Lanthanide Modified Cobalt Fischer-Tropsch Catalysts Increases Oxygenate/Olefins Selectivity

Richard Garcia, Mauro C. Ribeiro, PhD, Raimundo C. Rabelo, PhD, Fabio B. Noronha, PhD, I.A. Ferreira, Muthu K. Gnanamani, PhD, Burthon H. Davis, PhD, Gary Jacobs, PhD
The University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX 78249

INTRODUCTION

Fischer-Tropsch synthesis (FT) is a collection of chemical reactions that convert syngas (a mixture of carbon monoxide and hydrogen) into hydrocarbons that can be upgraded to diesel, jet fuels, lubricants, and waxes. These reactions occur in the presence of metal catalysts (e.g., cobalt, iron, or ruthenium) at temperatures of 150-300 °C and pressures between 10 and 30 bar. FT serves as an important reaction in both indirect coal liquefaction, gas to liquids (GTL) technology, and even biomass to liquids (BTL). Researchers are also seeking to use FT technology with modified catalysts to produce feedstock chemicals such as olefins and alcohols, the latter of which can be dehydrated to make ethenes. Therefore, the aim is to use this method as an alternative to producing polyethylene from syngas (H₂+CO) instead of using oil. In conventional FT, carbon monoxide dissociates on Co, and the carbon then gets hydrogenated into a CH₂ monomer. After that, the hydrocarbon chain growth proceeds by adding the monomer. Then, the chain growth terminates by either adding hydrogen to make an alkane, by losing hydrogen to make an alkene, or by adding molecular carbon monoxide to make alcohol.

On a typical Co catalyst, for Fischer Tropsch to make hydrocarbons, there is a low concentration of oxygen vacancy defects in which water is not activated on the support. Thus, molecularly adsorbed CO species (e.g., formate) do not play a significant role in oxygenate synthesis. For these traditional Co catalysts, the support does not participate to a significant degree in the catalytic cycle. Here, we explore using lanthanide supports which have oxygen vacancy defects that can activate water and thus form molecularly adsorbed CO species. Our aim is to use these CO species on the support to terminate hydrocarbon chain growth at the interface between Co and the lanthanide.

We vary the oxygen vacancy concentration (monitoring by x-ray absorption near edge spectroscopy) by changing the identity of the lanthanide, and where possible, compare the alcohol + olefin (A + O) selectivity at constant conversion to determine if a correlation exists between increasing oxygen vacancies and A + O selectivity.

ABSTRACT

To determine the concentration of reduced defects (e.g., oxygen vacancies and their associated bridging hydroxyl groups) we used XANES and EXAFS spectroscopies. Then, we correlated the concentration of defects to the oxygenates. Previously it was shown that when varying the interface between the active support (one with vacancies) and the Co metal, the oxygenate selectivity increased. After that, we use silica doped with different lanthanides that have different concentrations of vacancies to determine if O-vacancies control the selectivity of oxygenates being made.

RESULTS

1) Concentration of reduced defects – the vacancy concentration in catalysts follows the trend of Ce > Gd > Pr > La > Sm

2) Having the lanthanide gives you higher alcohols plus olefins selectivity, as shown in the 30% CO conversion comparison between unpromoted and Gd-promoted Co/Silica. At 20% CO conversion, the alcohols plus olefins selectivity follow precisely the trend in oxygen vacancy defects: Ce > Pr > La > Sm.

Table 1. FT reaction data under the following conditions: T = 220 °C; syngas pressure = 1.99 MPa; H₂/CO = 2.5; syngas hourly space velocity = 2.0 SL/hg.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catalyst</th>
<th>CO ratio (%)</th>
<th>H₂/CO molar ratio</th>
<th>A + O (%)</th>
<th>A/D (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ce</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gd</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sm</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this work is to utilize higher oxygenate/olefin synthesis from syngas as an alternative pathway (i.e., instead of oil) to make chemical feedstocks used to make polymers such as polyethylene found in milk containers, plastic bags, etc.

REFERENCES