Title: Solvation Effects on the Dielectric Constant of 1 M LiPF₆ in Ethylene Carbonate: Ethyl Methyl Carbonate 3:7

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Abstract:

In this communication we report the dielectric constant of 1 M LiPF₆ in EC:EMC 3:7 w/w (ethylene carbonate/ethyl methyl carbonate) in addition to neat EC:EMC 3:7 w/w. Using three Debye relaxations, the static permittivity value, or dielectric constant, is extrapolated to 18.5, which is compared to 18.7 for the neat solvent mixture. The EC solvent is found to strongly coordinate with the Li⁺ cations of the salt, which results in a loss of dielectric contribution to the electrolyte. However, the small amplitude and large uncertainty in relaxation frequency for EMC cloud definitive identification of the Li⁺ solvation shell. Importantly, the loss of the free EC permittivity contribution due to Li⁺ solvation is almost completely balanced by the positive contribution of the associated LiPF₆ salt, demonstrating that a significant quantity of dipolar ion pairs exists in 1 M LiPF₆ in EC:EMC 3:7.

Main Text:

Despite remarkable and thorough investigation of the baseline electrolyte for current Li-ion batteries, 1 M LiPF₆ EC:EMC 3:7 (ethyl carbonate: ethyl methyl carbonate, 3:7 w/w), the dielectric properties, specifically the constant ϵ_s , have never been measured. In this communication we report measurement of the value and quantification of the underlying dielectric contributions within the microwave frequency range.

In 1 M LiPF₆ in EC:EMC 3:7 the EC co-solvent is electrochemically reactive and can passivate Li-metal or graphite electrodes. EC also serves as a strongly polar solvent that facilitates dissociation of LiPF₆.¹ However, EC exhibits a high melting point, above that of room temperature, incurring sluggish kinetics. Hence a linear carbonate (such as EMC) is added primarily to lower the viscosity. A concentration of 1 M LiPF₆ is used as it allows for high conductivity. This electrolyte has been the subject of considerable research as well as technological interest, for which we refer readers to previous reviews.^{1,2} However, the dielectric constant has never been measured, despite being a fundamental thermodynamic property used in many of the theoretical models to understand solvation and transport properties of electrolytes. Properties that depend on the dielectric constant include concentration-dependent activity coefficients,^{3–7} bulk conductivity⁸ and degree of salt dissociation.⁹ Moreover, the dielectric constant is included in continuum solvation models employed in quantum chemistry (e.g. DFT-based) methods,^{10,11} making it an important parameter for calculations of electrochemical stability and chemical reactivity.^{12–15}

Previous work concerning the dielectric constant of EC:EMC 3:7 electrolytes has focused on

measuring the dielectric constant of neat blends of EC and linear carbonates,¹⁶ or using statistical mechanics-based modelling to predict the value in the presence of added salt,^{8,17} albeit with no measured value, to the best knowledge of the authors. Experimental work has been undertaken for various salts in PC^{18,19} (propylene carbonate) or DMC (dimethyl carbonate),²⁰ the latter for low salt concentration (< 0.3 M). Due to the technological importance of 1 M LiPF₆ in EC:EMC, we here report the value of ϵ_s and demonstrate resolution of the three primary dipolar relaxation processes contributing to this value. We leave further detailed analysis, e.g. to quantify degree of salt association,^{17,21} solvation number^{22–30} and preferential solvation,^{25,31,32} to an upcoming publication.

Electrolyte synthesis was performed in an actively purified argon glove box with typical water and oxygen levels below 1 ppm and 0.1 ppm, respectively. Anhydrous EC (99%) was purchased from Sigma-Aldrich and used as received. EMC (99%) and LiPF₆ (99.99%) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich. EMC was dried over molecular sieves and LiPF₆ was dried under vacuum at 60°C. Electrolytes were produced by mixing EC and EMC at a 3:7 ratio by mass, and subsequently adding this solvent mixture to a pre-weighed mass of LiPF₆ salt in order to achieve a solution volume corresponding to 1 M concentration. Solvent water content was measured at below 10 ppm using Karl-Fisher titration.

