Effect of sintering condition and V-doping on the piezoelectric properties of BaTiO$_3$–Bi(Mg$_{1/2}$Ti$_{1/2}$)O$_3$–BiFeO$_3$ ceramics

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0.3BaTiO$_3$–0.1Bi(Mg$_{1/2}$Ti$_{1/2}$)O$_3$–0.6BiFeO$_3$ ceramics were either doped with vanadium or sintered in calcined powder with the same composition. Compared to an undoped ceramic sintered without the calcined powder, both ceramics showed reduced leakage current densities (lower than 1 $\times$ 10$^{-7}$ A/cm$^2$) and absence of dielectric relaxation behaviors observed in frequency- and temperature-dependent dielectric measurements. The Curie temperatures of both samples were higher than 460°C. The maximum electric BiFeO$_3$ (BF) with the Curie temperature of 830°C. The maximum displacement current densities (lower than 1 $\times$ 10$^{-7}$ A/cm$^2$) were associated with the increased piezoelectric response of PZT ceramics with reduced concentrations of bismuth vacancy oxygen vacancy defect dipoles.

1. Introduction

Pb(Zr,Ti)O$_3$ (PZT) has been used for electromechanical applications owing to the large piezoelectric properties over a wide temperature range. Lead is, however, a toxic element, and therefore lead-free piezoceramics have extensively been studied. To date, no piezoelectric material with the piezoelectric response and Curie temperature simultaneously comparable to those of PZT was found. The large piezoelectric responses of PZT are attributed to the morphotropic phase boundary (MPB), which separates tetragonal and rhombohedral phases. There are several reported studies to understand the origin of the large response at MPB. A theoretical study explained that the increased response was attributed to increased numbers of polarizable directions as a result of coexistence of the two phases. Recent transmission electron microscopy studies showed nano-sized, fine domains at MPB. The motion of the fine domains by the electric field was observed, which was suggested to lead the large piezoelectric properties. Since nano-sized domains are also reported for solid-solutions of relaxors Pb(Zr$_{1/3}$Nb$_{2/3}$)O$_3$ and Pb(Mg$_{1/3}$Nb$_{2/3}$)O$_3$ and ferroelectric PbTiO$_3$ with large piezoelectric properties, they may be associated with the increased piezoelectric response of PZT at MPB.

Macrostructure and electric properties have been studied for lead-free piezoelectric solid-solutions of relaxor-like (1 $-$ x)-BaTiO$_3$-xBi(Mg$_{1/2}$Ti$_{1/2}$)O$_3$ (BT–BMT) with the dielectric maximum temperature maximized to 360°C at x = 0.5$^{19,20}$ and ferroelectric BiFeO$_3$ (BF) with the Curie temperature of ~830°C. An early work showed nanodomains in the BT–BMT–BF system. The domain structure of the 0.3BT–0.1BMT–0.6BF ceramics mainly consisted of nanodomains with a small amount of large, ferroelectric domains (macrodromains). The dielectric displacement–electric field loop was ferroelectric, but the loop appeared round and leaky. When the sample was doped with an acceptor of Mn, the lossy response was suppressed. However, the piezoelectric and dielectric properties were also reduced.

The aim of this study is to develop 0.3BT–0.1BMT–0.6BF ceramics with reduced leakage current and without sacrificing the properties. To this end, effect of donor doping and sintering condition was investigated. Donor doping is known to increase the resistivity of Bi-based ferroelectrics of Bi$_2$Ti$_2$O$_7$. Vanadium was selected in this study. Sintering a Bi-based sample in a bismuth-rich atmosphere would suppress Bi$_2$O$_3$ evaporation, as reported for a lead-based system. To determine if this is true for the 0.3BT–0.1BMT–0.6BF ceramics, the compacts were sintered either in a closed crucible fully filled with the calcined powder with the same composition or in a closed, empty crucible.

