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To cite this version:

HAL Id: jpa-00216988
https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/jpa-00216988
Submitted on 1 Jan 1977

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MAGNETIC AND MOSSBAUER SPECTROSCOPY STUDIES 
OF CERAMIC GARNET PROCESSING

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Résumé. — L'analyse thermomagnétique et la spectrographie Mössbauer au voisinage du point de Curie sont des méthodes utiles mais relativement peu exploitées pour l'étude de la formation des céramiques magnétiques. L'effet du processus de fabrication et du traitement thermique sur le degré de réaction et l'homogénéité chimique peut être directement évalué et relié aux performances finales du matériau.

Abstract. — Thermomagnetic analysis and Mössbauer spectroscopy near \( T_c \) are useful and relatively unexploited tools for studying the formation of magnetic ceramics. The effect of processing and heat treatment on the extent of reaction and chemical homogeneity can be readily evaluated and related to final application performance.

1. Introduction. — The major testing and evaluation of magnetic ceramics is carried out on the fired (sintered) product. We discuss measurements which are not commonly used in monitoring ceramic processing but which may be useful in the production of magnetic ceramics. The measurements are thermomagnetic analysis and Mössbauer spectroscopy near the Curie temperature \( (T_c) \). These tests add to the understanding of prior processing steps and directly correlate with engineering properties such as microwave loss tangent and resonance line width. They are ideally suited to garnets with partial substitution for Fe by diamagnetic ions, but also apply in principle to spinels. Examples are taken from our studies \([1, 2]\) of the garnet \((Y_{2.66}Gd_{0.34})Fe_{4.19}Al_{0.67}Mn_{0.09}O_{12}\) where \( x \) has a value close to 4.22, used in microwave phase shifters.

2. Thermomagnetic Analysis. — This measurement of the magnetization \( (\sigma) \) as a function of temperature \( (H) \) sufficient to produce technical saturation is well known in the physics of magnetic materials \([3]\). The information is richer than that obtainable from \( \sigma_{sat} \) (room temp.) alone. The presence of several magnetic phases is readily detected. Also, the shape of the \( \sigma \) vs. \( T \) curve and the values of \( \sigma(RT) \) and \( T_c \) permit estimates of the extent, composition and approach to homogeneity of the phase formed.

The steps of the conventional ceramic process are: \( a) \) mix oxides for a time \( t_{mix} \); \( b) \) calcine (prefire) for time \( t_{calc} \) at temperature \( T_{calc} \); \( c) \) ball-mill for a time \( t_{mill} \), or jet (fluid energy) mill; and \( d) \) press to shape and fire for time \( t_{fire} \) at temperature \( T_{fire} \). Thermomagnetic analysis is well suited for measuring on powder the effect of \( t_{mix}, t_{calc} \) and \( T_{calc} \). The technique also has application in detecting incorrect stoichiometry and mill ball abrasion.

Figure 1 shows the effect of \( t_{mix} \) on the garnet phase formed by calcination for a powder of nominal composition \((Y_{2.66}Gd_{0.34})(Fe_{4.19}Al_{0.67}Mn_{0.09})O_{12}\). The 10 \% difference in the \( \sigma(RT) \) values is traced to a 20 \^\circ \text{C} \) difference in approximate \( T_c \). The \( T_c \) values observed measure the progress \([4]\) of Fe-Al oxide reaction between that for \( Y_2Fe_5O_{12} \) (280 \^\circ \text{C}) and that for our composition when fully reacted (185 \^\circ \text{C}). Note also that \( T_c \) is not sharply defined, which indicates a range of Fe/Al ratios in the garnet. This is also demonstrated (below) using Mössbauer spectrometry.

In figure 2, the effect of calcination temperature is shown \((t_{mix} = 3 \text{ hr.})\). The evolution of these curves reflects the ongoing incomplete reaction process. For comparison, the dashed curve shows a rather homogeneous (sharper \( T_c \) fired sample.

In commercial practice milling is usually carried out in steel-ball mills \([5]\). The unavoidable wear of the
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When these powders are fired, but with a gentle comminution and sieving substituted for milling, a powder with a smooth surface is obtained. The technique for monitoring ball abrasion can detect small amounts of ferrimagnetic phase. Spinel present as a second phase, even minutely, is responsible for an unacceptable microwave loss. This is demonstrated in figure 4 by the correlation between tan δM at 3 GHz and σ0 (300 C), starting from a base loss attributed to the garnet host. The equation for this line is tan δM (garnet) ≈ 0.0006 + f tan δM (spinel), where f = σ0 (300 C, sample)/σ0 (300 C, spinel). As a representative σ0 value for a steel which is iron-rich (as indicated by microprobe analysis), we pick σ0 (300 C, spinel) ≈ 50 emu/g [9]. From figure 4, tan δM (spinel) is about 2.3 and in agreement with a range of values for NiFe2O4 between 1.5 and 3 at 3 GHz (p. 269 of ref. [9]).

3. Mössbauer spectroscopy near Tc — This is a uniquely sensitive technique to monitor chemical homogeneity owing to the marked difference between paramagnetic and ferrimagnetic Mössbauer spectra. In high homogeneity garnets van der Kraan et al. [10] have shown that the coexistence region of the two spectra is quite narrow, ranging from less than 1 C up to 5 C. The coexistence region, which measures the spread of Curie temperatures, ΔTc, is related to chemical fluctuations, presumably in the Fe/Al ratio in the family under study here.

The Mössbauer technique was applied to the powder whose thermomagnetic curves are reported in figure 1. Figure 5 shows F(T), the fraction which is ferrimagnetic (area of spectrum which shows hyperfine splitting divided by total area). ΔTc is defined as the range ΔTc = Tc2 − Tc1 where F(Tc2) = 0.1, F(Tc1) = 0.9. ΔTc values of 50 C are typical for calcined (unfired) powder confirming the assertion that the lack of sharpness of the thermomagnetic Tc arises from composition fluctuations. The offset of these F(T) curves for differing t_mix indicates differences in the amounts of unreacted material at this stage. When these powders are fired, but with a gentle comminution and sieving substituted for milling, a
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FIG. 5. Mossbauer ferrimagnetic fraction $F$ vs. temperature in as-calcined powder. Effect of $t_{mix}$ on garnet formation during calcination ($t_{calc} = 4$ hr., $T_{calc} = 1300$ °C, air). Magnetic Curie points from Fig. 1.

In their $T_c$ values of 10 °C persists from the differing $t_{mix}$ periods. This translates in the Mossbauer measurement to the data of figure 6. The sample for $t_{mix} = 3$ hr. sharpens its $\Delta T_c$ markedly to 9 °C while that for $t_{mix} = 1$ hr. remains rather inhomogeneous with $\Delta T_c \approx 25$ °C.

In [1] we concentrated on the approach to homogeneity with $\Delta T_c$ decreasing from 9 °C to about 3 °C as $t_{mix}$ went from 3 hr. to 66 hr. The passage of the calcined sample through a fluid energy mill before firing is at least as effective as 60 hr. additional sintering time. A significant correlation between resonance line width (9.5 GHz) and this Mossbauer measure of single phase homogeneity was demonstrated.

Acknowledgment. — The authors are happy to acknowledge discussions and exchange of measurement data with their colleagues in General Electric Electronics Systems Division and Electronics Laboratory, G. G. Palmer, J. P. Dietz, R. J. Hill, V. A. Russell, R. J. Jones, E. G. Nielsen and L. M. Barker.

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