac{(1+\beta_a)n_e F \eta_a}{RT}\right) - \exp\left(\frac{-\beta_a n_e F \eta_a}{RT}\right) \right], \quad (29)$$

and for the cathode according to

$$i = i^0 \left[\exp\left(\frac{\beta_c n_e F \eta_c}{RT}\right) - \exp\left(\frac{-(1-\beta_c)n_e F \eta_c}{RT}\right) \right]. \quad (30)$$

Here β_a and β_c are, respectively, the asymmetry factors for anode and cathode sides, F is the Faraday constant, R is the gas constant, T the temperature, and n_e is the number of electrons transferred. Since we consider single step electron transfer reactions, $n_e=1$. The exchange current densities for the anode side and cathode side are functions of temperature and concentration. The exchange current density, respectively, for the anode side and cathode side is calculated according to

$$i^0 = k_{H_2} \exp(-E_{H_2}/RT) \frac{(p_{H_2}/p_{H_2}^*)^{1/4} (p_{H_2O})^{3/4}}{1 + (p_{H_2}/p_{H_2}^*)^{1/2}} \quad (31)$$

and

$$i^0 = k_{O_2} \exp(-E_{O_2}/RT) \frac{(p_{O_2}/p_{O_2}^*)^{1/4}}{1 + (p_{H_2}/p_{H_2}^*)^{1/2}}. \quad (32)$$

In the above equations, p_{H_2} , p_{H_2O} , and p_{O_2} are, respectively, local partial pressures of H₂, H₂O, and O₂. k_{H_2} , E_{H_2} , k_{O_2} , and E_{O_2} are empirical parameters that are adjusted to reproduce experimental observations.

Since the species transport equation considers the porous media transport, concentration losses are not treated explicitly. The activation losses of the anode and cathode sides are related to the cell potential as

$$E_{cell} = E_{rev} - \eta_a - |\eta_c| - \eta_{ohm}. \quad (33)$$

The ohmic overpotential is calculated according to

$$\eta_{\text{ohm}} = L_{\text{el}} / \sigma_{\text{el}}, \quad (34)$$

where L is the length of the electrolyte and σ is the conductivity defined as

$$\sigma_{\text{el}} = \sigma_0 T^{-1} \exp\left(-\frac{E_{\text{el}}}{RT}\right). \quad (35)$$

6. Results and discussion

6.1. Mechanism validation

Thermodynamic analysis of $\text{NH}_3 + \text{O}_2$ system shows that at temperatures below 1000 K (typical operating temperature for direct NH_3 SOFC) the amount of NO_x formed is very much negligible. Six gas-phase species namely NH_3 , O_2 , H_2 , H_2O , NO , and NO_2 are considered for thermodynamic equilibrium calculations. Figs. 2 and 3 show the map of NO and NO_2 mole fraction as a function of temperature for an initial mixture of O_2 and NH_3 . In these figures as the mole fraction of O_2 increases from 0 to 1, the mole fraction of NH_3 decreases from 1 to 0. Composition of NO_2 is maximum at 1500 K for $\text{O}_2:\text{NH}_3$ ratio of 0.2:0.8. However, for NO the $\text{O}_2:\text{NH}_3$ ratio is 0.4:0.6. The experiments performed by Ma et al. (2006b) also reports the absence of NO at the anode exhaust. Furthermore, the partial pressure of oxygen, which results from the dissociative desorption of H_2O in the anode compartment of an SOFC will be much lower than that required for NO_x formation.

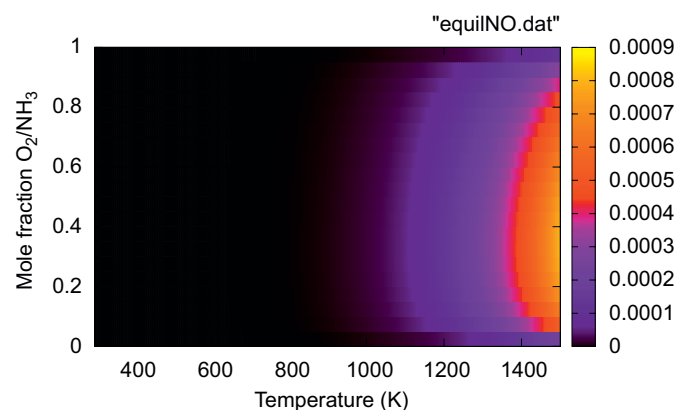


Fig. 2. Map of equilibrium composition of NO resulting from a mixture of O_2 and NH_3 . On the y-axis as the mole fraction of O_2 ranges from 0 to 1, the mole fraction of NH_2 ranges from 1 to 0.