2. Experimental procedure

Three different samples were studied: undoped 0.3BT–0.1BMT–0.6BF ceramics sintered in a closed crucible without a cover calcined powder with the same composition (undoped sample), undoped 0.3BT–0.1BMT–0.6BF ceramics sintered in a closed crucible fully filled with the cover calcined powder (embedded sample), and V-doped ceramics with the composition of 0.3BT–0.1Bi$_{1–y}$V$_y$(Mg$_{1/2}$Ti$_{1/2}$)$_3$O$_7$–0.6BF with y = 0.02 sintered in the closed crucible without the cover calcined powder (V-doped sample). The crucible was made of Al$_2$O$_3$ (99%) with a size of $\phi$36 mm $\times$ 30 mm. A lid made of the same alumina was placed on the crucible. The samples were prepared by a solid-state synthesis. Powders of BaTiO$_3$ (Sakai Chemical, BT01), Bi$_2$O$_3$ (99.99%, Rare Metallic), MgO (99.9%, Rare Metallic), TiO$_2$ (Ishihara Sangyo, MPT-851), $\alpha$-Fe$_2$O$_3$ (99.99%, Rare Metallic), and V$_2$O$_5$ (99.0%, Kanto Chemical) were weighed and ball-milled with zirconia balls and ethanol for 16 h. After drying at 80°C, the powders were ground and calcined at 800°C for 6 h in a closed crucible. The calcined powders were again ground, and then the crystal structures were examined by X-ray
3. Results and discussion

3.1 Physical and structural properties

Figure 1 shows the XRD patterns of the sintered samples. Only the perovskite phase was observed. The crystal structures of all the samples were pseudo-cubic, and this was consistent with previous studies.\(^{25,26}\) The pseudo-cubic lattice parameter was calculated by a least-square fit of selected XRD peaks. The pseudo-cubic lattice parameter for the samples was \(3.997(8)\) Å and did not change among the samples. Here, the lattice constant of the undoped and embedded samples was the same as that of the undoped sample, probably because the amount of the V dopant was small, which was consistent with previous study.\(^{27}\) The densities of the samples were 95–96% of the theoretical values.

\[\text{Density} = \frac{\text{Sample weight}}{\text{Volume of sample}}\]

The room temperature leakage current density-electric field response is shown in Fig. 2. The leakage current density of the undoped sample increased to \(10^{-8}\) A/cm\(^2\) at 40 kV/cm. Beyond the electric field, the sample was broken down. A large leakage current density has been reported for Bi-based materials.\(^{27,29,30}\) When the undoped sample was embedded or V-doped, the leakage current density was reduced to \(10^{-9} - 10^{-8}\) A/cm\(^2\). The reduction in the leakage current density of the embedded sample was attributed to the suppression of Bi\(_2\)O\(_3\) evaporation. The Bi\(_2\)O\(_3\) evaporation in the undoped sample might lose a local electrical neutrality,\(^{31}\) which resulted in a change in an oxidation state of Fe ions between Fe\(^{3+}\) and Fe\(^{2+}\). The change in the oxidation state is known to lead to a hopping conduction between the Fe ions and increased the leakage current density.\(^{29,30}\) For the V-doped sample, bismuth vacancies were generated, that is, Bi\(_{1-x/2}\)Fe\(_{1/2}\)O\(_3\). This could inhibit a further generation of bismuth vacancies as well as oxygen vacancies, which reduced the leakage current density, as proposed for V-doped Bi\(_{1-x/2}\)Fe\(_{1/2}\)O\(_3\).\(^{27}\)

The frequency dependence of the dielectric properties is shown in Fig. 3. A clear increase in the dielectric loss at low frequencies was observed for the undoped sample. This increase could be ascribed to an electric conduction and/or a dielectric relaxation which was either a migration of space charges or a reorientation of defect dipoles.\(^{32}\) For the undoped sample, a concentration of the oxygen vacancies could be high due to the Bi\(_2\)O\(_3\) evaporation. As reported for other perovskite oxides,\(^{33,34}\) these oxygen vacancies could migrate as space charges or move around bismuth vacancies, resulting in bismuth vacancy–oxygen vacancy defect dipoles. When the sample was sintered with the calcined powder or doped with V, the increase in the dielectric loss was suppressed.