Dielectric relaxation spectroscopy (DRS) was performed in glass vials at 21°C using a coaxial probe (Keysight N1501A) and vector network analyzer (Keysight P9375A) over a frequency (f) range from 0.5 to 26.5 GHz. Three-point calibration was performed using air, water, and tetrahydrofuran prior to each set of measurements. Two independent measurements were made on each sample using independent calibrations for each measurement series. In DRS of electrolytes, the experimentally accessible quantity is the total dielectric response η . While the real part of the permittivity ϵ' is equal to the real part of the response η' , the imaginary part of the permittivity ϵ'' requires subtraction of the conductivity σ contribution to the imaginary dielectric response η'' as follows:^{9,33}

$$\epsilon'' = \eta'' - \sigma / (2\pi f \epsilon_0) \quad (1)$$

In order to fit these spectra, two Debye relaxations³⁴ were used for the neat solvent case (3:7 EC:EMC) while three Debye relaxations were used for the 1 M LiPF₆ in EC:EMC 3:7 system. The expressions for the three Debye relaxations for ϵ' and ϵ'' , where the symbols have their typical significance,³⁴ are as follows:

$$\epsilon' = \frac{\epsilon_1}{1+(f/f_1)^2} + \frac{\epsilon_2}{1+(f/f_2)^2} + \frac{\epsilon_3}{1+(f/f_3)^2} + \epsilon_\infty \quad (2)$$

$$\epsilon'' = \epsilon_1 \frac{(f/f_1)}{1+(f/f_1)^2} + \epsilon_2 \frac{(f/f_2)}{1+(f/f_2)^2} + \epsilon_3 \frac{(f/f_3)}{1+(f/f_3)^2} \quad (3)$$

During the iterative fitting procedure each parameter was treated as adjustable, including the ionic conductivity value. For the neat solvent mixture, the parameters were first fit to the ϵ'' spectra and the remaining ϵ_∞ parameter was fit to the ϵ' spectra. For the 1 M electrolyte, the ϵ' spectra was fit

first, and the resulting parameters were then used to fit for the conductivity as verified against the ϵ'' spectra.

In 1 M LiPF₆, the ϵ'' values became unphysical at low frequencies due to the high ionic conductivity. In accordance with similar established methods,³⁵ ϵ'' values measured below 1 GHz were excluded from the fitting procedure in order to enable simultaneous agreement with ϵ' . Two sources of error were considered here, one from reproducibility and one from the uncertainty of the fits. From analysis of duplicate runs, the former proved negligible, while the latter proved significant. Thus, we herein report the fits from the data of averaged duplicate runs, where the uncertainties come from the fit. For the neat solvent mixture, a constraint of EMC frequency below 20 GHz was used, while for the 1 M solution a constraint of EMC amplitude below 1.0 was used (see SI for further details). In both cases, we note that removal of the constraints did not significantly impact ϵ_s but did yield physically unlikely parameters for the EMC contribution.

Figure 1. Neat EC:EMC 3:7 dielectric spectra (left) and 1 M LiPF₆ EC:EMC 3:7 dielectric spectra (right).

	Neat EC:EMC 3:7		1.0 M LiPF ₆ EC:EMC 3:7	
Total Dielectric Constant	$\epsilon_s = 18.7 \pm 0.5$	-	$\epsilon_s = 18.5 \pm 0.5$	-
Free EC	$\epsilon_1 = 14.1 \pm 0.3$	$f_1 = 5.7 \pm 0.1$ GHz	$\epsilon_1 = 5.3 \pm 0.2$	$f_1 = 3.9 \pm 0.2$ GHz
Free EMC	$\epsilon_2 = 1.1 \pm 0.2$	$f_2 = 20 \pm 7$ GHz ^a	$\epsilon_2 = 1.0 \pm 0.1^b$	$f_2 = 18 \pm 8$ GHz
Associated salt	-	-	$\epsilon_3 = 8.0 \pm 0.5$	$f_3 = 0.55 \pm 0.04$ GHz
Electronic component	$\epsilon_{inf} = 3.6 \pm 0.1$	-	$\epsilon_{inf} = 4.2 \pm 0.3$	-
Conductivity	-	-	$\sigma_{fit} = 7.7 \pm 0.1$ mS/cm	$\sigma_{meas} = 8.6$ mS/cm ^c

Table 1. Fit parameters from DRS data (21°C).