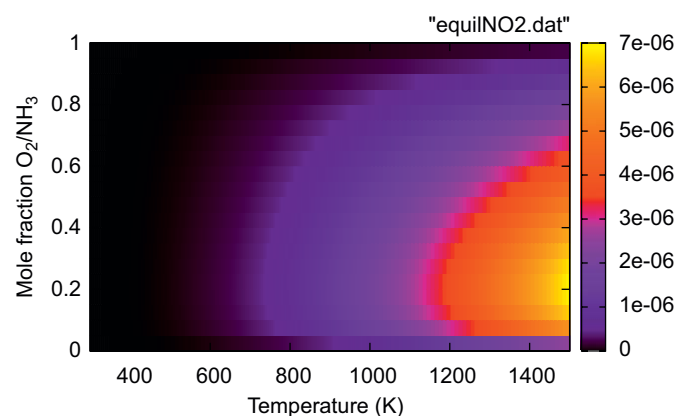


Fig. 3. Map of equilibrium composition of NO_2 resulting from a mixture of O_2 and NH_3 . On the y-axis as the mole fraction of O_2 ranges from 0 to 1, the mole fraction of NH_2 ranges from 1 to 0.

Therefore, in the present mechanism reaction steps leading to the formation of NO_x are not considered.

Although there are numerous studies on catalytic decomposition of NH_3 , there is no consensus on the rate limiting steps of NH_3 decomposition on different catalysts under different operating conditions (Ni et al., 2009). For model validation purpose we consider the data reported by McCabe (1983) and Choudary et al. (2001).

Choudary et al. studied the decomposition of NH_3 decomposition on various supported metal catalysts. A 2-cm long packed bed reactor is used for simulating the experiments reported by Choudary et al. (2001). The geometrical parameters of the reactor and the operating conditions are listed in Table 4 and the reactor model itself is presented in one of the previous sections. A comparison between experimentally observed conversion of NH_3 for Ni supported on SiO_2 and the model predictions at 1 atm is shown in Fig. 4. Very good agreement is observed between the model predictions and the measured values.

Table 4
Packed bed reactor parameters.

Parameters	Value
Length (cm)	2
Diameter (mm)	10
Particle diameter (μm)	20
Porosity (%)	38
Specific area ($1/\text{m}$)	2.8×10^5
<i>Inlet conditions</i>	
Inlet velocity (m/s)	0.1
NH_3 mole fraction	1.0

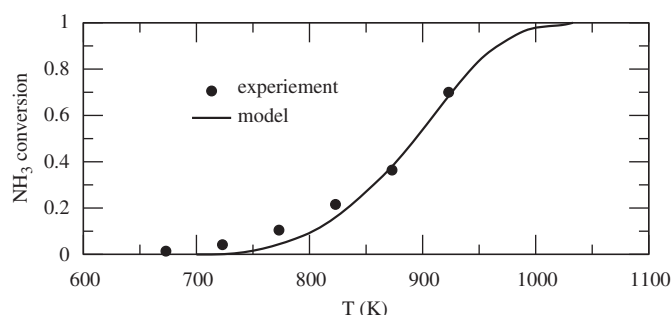


Fig. 4. Comparison of model predictions with experimental measurements of Choudari et al. on 10% Ni/SiO_2 (Choudhary et al., 2001).

