ON THE MECHANISM OF ACRYLAMIDE EMULSION POLYMERIZATION WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF ITS DIMERS

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The role of both dimeric and monomeric forms of acrylamide monomer in the process of polymerization in emulsions initiated by different type of initiators was discussed and the reasons for the reaction order with respect to monomer greater than unity were elucidated for acrylamide free radical polymerization in emulsions. The emulsion polymerization mechanism of acrylamide is discussed separately for the processes initiated by water-soluble initiator and oil-soluble initiator. The main difference in two cases is the distribution of acrylamide and initiator in aqueous and toluene phases. In the case of using water-soluble initiator, the initiator and acrylamide are in the same phase, whereas the molecules of the initiator and acrylamide are distributed between different phases in the case of using oil-soluble initiator. As a result, the participation of the dimers in the process of acrylamide emulsion polymerization is more efficient for the system where water-soluble initiator is used. For that system, it is suggested that both dimers and monomers of acrylamide participate in the propagation reaction at relatively low concentrations of acrylamide, which explains the value of the reaction order with respect to monomer greater than unity.

Keywords: acrylamide, emulsion polymerization, polymerization mechanism, water-soluble initiator, potassium persulfate, oil-soluble initiator, 2,2'-azobisisobutyronitrile.

DOI: 10.32434/0321-4095-2021-136-3-50-56
Experimental

Materials

Acrylamide (AA, CH$_2$=CHCONH$_2$, suitable for electrophoresis, ≥99.0%, Sigma-Aldrich), initiators potassium persulfate (PP, K$_2$S$_2$O$_8$, ACS reagent, ≥99.0%, Sigma-Aldrich) and 2,2'-azobisisobutyronitrile (AIBN, (CH$_3$)$_2$C(CN)N=NC(CH$_3$)$_2$CN, ≥98.0% (GC), Sigma-Aldrich), emulsifier lecithin (from egg yolk, type XVI-E, (TLC), lyophilized powder, 99.0%, Sigma-Aldrich), toluene (C$_6$H$_5$CH$_3$, ACS reagent, ≥99.5 %, Sigma-Aldrich) were used without further purification. The properties of the used chemicals are listed in Table.

Methods

The rate of polymerization was determined by dilatometric method at 323.15 K and V$_{\text{water}}$:V$_{\text{toluene}}$=1:2. The dilatometer was filled up under vacuum after degassing (~10$^{-4}$ MPa). Under the stream of high purity helium, the dilatometer was separated from installation and placed in a thermostat. The volume of dilatometer was 5.6 mL, the height change in the dilatometer capillary tube was measured with accuracy of ±0.5 mm. The temperature was controlled within ±0.5 K. The emulsion was prepared by magnetic-shaker stirring with constant rate.

Results and discussion

It is well known that the rate of polymerization ($R_p$) for AA is described in stationary conditions by the following relation:

$$R_p = k[I]^n[M]^m$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

where [I] and [M] are the concentrations of initiator and monomer, respectively; n and m are the reaction order with respect to initiator and monomer, respectively.

Commonly, n=0.5 and it is the constant for many systems, but the order with respect to monomer is varied depending on monomer concentration [1,9,10,13]. Analysis of AA EP kinetics data allows elucidating the mechanism of AA polymerization in ES based on AA existing form in a reaction system. The most important problem is to understand in which locus elementary reactions occur and elucidate the effect of a medium on the kinetics of reactions. At first, it is related to initiator homolysis and reactions of chain initiation. To establish the locus of each elementary reaction, it is also important to take into account the distribution of the initiator, monomer and other components in the polymerization system. Of course, the type of initiator has significant importance for kinetics and mechanism of EP, therefore the mechanisms of polymerization of AA in emulsions initiated by watersoluble and oil-soluble initiators should be discussed separately.

