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Rovibrational Motion of CO in Solid C$_{60}$


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Solid C$_{60}$ can be intercalated with CO gas in a 1:1 ratio. The rovibrational motion of CO in these samples is studied as a function of temperature by IR and NMR spectroscopy. The observed spectra indicate a gradual transition from nearly free motion of CO at room temperature to hindered motion at low temperature, with only tunneling between symmetry equivalent orientations remaining. The observations are augmented by theory, and details on the local environment of the CO molecules are extracted.

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Solid C$_{60}$ is a promising matrix for the storage of guest species, both inside and in between the cages. It consists of only one type of atoms, and the high molecular symmetry results in well-defined and uniform intercalation sites. For a detailed study of the guest-host interaction, the sparse spectral structure of the matrix in, for example, infrared (IR) and $^{13}$C nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectra is of advantage. In the face-centered cubic (fcc) lattice of C$_{60}$, two types of interstitial sites are available for intercalants, one large octahedral site and two smaller tetrahedral sites per C$_{60}$ molecule [1]. The octahedral site is located at the center of the conventional cell of the fcc lattice. In the high temperature phase this site has O$_h$ symmetry (crystal structure $Fm\bar{3}m$), whereas below the sc $\rightarrow$ fcc [sc (simple cubic)] ordering transition the symmetry of the site is reduced to S$_6$ (crystal structure $Pn\bar{3}m$) [2]. With a lattice constant $a = 1.41$ nm and a C$_{60}$ “van der Waals diameter” of 1.00 nm, it follows that this site can contain a sphere with a diameter of 0.41 nm. It has been reported that molecular oxygen and molecular hydrogen [3,4] as well as rare gas atoms [5] can be trapped in the octahedral sites via high pressure, high temperature synthesis, but no information on the dynamics of these trapped gases has become available so far.

Here we report data on the dynamics of CO intercalated in solid C$_{60}$. A CO molecule, with a “van der Waals length” of 0.44 nm [6], fits snugly in the octahedral site of the C$_{60}$ lattice. The tetrahedral sites are much too small to contain a CO molecule. CO intercalated C$_{60}$ samples are produced by exposing high purity polycrystalline C$_{60}$ powder (Hoechst, “Super Gold Grade” C$_{60}$, purity $\geq 99.9\%$) or a thin film of C$_{60}$ to CO at a temperature of 200 °C and a pressure of 10 MPa for about a day. Under these conditions samples with an almost 1:1 stoichiometry of CO : C$_{60}$ are obtained, resulting in CO densities in the solid equivalent to that of CO gas at 5 MPa pressure. These samples are stable under ambient conditions. On the order of a percent of the CO leaks out per day, while when put into vacuum at a temperature of 200 °C all CO is removed within a few minutes. It is spectroscopically confirmed that free CO molecules and pristine C$_{60}$ are retrieved by the latter procedure.

For IR absorption experiments, 5 $\mu$m thick films of CO intercalated C$_{60}$ on IR transparent substrates are used. Absorption spectra covering the 400–4000 cm$^{-1}$ region are measured as a function of temperature with an experimental spectral resolution of 0.1 cm$^{-1}$. Reference spectra are measured on the C$_{60}$ films prior to their exposure to CO. After intercalation with CO, a new spectral structure that is strongly temperature dependent is readily identified. In Fig. 1(b) the additional structure appearing in the 2000–2250 cm$^{-1}$ region is shown for four different temperatures. The spectral features due to C$_{60}$ (not shown) are hardly influenced both in position and in intensity by the presence of CO. Only a slight frequency shift, up to 0.5 cm$^{-1}$, is observed for some C$_{60}$ modes.

For comparison, a spectrum of free CO molecules in the gas phase is shown in Fig. 1(a) while a spectrum of CO in an Ar matrix, where its rotational motion is completely blocked, is shown in Fig. 1(c). For CO in solid C$_{60}$, the broad spectral structure visible at room temperature gradually merges into a sharp resonance centered around 2124 cm$^{-1}$ upon lowering the temperature. This resonance splits into at least two components upon approaching 0.6 K. The total integrated intensity of the CO related absorption is constant within a factor of 2 over the complete temperature range. There is no discontinuity in the appearance of the spectral structure associated with CO in crossing the rotational ordering sc $\rightarrow$ fcc phase transition of C$_{60}$ [2]. The simultaneously measured C$_{60}$ spectra change discontinuously in crossing this phase transition, bracketed between 230–260 K (pure C$_{60}$: 260 K [9]), in full accord with observations reported by others for pristine C$_{60}$ [10].

