

Trace element analysis in precious metals using Time Resolved Emission Spectroscopy

by

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SYNOPSIS

Determining the purity of precious metals has received considerable scientific attention, mainly because of the high intrinsic value of these precious metals.

These metals are extremely useful as catalysts in the chemical and petroleum industry. They have been used as exhaust catalysts and as conductors in the electrical industry, in medical and dental applications as well as in the jewellery industry.

Two methods of analysis are used to determine the purity of metals; the direct and indirect method of analysis. During the direct method of analysis, the actual percentage of metal is directly determined. Techniques used are the Fire Assay, gravimetric wet chemical techniques. However, these techniques are not suitable for characterising individual precious metals and impurities.

Indirect methods, based on spectroscopy, are well suited for the analysis of high purity metals. Using these techniques, the various impurities and their concentrations are determined and the purity of the metal is determined by difference. It is therefore

important that all impurities are determined with the highest degree of precision and accuracy, as this influences the ultimate purity and quality of the product.

A method was developed to determine the impurities in Ruthenium. The limits of detection obtained were in some instances improved up to a factor of ten times, compared to the current techniques used for the determination of the impurities. Elements such as Cd, Se, As and Cr which were previously reported as not detected, due to the difficulty of detecting them at levels below 10–15 ppm, are now measurable using the spark spectrometer. Making use of time resolved spectroscopy has in general increased the sensitivity by a factor of five to ten times, even when compared to normal spark analysis as used for Alloys.

The technique used in this study in the analysis of impurities in precious metals is known as SAFT (Spark Analysis For Traces). SAFT involves the use of time resolved spectroscopy, which is able to reduce background and thus improve signal to background ratios of spectral lines. It makes use of the phenomenon of “atomic afterglow”. By switching the photomultiplier detector to observe (measure) only the afterglow, the background radiation can be separated from the atomic radiation.

The technique is very sensitive and analyses of purities at 99.995 % are possible. However, the greatest drawback of the method when used for precious metals is the lack of commercially available standard samples for low concentration of impurity.

Spoorelementanalise vir platinum metale met behulp van tydontledings Emissiespektroskopie

deur

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SAMEVATTING

Suiwerheidbepaling van edelmetale geniet baie wetenskaplike aandag hoofsaaklik as gevolg van hulle hoë intrinsieke waarde. Hierdie metale is baie waardevol en word as katalisators in die chemiese en petrochemiese industrie gebruik, asook uitlaatsysteemkatalisatore en as geleiers in die elektriese industrie, mediese- en tandheelkunde en juweliersindustrieë.

Daar is twee tipes analise vir die bepaling van suiwerheid van metale: 'n direkte en indirekte metode van analise. Die direkte metode van analise, bepaal die persentasie waarde van die metaal op 'n direkte wyse. Hierdie metodes sluit in, tradisionele essaieering, gravimetriese en nat chemiese tegnieke. Hierdie tegnieke is nie geskik vir karakterisering van individuele edelmetale en onsuiverhede nie.

Indirekte metodes is gebaseer op spektroskopie en is geskik vir die hoë suiwerheid analise van metale. Hierdie tegnieke bepaal die konsentrasie van die onsuierhede. Die suiwerheid van die metal word bepaal deur die verskil. Om hierdie rede is dit baie belangrik dat al die onsuierhede bepaal word met die hoogste graad van presisie en akkuraatheid, omdat dit 'n invloed sal hê op die uiteindelijke suiwerheid en kwaliteit van die produk.

Die alternatiewe metode is ontwikkel om die onsuierhede in Ruthenium te bepaal. Die deteksie limiete in sommige gevalle het met 'n faktor tot tien verbeter, invergelyking met huidige tegnieke wat gebruik word vir die bepaling van onsuierhede. Elemente soos Cd, Se, As en Cr was voorheen as onbepaald geraporteer omdat deteksie limiete laer as 10–15 ppm nie moontlik was nie, maar nou wel moontlik is met vonkanaliese.

Die tegniek gebruik vir die analiese van onsuierhede in die edelmetale is bekend as SAFT “ Spark Analysis For Traces” (Vonkanaliese vir spoorelemente). SAFT maak gebruik van tydontledingsspektroskopie, wat agtergrond kan verminder en daardeur die sein tot agtergrond verhouding van spektrale lyne verbeter.

Dit maak gebruik van die atoomgloei. Deur die fotovermenigvuldigerdetektor te skakel om slegs die atoomgloei waar te neem kan die agtergronduitstraling geskei word van die atoom uitstraling. Die sensitiwiteit is 'n faktor van vyf tot tien keer beter as met normale vonkanalise.

