Enhanced electrocatalytic activity of Au@Cu core@shell nanoparticles towards CO₂ reduction


a University of Birmingham, School of Chemistry, Birmingham, B15 2TT, UK.
b Leiden Institute of Chemistry, Leiden University, P.O. Box 9502, 2300 RA, Leiden, the Netherlands.
c Institute of Electrochemistry, University of Alicante, E-03080, Alicante, Spain.

Corresponding author: p.b.rodriguez@bham.ac.uk

Supporting Information

1. Experimental procedure

Synthesis of Au nanoparticles

Briefly, Au seeds were prepared by the reduction of HAuCl₄·3H₂O (2.5 x 10⁻⁴ M) by ice-cold NaBH₄ (6.0 x 10⁻⁴ M) in the presence of CTAB (7.5 x 10⁻² M). Au seeds were used to induce the formation of nanocubes in a growth solution containing HAuCl₄ (2 x 10⁻⁴ M) + CTAB (1.6 x 10⁻² M) + L-ascorbic acid (6 x 10⁻² M) to which Au seeds (1.25 x 10⁻⁸ M) were added. After the reaction was completed, the solution was centrifuged at 3000 rpm for 30 minutes to precipitate the solid and remove the excess of reactants.

Cleaning procedure of electrochemical setup

In order to obtain very clean and reproducible conditions, prior to each experimental session, the cell and all of the glassware were immersed overnight in an acidic solution of KMnO₄. Next, the solution was removed and the residual MnO₄⁻ was rinsed with an acidic solution of H₂O₂ and sulfuric acid (3:1), and then thoroughly washed several times by boiling with ultra-pure water (Elga PureUltra, 18.2 MΩ cm, 1 ppb total organic carbon).

2. Mass spectrometry calibration

The MS was calibrated using two methods:

Calibration of the MS using mixture of gases:

The MS was calibrated using mixtures of gases as similar to the method described in 1,2. The mass ion current recorded by the mass spectrometer Iᵣ is proportional to the flux of the species into the system Fₛ; and both are related by a calibration constant K as:

Iᵣ = K Fₛ

The flux of the gases can be expressed as a function of the volume and pressures as follow:

Iᵣ = K \left( \frac{V}{RT} \right) \left( \frac{dp}{dt} \right)
Where $V_c$ is the calibration volume, $R$ is the ideal gas constant, $T$ the temperature in the chamber and $p_c$ is the total pressure of the volume of the gas.

In order to obtain the calibration constants, we prepared mixtures of gases in a stainless steel mixture bottle of 1L. The bottle was connected through a set of pressure meters to the gases to be analysed. The mixtures of gases evaluated and the calibration constant $K$ are shown in the table below:

### Table SI1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mixture</th>
<th>Inlet composition in % of partial pressure</th>
<th>Calibration constant K</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ar/CO$_2$</td>
<td>80:20</td>
<td>CO$_2$ = 0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ar/C$_2$H$_4$</td>
<td>90:10</td>
<td>C$_2$H$_4$ =0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ar/CH$_4$</td>
<td>90:10</td>
<td>CH$_4$ =0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He/H$_2$</td>
<td>98:2</td>
<td>H$_2$=0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Commercial sample BOC research grade.

Considering the system available in our lab (figure SI1) and the error of its pressures gauges, the calibration gas mixtures can be prepared with a relative expanded uncertainty of 2% in the volume fraction for the case of the Argon containing mixtures.

![Figure SI1. Experimental setup for the preparation of the gas mixtures.](image)

All the calibrations constants were determined at 20±3 °C (external temperature, measured with a thermocouple). The SEM voltage was 1329 V for the samples of CO$_2$, C$_2$H$_4$ and CH$_4$ and 2100 for H$_2$.

**Calibration of the electrochemical system:**

For the calibration of the OLEMS system, we used a well-known probe, the stripping voltammetry of a monolayer of carbon monoxide oxidation on Pt electrode.
In this case, the flux of the gases is replaced by the amount of CO\textsubscript{2} produced as the CO monoxide monolayer is oxidized from the electrode. Therefore, the charge associated with the Faradaic current of the oxidation reaction and the ion current mass (I\textsubscript{R}) can be expressed as follow:

\[ I\textsubscript{R} = kQ_{CO2} \]

The corresponding stripping voltammetry and the ion mass current of the CO\textsubscript{2} is show in figure SI2. Because the electrochemical surface area of the electrode (0.12 cm\textsuperscript{2}) is larger than the inlet on the tip (0.04 cm\textsuperscript{2}), we have use the charge associated to the oxidation of carbon monoxide in an area of 0.04 cm\textsuperscript{2}.

![Figure SI2. (Bottom) Voltammetric profile of the oxidation of a CO monolayer adsorbed on Pt polycrystalline electrode in 0.1 M HClO\textsubscript{4}. (Top) Corresponding ion mass signal of CO\textsubscript{2} (m/z=44). Scan rate \(\nu\)=5 mV/s. SEM voltage= 1329 V.](image)

Based on these results we have obtained that the calibration constant for the CO\textsubscript{2} is 0.24. The difference between the calibration constants of the CO\textsubscript{2} in the mixtures of gases and the OLEMS system must be associated with the collection coefficient of the gas in the tip and the approximation of the active area exposed in the tip. Since the calibration constants of the CO\textsubscript{2} in the OLEMS is a factor of 1.71 higher than the calibration constant of the CO\textsubscript{2} in the mixture of gases, we used this factor to obtain the calibration constant of the CH\textsubscript{4}, C\textsubscript{2}H\textsubscript{4} and H\textsubscript{2}. The calibration constants depend on the composition of the gas mixture; therefore, we extrapolate that the values for the calibration constants for mixture of two gases is an approximation of our real system where more than two gases and the vapour pressure are present.

3. Calculating the partial pressures

The sum of all the partial pressures will yield the total pressure of the system. Figure SI3 shows the total pressure, the CO\textsubscript{2} partial pressure and water partial pressure during the CO\textsubscript{2} reduction on Au@Cu2 sample as a function of time.
Figure SI3. Total pressure and partial pressures for CO$_2$ (m/z=44) and water (m/z=18) probed by OLEMS as a function of time for the reduction of CO$_2$ at 0.6 V vs RHE on the Au@Cu2 and in CO$_2$ saturated PBS (pH=8) solution. The partial pressure of water and CO$_2$ have been multiplied by x2 for comparison.

Results

Figure SI4. X-Ray diffraction pattern of Au cubic nanoparticles.
Figure SI5. X-Ray fluorescence spectra of (A) Au@Cu1 nanoparticles, (B) Au@Cu2 nanoparticles and (C) Au@Cu3 nanoparticles. The blue lines correspond to the Au signals and the brown lines correspond to the Cu signals.
Figure SI6. Normalized partial pressure for hydrogen probed by OLEMS as a function of time for the reduction of CO$_2$ at -0.6 V vs RHE on Au in a CO$_2$ saturated PBS (pH=8) solution.