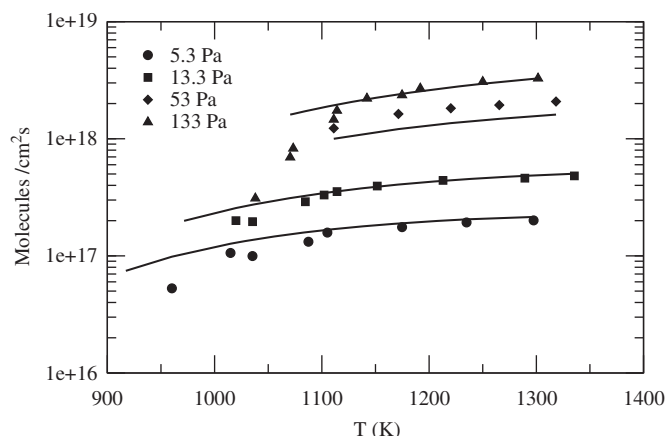


Fig. 5. Comparison of experimentally measured rates with the model predictions. The data points represent the experimental measurements by McCabe (1983), and the lines stand for detailed kinetic model predictions.

McCabe (1983) carried out NH_3 decomposition experiments over resistive heated wires at pressures between 5.3 and 133 Pa and temperatures between 700 and 1400 K. A comparison between the experimentally measured rate and the mechanism predicted rate for the decomposition of NH_3 for the data reported by McCabe is shown in Fig. 5. Again very good agreement is observed between the model predictions and the experimental observations at temperatures above 1000 K for all pressures.

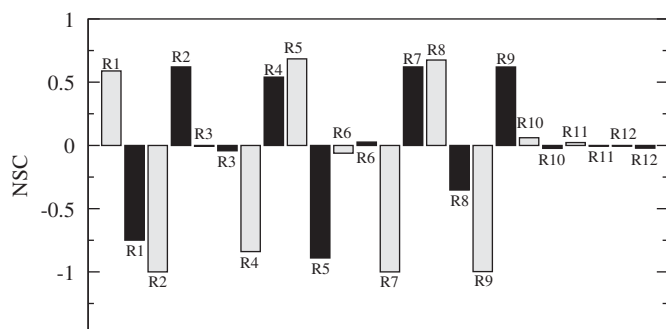


Fig. 6. Normalized sensitivity coefficient (NSC) for NH_3 conversion at 1073 K. Black filled boxes indicate a change of +10% in the pre-exponentials or sticking coefficient, and gray filled bars indicate a corresponding -10% change.

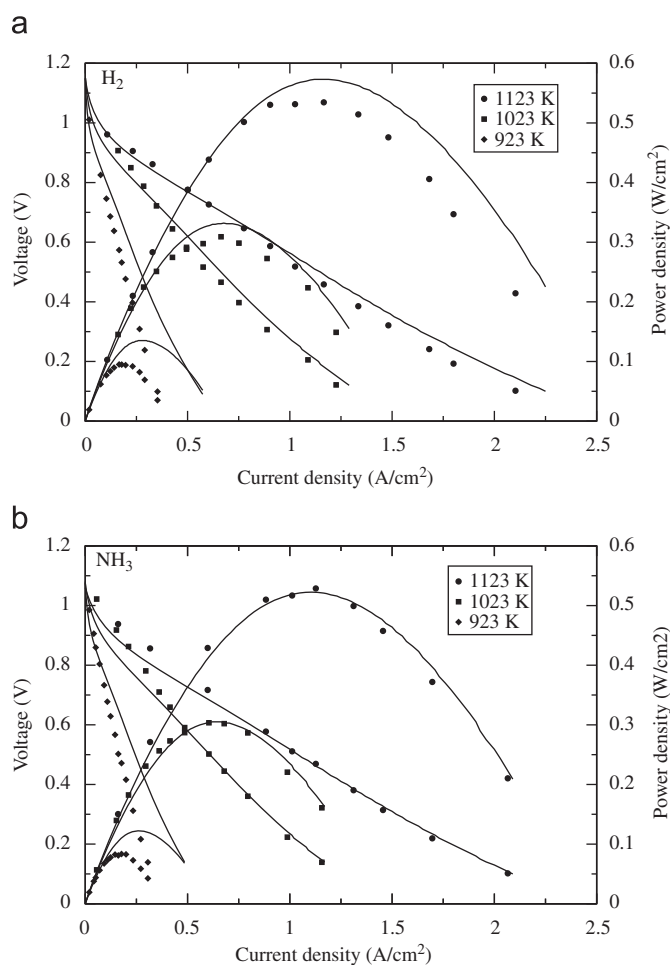


Fig. 7. Comparison between experimentally observed performance curves and the model predictions (Ma et al., 2007). The symbols indicate experimentally measured values and the solid lines represent model predictions. (a) Shows the comparison between the model predictions and experimental observations for H_2 and (b) shows the comparison between model predictions and experimental observations for NH_3 .