Die tegniek is baie sensitief en analise met suiwerhede van 99.995 % is moontlik, alhoewel die grootste nadeel van die metode vir edelmetale is die gebrek aan kommersieële beskikbare standarde met laë konsentrasie onsuierhede in.

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1	Brief Overview	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	References	5
Chapter 2	Chemistry and Refining of the Platinum Group Metals	6
2.1	Introduction	6
2.2	Occurrence	6
2.3	Uses	8
	2.3.1 Catalytic uses	11
	2.3.2 Electrical uses	13
	2.3.3 High-temperature uses	13
	2.3.4 Medical and dental uses	14
	2.3.5 Jewellery	14
2.4	Physical and chemical properties	14
2.5	Effect of Platinum Group Metals on human health	16
2.6	Toxicology – environment	17
2.7	Refining of Platinum Group Metals	18
2.8	References	23
Chapter 3	Methods of analysis of Platinum Group Metals	26
3.1	Globular Arc	27
	3.1.1 Disadvantages of Globular Arc analysis	28
	3.1.2 Matrix effects	28
	3.1.3 Poor limits of detection	28
	3.1.4 Poor precision	28

3.1.5	Low analytical throughput	29
3.1.6	Skilled labour	29
3.1.7	Cost	29
3.2	Glow Discharge technique	30
3.3	Inductively Coupled Plasma (ICP)	33
3.4	Inductively Coupled Plasma – Mass Spectrometry (ICP – MS)	37
3.5	Spark Ablation – Inductively Coupled Plasma	40
3.6	Laser Ablation Inductively Coupled Plasma – Mass Spectrometry	41
3.7	X-Ray Fluorescence	43
3.8	Neutron Activation	45
3.9	Spark Analysis	47
3.9.1	Advantages of Spark Analysis	47
3.9.2	Time Resolved Spectroscopy	48
3.9.2.1	Research arrangement	50
3.9.2.2	Advantages of the Time Resolved method	52
3.10	Standards	53
3.10.1	Standard specifications for refined Precious Metals	54
3.11	References	58
Chapter 4	Instrumentation	63
4.1	Introduction	63
4.2	Lifumat-Met-3.3/Vac-Gas Induction Furnace	63
4.3	Breitländer Semi-Automatic Milling Machine	65
4.4	Spectrometer	66
4.4.1	Source	66
4.4.2	Sample stand	68



4.4.3	Spectrometer optics	69
4.4.3.1	Optical fibres – light guides	70
4.4.3.2	Spectral dispersion	71
4.4.4	Instrument configuration	74
4.4.4.1	Polychromators	74
4.4.4.2	Detectors	75
4.4.4.3	Measurement of photoelectric current	76
4.5	Evaluation of the “burn spot”	77
4.6	Determination of mechanism of material removal	79
4.7	References	82
Chapter 5	Experimental	83
5.1	Introduction	83
5.2	Samples	83
5.3	Optimisation of parameters	84
5.3.1	High Energy Pre-spark (HEPS)	84
5.3.2	Intensity versus integration time	85
5.3.3	Effect of different gating parameters	86
5.3.4	Internal standardisation	88
5.3.5	Analytical gap 3 mm and 4 mm	90
5.3.6	Contamination from another base material	90
5.4	Creating calibration graphs	91
5.5	Comparisons of samples analysed	92
5.6	References	93
Chapter 6	Calibration	94
6.1	Introduction	94



6.2	Background Equivalent Concentration (BEC) and Limit of Detection (LOD)	95
6.3	Spectral interference	97
6.4	Background correction	100
6.5	Measurement values for the analytical data	101
	6.5.1 Intensity ratio	101
	6.5.2 Corrected intensity ratio	102
	6.5.3 Recalibration	103
	6.5.4 Concentration calculation	104
6.6	References	106
Chapter 7	Results	107
7.1	Optimisation of parameters	107
	7.1.1 High Energy Pre-spark	107
	7.1.2 Effect of integration time	114
	7.1.3 Effect of different gating parameters	115
	7.1.4 Internal standardisation	122
	7.1.5 Analytical gap	123
	7.1.6 Contamination from other base material	124
7.2	Calibration	124
7.3	Comparison of samples analysed	125
Chapter 8	Discussion of results and conclusion	138
8.1	Optimisation of parameters	138
	8.1.1 High Energy Pre-spark	138
	8.1.2 Effect of integration time	139
	8.1.3 Effect of different gating parameters	140

8.1.4	Internal standardisation	144
8.1.5	Analytical gap	144
8.1.6	Contamination from other base material	145
8.2	Calibration graphs	146
8.3	Comparison of samples analysed	147
8.4	Conclusion	149