

Electrochemistry of gold-based alloys

By

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ABSTRACT

The electro-oxidation of organic compounds at noble metal electrodes has been widely studied in the past. A bimetallic electrode is often more active than the respective pure metals. However, the effect of the microstructure of the alloys on their electrochemical properties has largely been ignored in the past.

The electro-oxidation of ethylene glycol at gold-platinum and gold-titanium electrodes in different heat treatment conditions was studied to determine how the different microstructures would influence the electrochemistry of these alloys.

Kirkendall porosity was produced by the solid solution heat treatment of the two-phased 60Au-40Pt electrodes. The extra surface area due to the porosity resulted in high apparent current densities at the porous electrodes in both acid and alkaline solutions without ethylene glycol. Only slightly higher apparent current densities were obtained at the porous gold-platinum electrodes compared to the non-porous electrodes when ethylene glycol was present in the solution. Kirkendall porosity was not produced by the solid solution heat treatment of the two-phased 50Au-50Pt electrodes.

The gold-platinum electrodes were more active for the electro-oxidation of ethylene glycol than both pure gold and platinum. The electrodes in the solid solution heat treatment condition were more active than the two-phased electrodes. This can be explained by the Third-body effect, which means that platinum atoms that are surrounded by gold atoms are less likely to become poisoned by intermediates than platinum atoms

that are surrounded by other platinum atoms. Poisoning of all the electrodes occurred during electrolysis of ethylene glycol at a fixed potential. The poisoning species at pure gold and pure platinum could be removed by potential pulsing and sustainable electrolysis of ethylene glycol was possible at these electrodes. Unfortunately, the same technique was not as successful with the gold-platinum alloys and their activities declined during the long-term electrolysis of ethylene glycol.

The electrochemical behaviour of the Gold 990 (Au-1wt% Ti) electrodes is similar to pure gold in acid and alkaline solutions. It is possible that the titanium content is too low to have a significant influence on the electrochemical behaviour of gold. The titanium may also be in the passive condition or it may have dissolved selectively from the Gold 990 alloy resulting in a pure gold surface.

Keywords: Gold, platinum, gold-platinum alloys, gold-titanium alloys, Gold 990, Kirkendall porosity, electrochemistry, electro-oxidation, ethylene glycol, cyclic voltammetry.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
CONTENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER 1: Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER 2: Theoretical background.....	2
2. Electrochemical behaviour of pure gold in aqueous media.....	2
2.1. Gold in acidic media.....	2
2.2. Gold in alkaline media.....	2
2.3. Premonolayer oxidation of gold.....	3
2.3.1. Premonolayer oxidation of gold in acid.....	4
2.3.2. Premonolayer oxidation of gold in base.....	6
2.4. The electro-oxidation of chemical compounds at gold electrodes in aqueous media..	6
2.4.1. Electro-oxidation by means of a submonolayer of adsorbed hydroxyl radicals....	8
2.5 Alloys of gold.....	8
2.5.1. Electrochemical behaviour of pure platinum.....	9
2.5.1.1. Mechanism of oxide formation.....	9
2.5.1.2. Electrochemical behaviour of platinum in alkaline solutions.....	11
2.5.1.3. Electrochemical behaviour of platinum in acid solutions.....	14
2.6 Gold-platinum alloys.....	15
2.6.1. Cold rolling of Au-Pt alloys.....	15
2.6.2. Precipitation in Au-Pt alloys.....	16
2.6.3. Electrochemical behaviour of Au-Pt alloys.....	17
2.6.3.1. Homogeneous alloys.....	17
2.6.3.2. Heterogeneous alloys.....	17
2.6.4. Electro-oxidation of chemical compounds at Au-Pt alloy electrodes	18
2.6.5. Possible explanations for synergism on Au-Pt alloys.....	18
2.6.5.1. The bifunctional theory.....	18

2.6.5.2. Changes in adsorption features.....	19
2.6.5.3. The Third-Body effect.....	20
2.6.5.4. The creation of surface Lewis acid sites on alloy electrodes.....	20
2.7. The 60Au-40Pt alloy electrode.....	21
2.8. The electro-oxidation of ethylene glycol at noble metal electrodes.....	22
2.8.1. The electro-oxidation of ethylene glycol at gold electrodes in acid.....	22
2.8.2. The electro-oxidation of ethylene glycol at gold electrodes in base.....	23
2.8.3. The electro-oxidation of ethylene glycol at platinum electrodes in acid.....	24
2.8.4. The electro-oxidation of ethylene glycol at platinum electrodes in base.....	25
2.8.5. The electro-oxidation of ethylene glycol at Au-Pt electrodes in base.....	27
2.9. The Au-1wt% Ti alloy (Gold 990)	28
2.9.1. Preparation of Gold 990.....	28
2.9.2. The electrochemical behaviour of pure titanium.....	29
2.10 Conclusions.....	32
CHAPTER 3: The heat treatment of Au-Pt alloys and the Gold 990 alloy.....	34
3.1. Introduction.....	34
3.2. The 60Au-40Pt alloy.....	34
3.2.1. The 60Au-40Pt alloy heat treated at 1300°C.....	34
3.2.2. The 60Au-40Pt alloy heat treated at 1200°C.....	37
3.2.2.1. The 60Au-40Pt alloy heat treated at 1200°C for 24 hours.....	38
3.2.2.2. Kirkendall porosity.....	40
3.2.2.3 The 60Au-40Pt alloy heat treated at 1200°C for 168 hours.....	41
3.2.3. The 60Au-40Pt alloy heat treated directly at 1200°C.....	42
3.2.4. The 60Au-40Pt miscibility gap heat treatments.....	44
3.2.4.1. The 60Au-40Pt alloy heat treated at 800°C for 50 hours.....	44
3.2.4.2. The 60Au-40Pt alloy heat treated at 600°C for 100 hours.....	47
3.3. The 50Au-50Pt alloy.....	49
3.3.1. The 50Au-50Pt alloy in the "ductile" condition.....	49
3.3.2 The 50Au-50Pt alloy in the solid solution condition.....	52