Figure 1 (left) shows the dielectric spectra as a function of concentration for neat EC:EMC 3:7 at 21°C. For the neat binary solvent mixture, one significant peak (pink) is seen for the (very polar) EC solvent contribution, while a much smaller peak is seen for the linear carbonate. The total value

^aconstraint $f_2 \leq 20$ GHz.

^bconstraint $\epsilon_2 \leq 1.0$.

^c24°C.

of the dielectric constant, 18.7, is consistent with a previous reported value, measured via (lower frequency) impedance spectroscopy.¹⁶ The relevant parameters for the two employed Debye relaxations are shown in Table 1. There is no literature data for neat liquid EC at 21°C since EC is solid at this temperature but the relaxation time is of the right order of magnitude when compared with values measured for liquid EC at higher temperatures.³⁶ Similarly, no literature data could be found for neat EMC; however, literature data shows that a similar dialkyl carbonate solvent, DMC, has a relaxation frequency of 22 GHz³⁷ which led us to constraint the EMC relaxation frequency to < 20 GHz in the EC:EMC mixture. Furthermore, dialkyl carbonates have been shown to exhibit a non-Debye absorption process in the far IR region that may cause deviation in the high frequency dielectric response.^{37,38} Understandably, the error bars are quite high for the EMC frequency, reflecting the difficulty of precisely fitting this minor component in the studied mixtures.

Figure 1 (right) shows the dielectric spectra for 1.0 M LiPF₆ in EC:EMC 3:7. Here, three Debye relaxations are used: one for the EC solvent (pink), EMC solvent (black) and associated salt (blue). The relevant parameters for the three employed Debye relaxations are shown in Table 1. Here, the amplitude ϵ_1 of the EC solvent contribution to the permittivity is reduced from 14.1 to 5.3 due to the loss of free EC to the solvation shell of Li⁺. It should be noted that the frequency of the EC relaxation f_1 decreases significantly after the addition of 1 M LiPF₆, which arises from the viscosity increase of factor ~ 3 .³⁹

The apparent permittivity contribution ϵ_2 from EMC does not significantly decrease after 1 M of LiPF₆ is added to the solution. Although this suggests that EMC does not interact strongly with the Li⁺, the small amplitude and large uncertainty in relaxation frequency for EMC cloud such interpretations. Thus, any definitive claim on the inference of preferential solvation of EC over EMC is left to more detailed analysis in an upcoming publication.

The associated salt species in solution exhibit a characteristic relaxation frequency of 0.5 GHz and its permittivity contribution ϵ_3 is 8.0, representing the largest contribution to the overall dielectric constant. Previous DRS studies on other electrolytes have identified peaks in similar frequency ranges as either solvent separated ion pairs (SSIPs) or contact ion pairs (CIPs).^{18,20} Summing the various contributions to the total permittivity, including the high frequency term ϵ_∞ , the permittivity of the 1 M LiPF₆ electrolyte is 18.5, compared to 18.7 for the neat binary solvent system. Here, the loss of the free EC permittivity contribution due to Li⁺ solvation is almost completely balanced by the positive contribution of the associated LiPF₆ salt, demonstrating that a significant quantity of ion pairs exists (either as SSIPs or CIPs). Previous scholarship has sometimes overlooked the importance of ion-pairing^{25,40,41} in describing the solvation environment of Li⁺ in solution. The herein measured value of $\epsilon_s=18.5$ is likely fairly close to values that would be observed if a different linear carbonate were used (e.g. dimethyl carbonate or diethyl carbonate), or if small weight percentages of additives are added to the bulk solution, as is typical for state-of-the-art electrolytes.² Thus, we believe the value of $\epsilon_s \approx 19$ to be representative of Li-ion carbonate-blend electrolytes generally used for Li-ion cells.

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