6.2. Sensitivity analysis

Sensitivity analysis for the NH_3 decomposition part of the mechanism is carried out by changing the pre-exponential factor (A) of each reaction by $\pm 10\%$, while keeping all other operating parameters constant. The scaled sensitivity coefficient (SSC) for NH_3 conversion is defined as (Mantri and Aghalayam, 2007)

$$\text{SSC} = \frac{X_{\text{NH}_3} - X_{\text{NH}_3}^0}{X_{\text{NH}_3}^0} \quad (36)$$

Here X_{NH_3} indicates NH_3 conversion for $\pm 10\%$ change in pre-exponential factors and $X_{\text{NH}_3}^0$ indicates the conversion for the pre-exponential factors as noted in Table 2. These sensitivity coefficients are further normalized with respect to the maximum SSC. A plug flow reactor model is used for sensitivity analysis. 100% NH_3 is assumed to enter reactor at a velocity of 10 cm/s and 1 atm pressure. The catalytic area to geometric area factor of 100 is chosen so that $\sim 99\%$ NH_3 conversion is obtained for the parameters given in Table 2. The catalytic area to geometric area is a measure of catalyst loading and a higher factor indicates higher catalyst loading (Mladenov et al., 2010). Fig. 6 shows the normalized sensitivity coefficient (NSC) for NH_3 conversion. Small values of NSC indicates that particular reaction has no significant effect on NH_3 conversion. It is quite obvious from the figure that the sticking coefficient of N_2 (R3) does not have any influence on NH_3 conversion, where as decreasing H_2 sticking coefficient and increasing NH_3 sticking coefficient have positive effect on NH_3 conversion. Among the sticking reactions, the sticking coefficient of NH_3 has highest influence on NH_3 conversion. Other than sticking reactions, hydrogen abstraction from surface adsorbed NH_3 (R7) and NH_2 (R9) is the most influential reactions. NH_3 conversion is least affected by the rate constants of reactions R10, R11 and R12.

Table 5
SOFC button cell membrane electrode assembly (MEA) parameters.

Parameters	Anode	Electrolyte	Cathode
Thickness (μm)	500	30	8
Porosity (%)	45	-	45
Tortuosity	3.8	-	3.8
Pore diameter (μm)	1.0	-	1.0
Particle diameter (μm)	1.0	-	1.0
Specific area (m^{-1})	2025×10^3	-	-
Exchange current density, i_0 (A cm^{-2})	2.77×10^4	-	240
Exchange current density, E (kJ/mol/k)	97.5	-	47.9
Symmetry factor (β)	0.3	-	0.2
Ionic conductivity, E_{el} (kJ/mol)	-	80	-
Ionic conductivity, σ_0 (S cm^{-1})	-	3.6×10^5	-

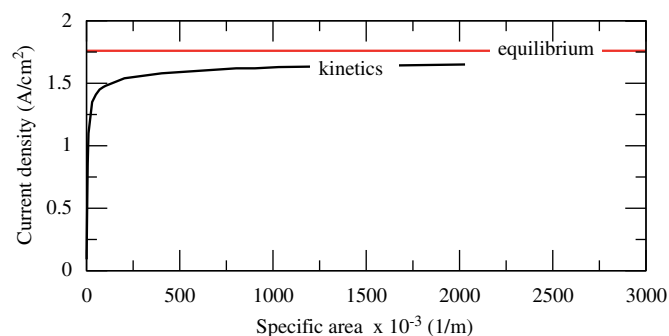


Fig. 8. Limiting current predicted by the kinetic model as a function of specific surface area. The horizontal line represents equilibrium.

