Effect of cobalt doping on the local structure and dynamics of multiferroic MnWO$_4$ and Mn$_{0.7}$Co$_{0.3}$WO$_4$

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Abstract. The local atomic structure and dynamics in multiferroic MnWO$_4$ and Mn$_{0.7}$Co$_{0.3}$WO$_4$ have been studied by X-ray absorption spectroscopy at the Co(Mn) K-edge and W L$_3$-edge. The analysis of the first coordination shell of metal ions using single-shell Gaussian approximation and regularization-like method allowed us to determine a distortion of Mn(Co)O$_6$ and WO$_6$ octahedra. It was found that the local environment of Co$^{2+}$ ions in Mn$_{0.7}$Co$_{0.3}$WO$_4$ is close to that in CoWO$_4$, whereas the presence of cobalt ions reduces the distortion of MnO$_6$ octahedra in comparison with pure MnWO$_4$.

1. Introduction

Pure manganese tungstate MnWO$_4$ is multiferroic material with spiral long-range magnetic order [1, 2]. It crystallizes in the wolframite-type structure [3] and is isomorphous to other antiferromagnetic transition-metal tungstates [4] such as CoWO$_4$ ($T_N$=55 K), NiWO$_4$ ($T_N$=67 K) and FeWO$_4$ ($T_N$=76 K). MnWO$_4$ contains only one kind of magnetic ion (Mn$^{2+}$) and undergoes three successive magnetic phase transitions to antiferromagnetically (AF) ordered states at $\sim$13.5 K ($T_N$), $\sim$12.7 K ($T_2$) and $\sim$7.6 K ($T_1$) [3]. The magnetic phase transitions in MnWO$_4$ are responsible for anomalies of the specific heat, the dielectric constant and the magnetic susceptibility [5]. The appearance of simultaneous ferroelectric polarization in the AF2 phase between $\sim$7.6 K and $\sim$12.7 K is explained by the loss of inversion symmetry due to the spiral magnetic order and a strong spin-lattice coupling [1, 6].

The magnetic properties of MnWO$_4$ can be influenced by replacing Mn$^{2+}$ with other magnetic Co$^{2+}$ [7, 8, 9, 10, 11], Fe$^{2+}$ [12], Ni$^{2+}$ [13] and non-magnetic Mg$^{2+}$, Zn$^{2+}$ [14, 15] ions as well as by substitution of W$^{6+}$ with Mo$^{6+}$ [16] ions. The c-T phase diagram of Mn$_1$–cCo$_c$WO$_4$ ($c<0.3$) has been established recently using the temperature-dependent magnetic susceptibility and neutron powder diffraction studies [7]. Upon Co doping the lattice parameters and the unit-cell volume decrease linearly, reflecting smaller radii of Co$^{2+}$ ions. At the same time, the temperature coefficients of the lattice parameters $a$ and $b$ show non-linear behavior [7]. Recent, Raman and infra-red spectroscopy studies of Mn$_{0.85}$Co$_{0.15}$WO$_4$ revealed an unusual behaviour for some phonon modes below 100–200 K, which were related to the rigidity of zigzag chains of edge-shared MnO$_6$ octahedra, directly influencing various exchange interactions [10, 17]. Therefore, the information on the local structure in solid solutions Mn$_1$–cCo$_c$WO$_4$ is one of the key factors for deeper understanding of their properties.
In this work we have performed for the first time temperature dependent (6–300 K) x-ray absorption spectroscopy study of the local structure and dynamics around Mn, Co and W ions in MnWO₄, Mn₀.₇Co₀.₃WO₄ and CoWO₄.

2. Experimental and calculation details

MnWO₄, Mn₀.₇Co₀.₃WO₄ and CoWO₄ powders were synthesized using co-precipitation technique by a reaction of proper amounts of aqueous solutions of Co(NO₃)₂·6H₂O and/or MnCl₂·4H₂O salts with that of Na₂WO₄·2H₂O at 20°C. The obtained precipitates were washed, dried and finally annealed in air for 8 hours at 800°C. The W L₃-edge and Mn(Co) K-edge extended X-ray absorption fine structure (EXAFS) spectra were measured in transmission mode at the HASYLAB/DESY C1 bending-magnet beamline in the temperature range from 6 to 300 K. The x-ray radiation was monochromatized by a detuned Si(111) double-crystal monochromator, and the beam intensity was measured using two ionization chambers filled with argon and krypton gases. EXAFS oscillations $\chi(k)k^2$ were extracted in $k$-space range up to 18 Å⁻¹ following the conventional procedure [18] using the EDA package [19]. Fourier transforms (FTs) of representative low-temperature EXAFS spectra are shown in Fig. 1. The
first shell EXAFS contributions (Fig. 2(a)) were singled out in the $R$-space range 1.2–2.1 Å and best fitted using single shell Gaussian model to obtain the mean interatomic distances $\langle R \rangle$ and effective mean-square relative displacements (MSRDs) $\sigma^2$ for Co–O and Mn–O bonds (Fig. 2(b)). The radial distribution functions (RDFs) within the first coordination shell of metal ions were reconstructed by the regularization-like method [20] (Fig. 3). Theoretical scattering amplitude and phase shift functions, calculated by the \textit{ab initio} FEFF8 code [21, 22], were used in all simulations.

