Local structure of multiferroic RMn$_2$O$_5$: Important role of the R site

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Abstract
The temperature and magnetic field dependent local structure of RMn$_2$O$_5$ systems was examined. While no significant displacements of the Mn ions are observed, it is found that the R–O distribution exhibits changes at low temperature which are possibly related to the changes in the electric polarization. Density functional computations are used to explore the system dynamics and to link the local structural measurements with anomalous changes in the infrared absorption spectra. The anomalous R–O distribution and observed coupling to magnetic fields point to the need to properly treat the 4f electrons on the R sites in these systems.

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1. Introduction

Magnetic and ferroelectric materials have been extensively studied for several decades from both applied and basic research perspectives. This work has resulted in the development of devices ranging from transformers to hard drive read–head sensors and data storage media [1–3]. Reductions in size and enhancement of sensitivity of magnetic devices, for example, have led to the large increases in data storage capacity with time.

From a microscopic perspective, magnetization can occur as a result of alignment of equivalent spins (ferromagnetism) or antialignment of non-equivalent spins (ferrimagnetism). Non-collinear alignment/antialignment of spins can also produce a net magnetization called canted ferromagnetism/antiferromagnetism. In these materials, the spontaneous magnetization (magnetic polarization) can be reversed and cycled.

For ferroelectric systems, the simple perovskite ABO$_3$ systems such as (PbTiO$_3$) have been extensively studied [2]. These materials possess a spontaneous net polarization below the so-called ferroelectric transition temperature and exhibit analogous hysteretic in the presence of an externally applied electric field. From a microscopic perspective these materials can acquire a net electric polarization due to atomic displacement such as in the ABO$_3$ system where an off center B atom displacement is proposed.

In the ideal displacive ferroelectric system, a symmetry reduction occurs on entering the ferroelectric phase from the high-temperature paraelectric phase. Typical atomic off-center displacements of Ti and Pb in PbTiO$_3$ are approximately 0.2 Å (from XAFS) with onset 190 K above $T_c$ [4]. XAFS analysis has become an invaluable tool for studying ferroelectrics as can be seen from studies on KTb$_{0.89}$Nb$_{0.10}$O$_3$ [5(a)], KNbO$_3$ [5(b)], BaTiO$_3$[5(c)], PbZr$_{1-x}$Ti$_x$O$_3$ [5(d)], BaTi$_{1-x}$Zr$_x$O$_3$ [5(e)].

Magneto-electric multiferroics are a class of materials which are simultaneously ferroelectric and ferromagnetic [3,6]. The possibility of coupling of the magnetic and electric properties will enable new functions. These include the ability to store data as both magnetic and electrical bits and the ability to write ferroelectric bits with magnetic fields. Although broad classes of ferromagnetic materials and ferroelectric materials exist, not many multiferroic materials have been observed. It has been suggested in by Hill [3] that while the 3d occupancy on ABO$_3$ systems creates unpaired electrons needed for magnetism it also stabilizes inversion center preserving distortions. Magneto-electric effects have been explored in systems such as Ti$_2$O$_5$, GaFeO$_3$, boracite, TbPO$_4$, BiFeO$_3$ and BiMnO$_3$ [6]. The characteristic feature of these systems is the weak coupling between the magnetic and electric components.

Hur et al. [7] discovered reversible switching below 40 K in the system TbMn$_2$O$_5$ (composed of c-axis MnO$_6$ polyhedral chains cross-linked by MnO$_5$ pyramids, Fig. 1). By sweeping the magnetic field from zero to two Tesla the polarization passes through zero and attains a value with magnitude – equal to the zero field value. Reducing the field to zero recovers the initial state. The magnitude of the polarization in zero field is $\approx 40$ nC/cm$^2$. Thus the RMn$_2$O$_5$ system shows promise for enabling an understanding of the

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coupling spin and lattice degrees of freedom and for the development of devices (if the magnetic and electrical transition temperatures can be increased and the sensitivity to magnetic fields is enhanced.)

The room temperature structure of RRMn₂O₅ for a broad range of R ions have been determined [8]. The Mn⁴⁺O₈ octahedra (Mn1 sites) form infinite chains parallel to the c-axis of the orthorhombic Pbam cell (Fig. 1). These chains are cross-linked by Mn²⁺O₆ pyramids (Mn2 sites) which form edge-sharing dimmers (Mn²⁺O₈). The R atoms are eight-fold coordinated to oxygen atoms. We note that the inversion center in this Pham space group is inconsistent with a finite polarization. The low-temperature behavior of this system is quite complex [9]. The Mn sites order antiferromagnetically at T_N ~40 K (43 for Tb and 44 K for Dy) followed by the onset of ferroelectricity at 38 K for Tb (and 39 K for Dy). For the Tb system, the magnetic structure is incommensurate directly below T_N and becomes commensurate on cooling through a "lock-in" temperature at 33 K. A commensurate to incommensurate transition takes place at 24 K concomitant with a reduction in |P| (magnitude of polarization). Ordering of the Tb moments onsets near 9 K with recovery of |P|. For the case of Dy, the magnetic structure is incommensurate below 32 K and the magnetic structure is maintained until 8 K at which the Dy moments order and a commensurate spin order is observed.