The series of spectra shown in Fig. 1(b) indicates a transition from a situation in which the CO molecules have significant freedom to move to a situation in which this motion is strongly hindered. At high temperature the wings of the spectra resemble the envelope of the rotational structure of a free CO molecule. The center peak

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FIG. 1. Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) absorption spectra (Bruker IFS 66v/113v) of (a) CO gas at room temperature, (b) CO in the octahedral sites of the cubic $C_{60}$ lattice for four different temperatures, and (c) CO in an Ar matrix at 15 K [7]. The weak structure appearing in the spectra about 2080 and 2190 cm$^{-1}$ is caused by rather strong IR absorption bands that are intrinsic to $C_{60}$ [8] and that are not completely corrected for by subtracting the reference spectra. At 0.6 K the resonance is split into two components at 2123.3 and 2124.1 cm$^{-1}$ with a full width at half maximum of 0.35 cm$^{-1}$. In the lower trace of the inset the difference between the spectra recorded at 0.6 and 3.7 K is shown.

in the room temperature absorption spectrum is attributed to CO molecules that occupy states that are below the barrier for free rotation. At liquid nitrogen temperature the absorption spectrum resembles mostly that of CO fixed in a matrix. It is detailed below, however, that the observed splitting at 0.6 K indicates that, down to the lowest temperatures, quantum mechanical tunneling motion of CO occurs between symmetry equivalent orientations in the structured potential well.

Further information on the dynamics of CO in solid $C_{60}$ and on the symmetry of the CO site is obtained from $^{13}$C NMR spectroscopy. For the NMR experiments a 150 mg polycrystalline sample of $C_{60}$ with natural isotopic abundance is intercalated with 99% $^{13}$C enriched CO. Under magic angle spinning (MAS) conditions, two sharp resonances at 142.4 and 183.9 ppm are detected. These resonances can unambiguously be assigned to $C_{60}$ (pure $C_{60}$: 143 ppm [11]) and CO (pure CO: 182.2 ppm [12]).

From the intensity ratio of the two resonances in a fully relaxed spectrum it is concluded that approximately 15% of the octahedral sites are occupied in this particular sample. In other samples, in particular in the IR film samples, 100% of the octahedral sites could be filled. The less efficient filling of the present sample is attributed to the large size of the $C_{60}$ crystallites and their short exposure time to CO. MAS spectra measured between 200 and 300 K reveal a single $^{13}$CO resonance of constant linewidth and resonance frequency.

In contrast, the line shape of the $^{13}$CO resonance from a static sample is strongly temperature dependent in this region, as shown in Fig. 2. At all temperatures shown, the width of the resonance is much smaller than the width of the chemical shift tensor of solid CO ($\delta_{\perp} - \delta_{\parallel} = 365 \pm 20$ ppm at 4.2 K [13]). At room temperature, a symmetric line centered around the isotropic chemical shift value is found. This is in agreement with the expectation of the rapid motion of CO on the NMR time scale in an environment with $O_h$ symmetry, which averages the second-rank tensor of the chemical shift anisotropy to its isotropic value. At temperatures below that of the $sc \leftrightarrow fcc$ orientational ordering phase transition of $C_{60}$, the symmetry of the “octahedral” site is reduced to $S_6$. This lowering of the symmetry leads to a non-vanishing anisotropic contribution to the chemical shielding that is clearly reflected in the NMR line shape below 240 K. The experimental line shape at 200 K is described approximately by an axially symmetric chemical shift.
tensor, in accordance with the expectation for a dynamically averaged tensor in a potential of $S_6$ symmetry. The observed tensor anisotropy of $(−20 ± 1)$ ppm is considerably smaller than the static anisotropy of CO, indicating that considerable averaging still takes place.

Theoretical calculations are performed to aid in the interpretation of the experimental data. Rigid $C_{60}$ molecules are positioned on an fcc lattice. Their orientation is taken either as the “major” or “minor” orientation that is experimentally found for $C_{60}$ in the simple cubic $P a \bar{3}$ low-temperature phase [1]. The potential felt by CO is due to the combined van der Waals interaction with the surrounding $C_{60}$ molecules, and it does depend on the orientation of its six nearest-neighbor $C_{60}$ molecules. The CO molecule is in a potential with $S_6$ symmetry only when all $C_{60}$ molecules are in the same orientation. The interaction is described with the same atom-atom potential as used for endohedral CO@$C_{60}$ [6]. The five-dimensional (5D) bound states for a rigid CO molecule inside this potential are calculated; three of the dimensions refer to the motion of the center of mass of CO, while the other two dimensions describe the orientation of the CO axis.