3. Results and discussion
In wolframite-type structure tungsten and 3$d$(Mn/Co) ions have distorted octahedral coordination by oxygen atoms, which can be characterized by a distortion parameter $\Delta = (1/6) \sum_{i=1}^{6} |R_i - \langle R \rangle|$. The WO$_6$ octahedra are strongly distorted with $\Delta = 0.124$ Å in MnWO$_4$ and 0.118 Å in CoWO$_4$, so that six oxygens can be divided into two groups of 4 nearest and 2 distant atoms located at 1.8–1.9 Å and 2.1–2.2 Å, respectively [3, 4]. A distortion of the MnO$_6$ octahedra $\Delta = 0.064$ Å is twice smaller, and that of the CoO$_6$ octahedra $\Delta = 0.048$ Å decreases even more. The octahedra distortion is well observed in the RDFs reconstructed from EXAFS spectra (Fig. 3). While RDFs for Co–O and Mn–O pairs are single-peak shaped, the ones for W–O pairs have two maxima in agreement with diffraction data [3, 4]. Note that the W–O RDFs are very close in all three compounds, and the different position of the RDF maxima for Co–O and Mn–O pairs is due to the size difference of Co$^{2+}$ (0.75 Å) and Mn$^{2+}$ (0.83 Å) ions being in the high-spin state [11].

Rather small distortion of the Mn(Co)O$_6$ octahedra allows one to perform the analysis of the first shell within the single-shell Gaussian approximation. As a result, the mean interatomic distances $R$(Mn/Co–O) and the MSRDs $\sigma^2$ for Co–O and Mn–O bonds were determined (Fig. 2). The Mn(Co)–O distances remain constant upon increasing temperature within $\pm 0.01$ Å, and their values in Mn$_{0.7}$Co$_{0.3}$WO$_4$ are close to that in pure tungstates.

The analysis of the Mn(Co)–O MSRDs suggests that they contain dynamic, i.e. temperature dependent, and static, caused by octahedra distortion, contributions. The MSRDs temperature dependent part is close in three tungstates and is well approximated by the Einstein model with the characteristic temperature $\theta_E \approx 415$ K.

The main difference in the MSRDs is due to the static octahedra distortion, being the largest in MnWO$_4$ and the smallest in CoWO$_4$. In Mn$_{0.7}$Co$_{0.3}$WO$_4$ the MSRD values for Co–O bonds
are close to that in CoWO₄, suggesting that Co²⁺ ions adopt similar local environment. On the contrary, the MSRD values for Mn–O bonds in Mn₀.₇Co₀.₃WO₄ are significantly smaller by about 0.005 Å² than in MnWO₄, but slightly larger by about 0.002 Å² than for Co–O bonds. This means that cobalt doping leads to a decrease of the MnO₆ octahedra distortion. Comparison of the Mn(Co) K-edge FTs in Fig. 1 indicates that the behaviour of the outer shells at 2.5–4.0 Å in Mn₀.₇Co₀.₃WO₄ is also closer to that in CoWO₄. These original results confirm the stabilizing role of Co doping in solid solutions Mn₁₋ₓCoₓWO₄ suggested in [7, 10].

4. Conclusions

Temperature dependent x-ray absorption spectroscopy study of the local structure and dynamics around Mn, Co and W ions in multiferroic MnWO₄ and Mn₀.₇Co₀.₃WO₄ has been performed in comparison with antiferromagnetic CoWO₄. The obtained results provide direct evidence of the stabilizing role of cobalt in Mn₀.₇Co₀.₃WO₄. We have proved that the local environment of Co²⁺ ions in the solid solution is close to that in CoWO₄. At the same time, the presence of cobalt ions influences strongly the local environment around Mn ions, which becomes less distorted compared to pure MnWO₄. The strongly distorted octahedral environment of tungsten atoms was found to be close in three tungstates.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Dr. R. Chernikov for assistance during the experiments at the HASYLAB/DESY beamline. This work was supported by ESF projects 2009/0202/1DP/1.1.1.2.0/09/APIA/VIAA/141, 2009/0216/1DP/1.1.1.2.0/09/APIA/VIAA/044 and Latvian National Research Program IMIS. The EXAFS experiments at HASYLAB/DESY have been supported from the European Community’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement No. 226716 (project I-20100098 EC).

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