In this system it is suggested that the inhomogeneous magnetization due locally to spin frustration enables the observed low-temperature coupling of magnetization and polarization. A view about the Tb c-axis chains (Fig. 1) reveals that the Mn ions are arranged as rings of Mn⁴⁺–Mn⁷⁺–Mn⁴⁺–Mn³⁺–Mn³⁺ ions with S = 2 and S = 3/2 for the Mn⁴⁺ and Mn³⁺ ions, respectively [10]. The nearest neighboring spins are antiferromagnetically coupled but due to the odd number of spins on the loops all AF couplings cannot be achieved leading to magnetic frustration. This produces a large number of magnetic configurations with closely lying energies. Across the loop, half of the Mn³⁺–Mn⁴⁺ ions spins are parallel and the other half are coupled in a antiparallel manner. It is argued that the total energy can be lowered by breaking the symmetry by displacement (small) of the Mn³⁺ ions towards or away for the apical oxygen ions resulting in a net polarization along the b-axis at low temperatures.

Although earlier neutron scattering measurements suggest a lower symmetry than the standard Pbam space group [11], recent evidence has been found structurally for a reduction in the space group symmetry by diffraction measurements at room temperature. X-ray diffraction measurements reveal suprallattice reflections in DyMn₂O₅ in the low temperature magnetically ordered regions [12]. No significant field or temperature-dependent changes in the lattice parameters have been found in the RMn₂O₅ system by high resolution diffraction methods [13].

In order to understand the mechanism responsible for the finite polarization from a microscopic perspective, temperature and magnetic field dependent local structural measurements have been performed. To the limit of the experiments (0.01 Å) no displacement of the Mn ion was detected on comparing low- and high-temperature measurements or measurements in magnetic fields. However, temperature and magnetic field changes were found in the R-O distributions. This suggests that the R site plays an important role in the magnetic and electrical properties of these materials.

2. Experimental and theoretical methods

Polycrystalline samples of TbMn₂O₅ and DyMn₂O₅ were prepared by solid state reaction in oxygen. X-ray absorption samples were prepared by grinding and sieving the materials (500 mesh) and brushing them onto Kapton tape. Layers of tape were stacked to produce a uniform sample for transmission measurements with jump μt~1. Spectra were measured at NSLS beamline X19A at Brookhaven National Laboratory. Measurements were made warming from 3 K in He vapor in the cryostat of a superconducting magnet [14]. Magnetic field measurements were conducted at 3 K. The reduction of the X-ray absorption fine-structure (XAFS) data was performed using standard procedures and follows the details of Ref. [15].

Local spin density functional calculations in the projector augment wave approach [16] were carried out using a 32 atom cell. Full optimization of both the lattice parameters and atomic positions was conducted and the GGA+U approximation was implemented to obtain the fully relaxed structure. The structure was optimized so that forces on each atom were below 3 x 10⁻⁵ eV/Å. Forces along x-, y- and z-direction were computed for all 32 atoms for displacements of 0.002 (fraction coordinates). Forces for positive and negative displacements were averaged to improve the accuracy. The phonons at gamma point in the Brillouin zone were determined by frozen phonon lattice dynamics calculations [17,18].

3. Results and discussion

We combine previous temperature-dependent data on the Tb system [15] with recent field-dependent data on the Dy system. In Fig. 2(a), we show the Fourier transform of the Tb L3 spectra taken at 20 K (thin line) and 300 K (thick line). These spectra are compared with a model spectrum, based on the Pham structure [10(b)] including a reasonable global Debye–Waller factor (same for all shells) of σ² = 0.0023 Å² for low temperature (dotted line). The Tb–Mn and higher shells (Tb–Tb and Tb–Mn shells) are matched by this simple model. However, the Tb–O shell (shown in Fig. 2(a)) exhibits a significant deviation from the diffraction derived model. The low-temperature (thin line) data reveal a broad, suppressed and asymmetric function compared to the model suggesting a complex distribution. The filtered first shell XAFS spectrum (Fig. 2(b)) reveals a "beat" pattern corresponding to multiple components leading to a reduction in amplitude at

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**Fig. 1.** Crystal structure of TbMn₂O₅ showing the corner sharing MnIo₆ polyhedra linked along the z-axis. Note the cross linked MnO₂₈ pyramids.
approximately 11 Å⁻¹. The position of the “beat” pattern yields a splitting of ~0.14 Å. The split radial distribution derived from direct fits is given in Fig. 2(c). Detailed multiple shell analysis was conducted for the Tb–O distribution [15]. Below ~180 K the Tb–O distribution is composed of well-resolved components which sharpen in intensity at the Tb ordering temperature.

A structure which preserves the local atomic order with respect to the Mn polyhedra and the second shell about Tb (Tb–Mn and higher shells) while hosting a split Tb–O distribution has limited possibilities. The data are consistent with rotations of the polyhedra about the c-axis generated by bucking at the “hinges” connecting them [15].

The self-force constants [19], which indicate the force on the isolated atom with respect to unit displacements, are all positive indicating that the optimized structure is stable with respect to the displacement of individual atoms. No “ratting” atoms are present in the structure. All atoms sit in single position wells. The total energy can only be lowered by the cooperative motion of different atoms.

The atomic structure is found to be sensitive to the magnetic ordering and points to the need to incorporate a proper treatment of the 4f electrons as localized valence states (not core states) with correlation treated appropriately.

While the Mn1 ions reside in approximately symmetric potential wells with approximately equal force constants for x, y and z displacements (kₓ, kᵧ, kₜ = ~25, 26, 30 eV/Å²), the Mn2 ions have force constants of ~23 eV/Å² in the y–z plane and ~12 eV/Å² along the x-axis. The O1 (kₓ, kᵧ, kₜ = ~25, ~26,
layers without significant off-center shifts of the Mn ions [22]. For R sites with 4f electrons, the observations point to the need to properly treat the 4f electron states since the magnetic states on the R sites are coupled with the atomic structure.

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