The temperature dependence of the dielectric properties is shown in Fig. 4. For the dielectric constant profile of the undoped sample, there are two peaks observed. One is the peak...
at 480°C, which is associated with the Curie temperature.22) The peak dielectric constant decreased with increasing frequency. This was related to an electric conduction, as evidenced by the large increase in the dielectric loss at high temperatures. The other is the peak near 230°C, accompanied with the dielectric loss peak. Such a peak is related to the dielectric relaxation,33),34) and thus this supports that the dielectric loss increase observed in Fig. 3 was, at least, associated with the dielectric relaxation. For the sample doped with V or sintered in the calcined powder, the peak at 230°C was suppressed. The leakage and dielectric data suggest that there were a large concentration of the defect dipoles and space charges in the undoped sample. These defects might connect to form leakage paths, and thus result in the large leakage current density. For the V-doped and embedded samples, the defect concentrations were reduced. The defects were isolated and did not form the leakage paths, leading to the reduced leakage.

The Curie temperature was reduced by 20°C for the V-doped sample. A reduction in the Curie temperature by V-doping was reported for Bi4Ti3O12 ceramics, although the reduction was smaller.27) On the other hand, the Curie temperature was raised by 15°C for the embedded sample. A possible reason for this is the reduced oxygen vacancy concentration, as reported for BaTiO3.35)

At temperatures between room temperature and 200°C, a frequency dispersion in the dielectric constant and loss was observed for the V-doped sample. A similar dispersion was found in BT–BF and BT–BiScO3 solid solutions,36),37) and therefore this could be a characteristic of BaTiO3–Bi-based perovskite systems. The origin was suggested to be reentrant, which meant that the material could be treated as dipolar glass.36)

3.3 Ferroelectric and piezoelectric properties

The dielectric displacement–electric field loops of the samples are shown in Fig. 5. A leaky, round loop was observed for the undoped sample. This was at least associated with the increased leakage current density presented in Fig. 2. The space charges, as suggested in the frequency and temperature studies, could contribute to this as well. The hysteresis loop was slightly pinched. Pinched hysteresis loops were reported for ferroelectrics including BF,38),41) and were attributed to defect dipoles. For the embedded sample and the V-doped sample, such a lossy response was suppressed. No large difference was observed for the loops. Note that the hysteresis loops were also slightly pinched, suggesting a small amount of the defect dipoles that was not detected by the tan δ–frequency response.

The bipolar strain–electric field curves of the samples are shown in Fig. 6(a). It was found that the field-induced strain was increased for the embedded and V-doped samples, compared to the undoped sample. This could be attributed to the reduced concentrations of the defect dipoles that pinned the domain wall motion. The asymmetric curve was observed for the V-doped sample. Such a curve was reported for a BiFeO3 ceramic.42) Note that the coercive field was smaller than those of the dielectric displacement–electric field loops because of the lower measuring frequencies. With increasing frequency, a coercive field of a ferroelectric increases due to a delayed response of domain walls with respect to the applied electric field,43) and the frequency dependence was mainly attributed to a slow response of a non-180° domain wall motion.42),44) Recent studies showed the strong frequency dependence of the coercive field in 0.7Pb(Mg1/3Nb2/3)O3–0.3PbTiO3 and 0.955Pb(Mg1/3Nb2/3)O3–0.045PbTiO3 systems with compositions having nanodomains.45),46) These might...
suggest that the strong frequency dependence of the coercive field of the samples in this study was associated with an increased concentration of non-180° domain walls due to their nano-domains. The unipolar strain–electric field curves of the samples are shown in Fig. 6(b). Note that the samples were not poled. As expected, increased responses were observed for the embedded sample and the V-doped sample. The strain maximum expected, increased responses were observed for the embedded sample and the V-doped sample, respectively. These results indicated that the sintering with the calcined powder and the V-doped sample, respectively. The strain response of the V-doped sample compared to that of the reduced defect dipole concentrations. The origin of the smaller strain response of the V-doped sample compared to that of the embedded sample is unclear and needs further study.

4. Conclusions

The leakage, dielectric, and piezoelectric properties of the undoped, embedded, and V-doped samples were studied. The large current densities and the dielectric relaxation of the undoped sample were suppressed for the embedded sample and the V-doped sample. The electric-field-induced strain was increased for the embedded and V-doped samples. The dielectric relaxation and the pinched P–E loops suggested that the increase was associated with the reduced concentrations of the defect dipoles.

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References