3.4. The Gold 990 alloy.....	53
3.4.1. The Gold 990 alloy in the solid solution condition.....	53
3.4.2. The Gold 990 alloy in the precipitation-hardened condition.....	54
3.5. Conclusions.....	55
CHAPTER 4: The electrochemical behaviour of gold-based alloys in acid solution without ethylene glycol.....	56
4.1. Introduction.....	56
4.2. Experimental.....	56
4.3. Results and discussion.....	57
4.3.1. Gold.....	57
4.3.2. Platinum.....	58
4.3.3. The 60Au-40Pt alloy.....	61
4.3.3.1. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 1300°C heat treatment condition.....	61
4.3.3.2. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 1200°C (24 hours) heat treatment condition.....	62
4.3.3.3. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 1200°C (168 hours) heat treatment condition.....	63
4.3.3.4. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 800°C heat treatment condition.....	67
4.3.3.5 The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 600°C heat treatment condition.....	67
4.3.4. The 50Au-50Pt alloy.....	69
4.3.4.1 The 50Au-50Pt alloy in the "ductile" condition.....	69
4.3.4.2 The 50Au-50Pt alloy in the solid solution condition.....	70
4.3.5. The Gold 990 alloy.....	72
4.3.5.1. The Gold 990 alloy in the solid solution condition.....	72
4.3.5.2. The Gold 990 alloy in the precipitation-hardened condition.....	72
4.4. Conclusions.....	76
CHAPTER 5: The electrochemical behaviour of gold-based alloys in alkaline solution without ethylene glycol.....	77
5.1. Introduction.....	77
5.2. Experimental.....	77
5.3. Results and discussion.....	78

5.3.1. Gold.....	78
5.3.2. Platinum.....	79
5.3.3. The 60Au-40Pt alloy.....	81
5.3.3.1. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 1300°C heat treatment condition.....	81
5.3.3.2. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 1200°C (24 hours) heat treatment condition.....	82
5.3.3.3. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 1200°C (168 hours) heat treatment condition.....	83
5.3.3.4. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 800°C heat treatment condition.....	87
5.3.3.5 The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 600°C heat treatment condition.....	88
5.3.4. The 50Au-50Pt alloy.....	89
5.3.4.1 The 50Au-50Pt alloy in the "ductile" condition.....	89
5.3.4.2 The 50Au-50Pt alloy in the solid solution condition.....	91
5.3.5. The Gold 990 alloy.....	94
5.3.5.1. The Gold 990 alloy in the solid solution condition.....	94
5.3.5.2. The Gold 990 alloy in the precipitation-hardened condition.....	94
5.4. Conclusions.....	96
CHAPTER 6: The electro-oxidation of ethylene glycol at gold-based alloys in an alkaline solution.....	98
6.1. Introduction.....	98
6.2. Experimental.....	98
6.3. Results and discussion.....	100
6.3.1. Gold.....	100
6.3.2. Platinum.....	102
6.3.3. The 60Au-40Pt alloy.....	106
6.3.3.1. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 1300°C heat treatment condition.....	106
6.3.3.2. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 1200°C (24 hours) heat treatment condition.....	108
6.3.3.3. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 1200°C (168 hours) heat treatment condition.....	111
6.3.3.4. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 800°C heat treatment condition.....	113
6.3.3.5 The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 600°C heat treatment condition.....	116
6.3.4. The 50Au-50Pt alloy.....	118
6.3.4.1 The 50Au-50Pt alloy in the "ductile" condition.....	118

6.3.4.2 The 50Au-50Pt alloy in the solid solution condition.....	120
6.3.5. The Gold 990 alloy.....	122
6.3.5.1. The Gold 990 alloy in the solid solution condition.....	122
6.3.5.2. The Gold 990 alloy in the precipitation-hardened condition.....	124
6.3.6. Electrolysis of ethylene glycol at a fixed potential.....	128
6.3.6.1. Gold.....	129
6.3.6.2. Platinum.....	129
6.3.6.3. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 1300°C heat treatment condition.....	129
6.3.6.4. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 1200°C - 24 h heat treatment condition.....	130
6.3.6.5. The 50Au-50Pt alloy in the "ductile" heat treatment condition.....	130
6.3.6.6 The 50Au-50Pt alloy in the solid solution heat treatment condition.....	130
6.3.6.7. The Gold 990 alloy in the solid solution heat treatment condition.....	130
6.3.7. Electrolysis of ethylene glycol using potential pulsing.....	135
6.3.7.1. Gold.....	136
6.3.7.2. Platinum.....	140
6.3.7.3. The 60Au-40Pt alloy in the 1200°C - 24 h condition.....	143
6.3.7.4. The 50Au-50Pt alloy in the "ductile" condition.....	146
6.3.7.5 The 50Au-50Pt alloy in the solid solution condition.....	149
6.3.7.6. The Gold 990 alloy in the solid solution condition.....	152
6.4. Conclusions.....	158
CHAPTER 7: Conclusions and Recommendations.....	161
REFERENCES.....	164