Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory

Recent Work

Title

THE IMPORTANCE OF C7 SITES AND SURFACE ROUGHNESS IN THE AMMONIA SYNTHESIS REACTION OVER IRON

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7md1v1b6>

Author

Strongin, D.R.

Publication Date

1986-05-01

Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

RECEIVED
LAWRENCE
BERKELEY LABORATORY

JUN 18 1986

LIBRARY AND
DOCUMENTS SECTION

Materials & Molecular Research Division

Submitted to Journal of Catalysis

THE IMPORTANCE OF C_7 SITES AND SURFACE ROUGHNESS
IN THE AMMONIA SYNTHESIS REACTION OVER IRON

D.R. Strongin, J. Carrazza, S.R. Bare,
and G.A. Somorjai

May 1986

TWO-WEEK LOAN COPY

*This is a Library Circulating Copy
which may be borrowed for two weeks.*

Prepared for the U.S. Department of Energy under Contract DE-AC03-76SF00098

c2
LBL-21500

DISCLAIMER

This document was prepared as an account of work sponsored by the United States Government. While this document is believed to contain correct information, neither the United States Government nor any agency thereof, nor the Regents of the University of California, nor any of their employees, makes any warranty, express or implied, or assumes any legal responsibility for the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness of any information, apparatus, product, or process disclosed, or represents that its use would not infringe privately owned rights. Reference herein to any specific commercial product, process, or service by its trade name, trademark, manufacturer, or otherwise, does not necessarily constitute or imply its endorsement, recommendation, or favoring by the United States Government or any agency thereof, or the Regents of the University of California. The views and opinions of authors expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of the United States Government or any agency thereof or the Regents of the University of California.

The Importance of C₇ Sites and Surface Roughness
in the Ammonia Synthesis Reaction over Iron

D. R. Strongin, J. Carrazza, Simon R. Bare and G. A. Somorjai

Materials and Molecular Research Division

Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory

and

Department of Chemistry

University of California

Berkeley, CA 94720 U.S.A

The Importance of C_7 Sites and Surface Roughness
in The Ammonia Synthesis Reaction Over Iron

In this note we present data which further supports the contention that C_7 sites (Fe atoms with seven nearest neighbors) are those most active in iron ammonia synthesis catalysts. Previous work in our laboratory showed that the synthesis of ammonia from its elements is a very structure sensitive reaction (1). It was found that the relative order of activity for ammonia formation was $Fe(111) \gg Fe(100) \gg Fe(110)$. Related studies on iron single crystals have shown the same relative order of activity for dissociative chemisorption of nitrogen (2,3), the rate limiting step in the ammonia synthesis reaction (4,5). The nitrogen dissociation results were explained by the observation of an increasing activation energy for dissociation in the sequence $Fe(111) \ll Fe(100) \ll Fe(110)$ (4).

It has been suggested that the high activity of the $Fe(111)$ surface is related to the presence of C_7 coordination sites, which are in the second and third layers and are exposed to the reactant gases (1,6). A second possibility that could not be excluded from the previous results is that the $Fe(111)$ surface is very open (second and third layer atoms are exposed), suggesting that the high catalytic activity is due to the high surface free energy and low work function characteristic of a rough surface. High pressure kinetic results presented here of ammonia synthesis over $Fe(210)$ and $Fe(211)$ surfaces in addition to the $Fe(111)$, $Fe(100)$ and $Fe(110)$ surfaces show that the presence of highly coordinated sites is more important than surface roughness for high catalytic activity.

The apparatus used (1) consists of an ultra high vacuum (UHV) chamber with a retarding field analyzer for low energy electron diffraction (LEED) and Auger electron spectroscopy (AES) to determine surface structure and composition, respectively. An ion sputtering gun is used for sample cleaning. A high pressure cell which can be closed to isolate the sample from the UHV environment is connected to an external loop. The reactant gases, 15 atm hydrogen and 5 atm nitrogen, were continuously circulated over the single crystal samples via a positive displacement pump. Gas samples were periodically withdrawn through a sampling valve into a photoionization detector with a 10.2 eV lamp to determine the partial pressure of ammonia (nitrogen and hydrogen are not detectable at this photon energy). After reaction the cell is evacuated and reopened to UHV where the sample is analyzed by LEED and AES. The single crystal samples used were on the average 1cm^2 discs about 1 mm thick. They were cut and polished by standard metallurgical techniques. The major impurities in the samples were sulfur and carbon. The sulfur was removed by prolonged sputtering ($4-5 \times 10^{-6} \text{ A/cm}^2$) while the sample was held at 873 K. Carbon was removed by treating the sample with 10^{-7} Torr of oxygen while sputtering. The samples were annealed at 873 K for 2 minutes after sputtering. Surface structures were verified by LEED. The ammonia synthesis rate was determined under identical conditions over all five different iron single crystal samples in this study (20 atm of a stoichiometric mixture of N_2 and H_2 at 673K).