The quantum mechanical method to compute the energy levels of CO inside this cavity is based on a discrete variable representation for the radial coordinate of the CO center of mass and an expansion of the angular wave functions in symmetry-adapted and coupled spherical harmonics [6]. It is important for the present study that this method includes the angular-radial coupling caused by the hindering potential of the cavity walls exactly and that it also describes large amplitude vibrations and hindered rotations of CO, with the inclusion of tunneling between multiple (equivalent) minima on the five-dimensional potential surface. From the energy levels and the corresponding wave functions, the frequencies and intensities of all the allowed dipole transitions are calculated, and the infrared spectrum is synthesized for different temperatures.

A three-dimensional (3D) equipotential surface for the position of the center of mass of CO with all $C_{60}$ molecules in the major orientation, obtained by taking a cut through the five-dimensional potential surface for an optimized CO orientation, is shown in Fig. 3. There are eight minima present in the potential for the position of the CO center of mass, all being off-center. In these minima the CO points with the oxygen atom of the CO center of mass, all being off-center. In these minima the CO points with the oxygen atom of the CO center of mass, all being off-center. The eight equivalent (local) minima on the $C_3$-symmetry axis are approximately $30 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ less deep than the six equivalent (global) minima along the three other cubic diagonals. In contrast, with all $C_{60}$ molecules in the minor orientation, the calculation predicts the minima on the $C_3$ axis to be the global minima. If we assume that in the 200–230 K range the $C_{60}$ molecules rapidly interconvert between the major and the minor orientation, an effective potential that is a linear combination of the ones just described, and that still has $S_6$ symmetry, is sampled by the NMR measurements.

In a simple model, the orientational distribution for the CO molecules described above may be replaced by the eight discrete minima. Then, the motionally averaged chemical shielding tensor [14] is the weighted sum of eight axially symmetric second-rank tensors, of which six and two, respectively, are symmetry equivalent. The principal values of all tensors may be assumed to be identical (supported by the appearance of a single CO resonance in the MAS spectrum) but the principal axes differ. A preferential population of the six equivalent minima leads to an averaged chemical shift tensor with an inverted sign of the asymmetry ($\delta_\perp − \delta_\parallel$) with respect to the original tensor.

In Fig. 4 the observed IR spectrum of CO in solid $C_{60}$ measured at 203 K is compared to the calculated IR spectrum. The calculation is done in $S_6$ symmetry, with all $C_{60}$ molecules in the major orientation. For a true comparison with the experimental spectrum, a superposition of calculated spectra belonging to that of CO in sites with $C_{60}$ molecules in random orientations has to be made. This will lead to a blurring of the sharp spectral structures in the calculated spectrum, bringing this in even better agreement with experiment.

Below liquid nitrogen temperature, the major and minor orientations of $C_{60}$ are randomly frozen throughout the solid in a 5:1 ratio [15]. Under the assumption that this ratio is the same for $C_{60}$ intercalated with CO, this leaves approximately one-third of the CO molecules surrounded solely by $C_{60}$ molecules in the major orientation. These CO molecules are in a potential with six equivalent global minima, with a calculated tunnel splitting on the order of $1 \text{ cm}^{-1}$. In the IR spectrum this will result in two almost equally strong components separated by twice the tunnel splitting. The extra intensity in the high-frequency
complicated fullerene-related solids as, for instance, the recently reported storage of hydrogen in carbon nanotube material [18].

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FIG. 4. Observed IR spectrum of CO in solid C_{60} at 203 K compared to the calculated IR spectrum. In the calculation a lattice parameter \( a = 1.41 \) nm is taken, and the orientation angle \( \phi \) of the \( \text{C}_{60} \) molecules around their respective \{111\} axes (related according to \( Pa\overline{3} \) symmetry) is taken as \( \phi = 23.5^\circ \) (major orientation). In the calculation, energy levels up to 600 cm\(^{-1}\) above the ground state level are included. The calculated spectrum is convoluted with a Gaussian with a full width at half maximum of 0.25 cm\(^{-1}\).

Small molecules inside fullerene cages have been suggested to form an ideal system for the study of nearly free molecular rotation in the solid, and experimental evidence for the motion of a scandum trimer inside a \( \text{C}_{82} \) fullerene cage has, for instance, been reported [16]. In addition, it has been pointed out that small polar molecules trapped inside the highly symmetric \( \text{C}_{60} \) cage might be considered the building blocks for an ideal electric dipolar lattice [17]. The results reported here indicate that samples in which small molecules are trapped in the octahedral sites of solid \( \text{C}_{60} \), i.e., in between \( \text{C}_{60} \) molecules, samples that are much easier to produce, are equally interesting and promising and might show many of the characteristics, and enable many of the applications, anticipated for the corresponding endohedral species. In addition, it is demonstrated that molecules such as CO intercalated in fullerene samples are a very sensitive local probe of crystal structure and molecular orientation. It has also been shown here that gases can be efficiently stored in solid fullerene samples. The understanding of the guest-host interaction in a well-defined system as described here is a prerequisite for the understanding of gas storage in more