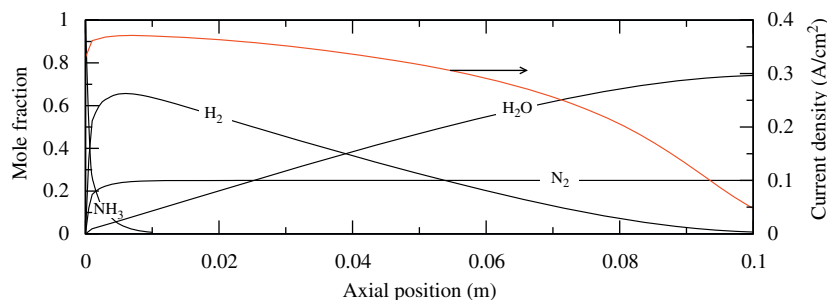


Fig. 9. Species profiles in the fuel channel and current density along the length of a 10-cm long planar cell. 100% NH_3 is considered to enter the fuel channel at 0.1 m/s and air at 5 m/s is in the air channel. The MEA parameters used for this calculation is same as the ones given in Table 5.

6.3. SOFC modeling

Ma et al. (2007) have reported performance of a conventional SOFC button cell (Ni-YSZ/YSZ/LSM-YSZ) at different temperatures using H_2 as well as NH_3 fuel. The micro-kinetic model developed here is used to simulate the experiments and the results are shown in Fig. 7. For carrying out these simulations, we assume that H_2 as the only electrochemically active species and the electrochemical model parameters are fixed by reproducing the experimental observation for H_2 fuel, and the same parameters are applied for NH_3 fuel. Fig. 7(a) shows the comparison between model predictions and experimental observation for H_2 fuel. The model parameters are given in Table 5. The comparison between the experimental observations and the model predictions for NH_3 fuel is shown in Fig. 7(b). Overall, good agreement is observed between the measured values and the model predictions. Under identical conditions the model predicts similar performances for both H_2 and NH_3 , which is in very good agreement with experimental observations. NH_3 which enters the anode compartment decomposes into H_2 and N_2 , and H_2 further participates in the charge transfer reactions. The comparable performance of NH_3 with H_2 indicates that significant conversion of NH_3 occurs in the anode and the presence of N_2 as a diluent does not affect the cell performance adversely. This is again confirmed by running the model with 75% H_2 and 25% N_2 , which gave performance curves very close to that of 99% H_2 under identical operating conditions.

A comparison of kinetically predicted limiting current for button cell as a function of specific surface area is shown in Fig. 8. As the surface area increases, the limiting current approaches the equilibrium predictions. The equilibrium prediction is calculated by considering 75% H_2 and 25% N_2 .

The kinetics model can be quite useful when planar or tubular cell calculations are desired. The species mole fractions and the current density for a 10-cm long planar cell are shown in Fig. 9. The numerical model used to simulate the channel model is presented in Zhu et al. (2005). The channel is modeled under isothermal condition of 1023 K with the same membrane electrode assembly parameters as given in Table 5. 100% NH_3 is considered to enter the cell at a velocity of 0.1 m/s. NH_3 is fully converted within 2 cm from the cell inlet. Although no H_2 is present in the inlet fuel, H_2 is generated within the porous media by catalytic decomposition of NH_3 . The H_2 thus generated takes part in the electrochemical charge transfer reactions occurring at the anode electrolyte interface. The current density drops along the length of the channel because of H_2 depletion.

6.4. Conclusions

We have developed a micro-kinetic model for the decomposition of NH_3 on Ni catalyst. The decomposition mechanism is

supplemented with H_2 oxidations reactions reported previously so that the model can be used for direct NH_3 SOFC. Furthermore, the overall mechanism is made thermodynamically consistent in enthalpy as well as in entropy. The decomposition mechanism is validated by comparing against experimental observations over a wide range of temperatures and pressures. The complete mechanism is used to model the direct NH_3 SOFC experiments reported by Ma et al. (2007). Overall the model predictions are in very good agreement with experimental observations.

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