Polymerization of AA initiated by water-soluble potassium persulfate (PP)

It is known that homolysis of PP occurs in the aqueous phase where AA also is present; therefore, all elementary reactions of polymerization occur in an aqueous medium. As was mentioned, AA is present in an aqueous phase both in the monomeric and dimeric forms and can participate in elementary reactions in both forms. For the kinetics of EP, the participation of dimers in chain growth reaction is especially important. Let’s assume that propagation reaction of growing radicals ($P^*_m$) with dimers and monomers of AA proceeds simultaneously (as parallel reactions):

$$P^*_m + H_2C=CHCONH_2 \longrightarrow P^*_m + H_2C=CHCONH_2 \quad (3)$$

$$P^*_m + H_2C=CHCONH_2 \longrightarrow P^*_m + H_2C=CHCONH_2 \quad (4)$$

Specification of the chemicals used

| Chemical                  | Source         | CASRN    | Purification method | Final purity * |
|---------------------------|----------------|-----------|---------------------|----------------|
| acrylamide                | Sigma-Aldrich  | 79-06-1   | none                | ≥99.0%         |
| potassium persulfate      | Sigma-Aldrich  | 7727-21-1 | none                | ≥99.0%         |
| 2,2'-azobisisobutyronitrile | Sigma-Aldrich  | 78-67-1   | none                | ≥98.0%         |
| lecithin                  | Sigma-Aldrich  | 8002-43-5 | none                | ≥99.0%         |
| toluene                   | Sigma-Aldrich  | 108-88-3  | none                | ≥99.5%         |

Note: * Declared by supplier.

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The reactivity of the dimer is lower than monomer [9], therefore $k_1 < k_2$. The rate of reactions (3) and (4) can be expressed by the following expressions:

$$R_1 = k_1 \left[ P_m \right] [M]^2, \quad (5)$$

$$R_2 = k_2 \left[ P_m \right] [M]. \quad (6)$$

The overall rate of the process is summed up from (5) and (6) as follows:

$$R_p = R_1 + R_2 = k_1 \left[ P_m \right] [M]^2 + k_2 \left[ P_m \right] [M]. \quad (7)$$

Then, two extreme cases should be considered:

1) the dimers are practically absent in the system when $[AA] < 0.7 \text{ mol L}^{-1}$, and the rate of polymerization is expressed by the following equation:

$$R_p = k_2 \left[ P_m \right] [M]. \quad (8)$$

In this case, the reaction order with respect to monomer is equal 1, which has been established in a number of publications [1,10,11,13]. Our data also confirm this conclusion (Fig. 1, curve 3).

2) the dimers prevail in the system when $[AA] > 0.7 \text{ mol L}^{-1}$, and the rate of polymerization is expressed by the following equation:

$$R_p = k_1 \left[ P_m \right] [M]^2. \quad (9)$$

As follows from Eq. (9), the reaction order with respect to monomer is equal to 2. In practice at $[AA] > 0.7 \text{ mol L}^{-1}$, the reaction order with respect to AA is always greater than unity, however less than 2, and can reach 2 only in the ideal case. As follows from Fig. 1, the reaction order with respect to AA is equal 1 at $[AA] > 0.8 \text{ mol L}^{-1}$ in an aqueous medium, as opposed to the emulsion.