Schematic representations of the five iron crystal unit cells are shown in Figure 1. The difference in surface roughness between the different planes can be quantified by the use of work function measurements (close packed faces have higher work functions than open faces) (7). The work functions of all the iron faces we have studied are not available but those of tungsten, another bcc metal which shows structure sensitivity towards the decomposition of ammonia similar to iron (8) have been tabulated (9). The work function of the tungsten surfaces increase in the following order: $\phi_{210} < \phi_{111} < \phi_{100} < \phi_{211} < \phi_{110}$. The Fe(210) plane contains no C_7 sites but it is an open face exposing, second and third layer atoms, much like the Fe(111) plane while the Fe(211) crystal contains C_7 sites but it is less open than the Fe(100) face based on the work function measurements. The relative rates of ammonia synthesis shown in Figure 2 clearly show that the Fe(211) crystal orientation is almost as active as the Fe(111) plane while the Fe(210) face is less active than the Fe(100) plane. If surface roughness was the important ingredient for an active catalyst then we would expect the Fe(210) face to be the most active face and the Fe(211) plane to be less active than the Fe(100) face. Our results are contrary to this and we must conclude that the C_7 sites (the most highly coordinated surface site Fe can expose) are more important than surface roughness in the ammonia synthesis reaction.

Theoretical work that correlates high catalytic activity with highly coordinated sites (i.e. the C_7 site in Fe) has been performed by Falicov and Somorjai (10). Their calculations suggest that highly coordinated metal atoms will show the greatest catalytic activity because these are the atoms which experience the largest electronic charge fluctuations within the solid. Since the Fe(111) and Fe(211) crystal faces are the only samples used in this study which expose highly coordinated, bulk-like metallic atoms to the reactant gases (nitrogen and hydrogen) they would be expected to show increased catalytic

activity. The same conclusions can be drawn from the structure sensitivity of rhenium in the ammonia synthesis reaction (11). Here the $\text{Re}(11\bar{2}1)$ face was found to be the most active crystal orientation studied. Like iron where the $\text{Fe}(111)$ and $\text{Fe}(211)$ faces contain highly coordinated C_7 sites, the $\text{Re}(11\bar{2}1)$ plane exposes highly coordinated C_{11} and C_{10} sites. Surface roughness on the ammonia synthesis catalyst is only important to the extent that it can expose these highly coordinated surface atoms.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Director, Office of Energy Research, Office of Basic Energy Sciences, Materials Science Division of the U.S. Department of Energy under contract number DE-AC03-76SF00098. J. Carrazza acknowledges CEPET of Venezuela for a research fellowship.

REFERENCES

- (1) Spencer, N. D, Schoonmaker, R. C, and Somorjai, G. A., J. Catal. 74, 129(1982).
- (2) Bozso, F., Ertl, G., Grunze, M. and Weiss, M. , J. Catal. 49, 18(1977).
- (3) Bozso, F., Ertl, G., and Weiss, M. ,J. Catal. 50, 519(1977).
- (4) Ertl, G., Catal. Rev-Sci. Eng., 21(2), 201(1980).
- (5) Emmett, P. H., and Brunauer S., J. Am. Chem. Soc., 59, 1553(1937).
- (6) Dumesic, J. A., Topsoe, H., and Boudart, M., J. Catal. 37, 513(1975).
- (7) Smoluchowski, R., Phys. Rev., 60, 661(1941).
- (8) McAllister, J. and Hansen, R. S., J. Chem. Phys., 59, 414(1973).
- (9) Holzl, J., and Schulte, F. K., "Work Function of Metals", in Solid Surface Physics, Springer-Verlag, Berlin, 1979.
- (10) Falicov, L., and Somorjai, G. A., Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci., 82, 2207(1985).
- (11) Asscher, M., Carrazza, J., Khan, M. M., Lewis, K. B. and Somorjai, G.A J. Catal., accepted.

FIGURE CAPTIONS

FIGURE 1

Schematic representations of the five iron single crystal surfaces.
The coordination number for each surface atom is indicated.

FIGURE 2

The rate of ammonia synthesis over the five surfaces studied
exhibiting the structure sensitivity of the reaction.

Fe(111)

Fe(210)

Fe(100)

Fe(211)

Fe(110)

Figure 1

Figure 2

This report was done with support from the Department of Energy. Any conclusions or opinions expressed in this report represent solely those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of The Regents of the University of California, the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory or the Department of Energy.

Reference to a company or product name does not imply approval or recommendation of the product by the University of California or the U.S. Department of Energy to the exclusion of others that may be suitable.

*LAWRENCE BERKELEY LABORATORY
TECHNICAL INFORMATION DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94720*