Thus, for AA polymerization, the value of reaction order with respect to AA is greater than unity and the behavior of polymerization rate at $[AA] > 1.0 \text{ mol L}^{-1}$ can be explained on the basis of the above mentioned kinetic scheme. As follows from Eq. (3), that the dimers of AA can exist within macromolecules of PAA, which, principally, can start the propagation of polymer chains and, as a result, the branched polymeric structures can be formed. They can also be the cause of the formation of partially cross-linked polymeric structures. Apparently, the mentioned factors are the fundamental reasons for PAA solubility decreasing at relatively high concentrations of AA; thus, about 15% of PAA is not solubilized in water at $[AA] = 1.5 \text{ mol L}^{-1}$, and about 30% of PAA is not solubilized in water at $[AA] = 2.0 \text{ mol L}^{-1}$. These facts can explain the observable gel-effect at relatively high concentrations of AA [9]. The separation of side monomeric molecules from the polymer chain also must not be excluded. The probability of such separation increases under the local influence of the released energy in the polymerization process. In that case, the reaction order with respect to monomer...
must not differ from unity, which is established for homogenous polymerization of AA in aqueous solutions [9,11,13]. Particularly, it is established that the reaction order with respect to AA remains to be unity in homogenous system at [AA]≤2.0 mol L⁻¹, while the reaction order with respect to AA is greater than unity at higher concentrations of AA. It is obviously caused by the formation of more stable dimeric forms at relatively high concentrations of AA in water. As can be concluded from our earlier studies [9,2,14] and literature data [10,13], the threshold concentration of dimerization in emulsions is relatively low, which explains the value of reaction order with respect to AA greater than unity at relatively low concentration of AA.

Polymerization of AA initiated by oil-soluble 2,2'-azobisobutyronitrile (AIBN)

As shown in ref. [9], the oil-soluble initiator AIBN practically does not transfer from toluene (i.e. organic phase) to aqueous phase and, at the same time, AA does not transfer from aqueous phase to toluene practically (AIBN is in disperse phase and AA is in continuous phase). Thus, the homolysis of AIBN occurs in organic phase where the molecules of AA are practically absent. The decay of AIBN can be presented by the following general scheme:

\[
\begin{align*}
H_2C=\text{C}N\equiv\text{N}C-C\text{CH}_3 + & \quad \frac{k_1}{k_1} \\
\text{CH}_3 & \quad \frac{k_2}{k_2} \\
H_2C=N\equiv\text{N}^*C-C\text{CH}_3 + & \quad \frac{k_3}{k_3} \\
\text{CH}_3 & \quad \frac{k_4}{k_4}
\end{align*}
\]

(10)

It should be noted that the constant of AIBN decay rate does not practically depend on the polarity of a solvent [13,15]. The effect of medium on the decay of AIBN is explained by the theory of cage effect [11,13,15]. It is suggested that the changes in the values of AIBN decay rate constant, which is detected by the replacement of one solvent by other, is a result of the cage effect on the recombination of formed radicals. Due to the replacement of one solvent by other, the fraction of radicals, which has time to recombine in the «cage», changes depending on the properties of solvent and reaction system. It was shown in ref. [9,12] that the rate of AIBN decay decreases with an increase in the viscosity of a solvent. It was also reported [9,12] that the rate of AIBN homolysis decreases in ES as compared with the homogenous system. At the same time, the decrease in the rate of homolysis becomes more significant with an increase in the size of discrete particles. In general, it is due to the effect of emulsion properties on the cage effect. The R radicals, formed due to AIBN decay, are more mobile and relatively easily diffuse into the surface layer of emulsion droplets or polymer-monomer particles (PMP), where the molecules of AA can also exist together with molecules of emulsifier [9,12]. It is suggested that is where the act of initiation proceeds. At the same time, the dependence of initiation rate (R_i) on the AIBN concentration is expressed as the first order-like kinetic equation, regardless of the type of emulsion [12]:

\[ R_i = k_i [\text{AIBN}] . \]  

(12)

As the reaction of AIBN homolysis is slightly sensitive to solute properties, thus, independently the molecules of AIBN are within discrete or continuous phase, the energetic and kinetic characteristics of AIBN homolysis will be practically the same. However, the efficiency of the initiation of AIBN within discrete particles is lower than within homogenous system [14]. The particles RM* (primary single radicals) and RM* (oligomeric radicals) are more hydrophilic than R and the probability of their transfer to an aqueous phase is more realistic. The mobility of the molecules of the adsorption (surface) layers on discrete particles (emulsion droplets, PMP) [9–13] and the existence of dynamic equilibrium of the adsorbed molecules within the layer and continuous phase will also contribute to this. Naturally, the number of R* and RM* in a surface layer is limited and mainly depends on the specific surface of discrete particles and characteristics of adsorption layer molecules. Obviously, this is a basic reason for the independence of polymerization rate (R_i) from the AIBN concentration at its relatively high concentrations (Fig. 2). It can be suggested that the formed RM radicals are in the interfacial
layer and they are not transferred into the bulk of aqueous medium where the growth of polymer chains mainly occurs. When carrying out the process under constant conditions, the surface of the interface layer, which is limited through the put of radicals formed due to AIBN homolysis, is not practically changed, and, thus, the detected dependence of \( R_p \) on the AIBN concentration (Fig. 2, curve 3) is quite expected.

If we compare the data concerning the AA EP initiated by water-soluble PP (Fig. 1) with those relating to the AA EP initiated by oil-soluble AIBN (Fig. 2), we can conclude that the values of \( R_p \) when applying PP are higher than in the case of AIBN under comparable conditions. It is important that there is no change in \( R_p \) vs. [AA] curve behavior at comparable high concentrations of AA for the ES initiated by AIBN, which was detected for the ES initiated by PP. Probably, the chance of a transfer of dimer into interfacial layer for the discussed system is significantly low than for molecules of AA.

**Conclusions**

The present paper reveals that the mechanism of AA EP is highly depending on the type of the used initiator. The dimeric form of AA prevails in the discussed system in the case of EPS where water-soluble PP is used as an initiator at the [AA]<0.7 mol L\(^{-1}\), and, as a result, the reaction order with respect to monomer is greater than unity. However, at the [AA]>0.7 mol L\(^{-1}\), the amount of dimers of AA in EPS becomes lower and the reaction order with respect to AA remains within the unity. At the same time, as the oil-soluble initiator AIBN and water-soluble AA are distributed in different phases and the transfer of each components molecules to other phase is limited, the form of AA molecules does not play decisive role in the participation of EP, and, as a result, the reaction order of polymerization with respect to AA is always equal to unity.

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Received 11.11.2020

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PRO MEKHANIZM EMULSYIÎNOI' POLIMERIZATSII ACRYLAMIDU ZA UCHAST'IO HOTO DIMEROV

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Obogovoreno znachenia dimerichnyh i monernych form acrylamidnogo monomera v proce polimerizatsii v emulsii, chto ichyiniyana riznymi tipami initiatuv. Vysvityzeni prichyni peredovi reaktsii za monomerom, blihshh odeniinicy, dlya vlyano radikalnoi polimerizatsii acrylamidu v emul'si i. Mehanizm emulyssnoi polimerizatsii obogovorenokrêmno dla proceś, iniyovannyh vodno-rocchnym initiatoryom i maso-rocnym initiatoryom. Osnovna viddenivost v obh vypadakh y rozpozd akrylamidu i initiatorya v vodnîj i tolshennîj fazah. V vypadku vyikoristenti vodno-rocnyno iniciatorya i acrylamid znayotsehtsi v odnoi fazi, tôdy kak molouki initiatorya i acrylamidu rozpalâlenî mî dvoa rîzînîmî faham v vypadku vyikoristeniya maso-rocnyno iniciatorya. U rezultâti uchast dimerov v proce emulyssnoi polimerizatsii acrylamidu byînî diava dlya sistem, de vyikoristenosyo vodno-rocnyno iniciatorya. Dlya takim system akrylamid, tak i monomerici acrylamid beruet uchast v rozpozvodianîi reaktsii pri vydnosno nillyh koncentrachii akrylamidu, òa i poynsno kellichnymu peredovi re-aksiî po monomeru, blihsho za odeniinicy.

Klyouchovie slova: akrylamid, emulyssno polimerizatsiya, mehaniçm polimerizatsii, vodno-rocnyno initiatorya, kalîî persulyff, maso-rocnyno initiatorya, 2,2'-azobiozobutyronitir.

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