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To cite this version:
F. Auzel, J. Breteau. MATERIALS FOR IR TUNABLE LASER APPLICATIONS AND NON RADIATIVE DECAY PROCESSES. Journal de Physique Colloques, 1987, 48 (C7), pp.C7-451-C7-454. 10.1051/jphyscol:19877107 . jpa-00226923

HAL Id: jpa-00226923
https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/jpa-00226923
Submitted on 1 Jan 1987

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MATERIALS FOR IR TUNABLE LASER APPLICATIONS AND NON RADIATIVE DECAY PROCESSES

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Abstract: The optical spectroscopy of the new material for IR tunable laser applications MgAl2O4 : Ni2+ is presented. A comparison with well-known fluoride materials is made for IR fluorescent lifetimes and quantum efficiencies. For Ni2+ and Co2+ doped fluorides, limitations of concentrations in doping ions are established. Multiphonon processes are studied with a single frequency model and a good agreement is found. It is shown that the "effective phonon frequency" is closer to mean frequency of the density of states curves than to their maximum and the electron-phonon coupling factors appears to vary with doping concentration.

1. Introduction: For several years Ni2+ and Co2+ doped systems have been studied for IR tunable solid state laser applications. The greater part of the works concerns materials only with a well defined doping ion concentration, and the behaviour of radiative and non radiative transitions is rarely investigated in comparison with the I.R. laser emission, although lattice vibrations have opposite roles in the frequency tunability and emission intensity.

In this study we have examined a few well-known laser materials as MgF2 : Ni2+; MgF2 : Co2+; KZnF2 : Ni2+ ; KZnF3 : Co2+ and a new compound for IR tunable laser : MgAl2O4 : Ni2+. Informations are obtained concerning temperature and concentration limitations but also on non radiative transitions.

2. Results

2.1 Quantum efficiencies and ions concentration

Absorption and luminescence spectra of Ni2+ and Co2+ doped fluorides are consistent with preceding works [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7]. For MgAl2O4 : Ni2+ absorption and emission spectra are given in fig. 1. The absorption spectrum of MgAl2O4 : Ni2+ is similar to the absorption spectra of Ni2+ ions in octahedral sites in other materials [8] [6] [7] and is not consistent with the spectrum of Ni2+ ions in tetrahedral sites [9]. As in the case of MgO : Ni2+ [10] and LiGa5O8 : Ni2+ [8], the absorption spectrum of MgO : Ni is dominated by three spin-allowed broad band transitions. These are 3A0→3F, 3T1→3F and 3T2→3F in the deep blue, 3A0→3F and 3T1→3F in the red and 3A0→3F in the near infrared. The relative positions of these three bands allow one to evaluate the crystal field parameter Dq/B by comparison with the Tanabe and Sugano's diagram for Ni2+ ion in octahedral site [11]. We find for MgAl2O4 : Ni2+ a Dq/B ratio equal to 1.29, greater than in MgO : Ni2+ (Dq/B = 1.11 [10]) and LiGa5O8 : Ni (Dq/B = 1.085 [8]).

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Article published online by EDP Sciences and available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1051/jphyscol:19877107
The IR emission of interest for possible laser operation and which is attributed to the vibronic transition $3T_2(3F) \rightarrow 3A_2(3F)$, extends from 1.1 to 1.5 $\mu$m with a peak at about 1.26 $\mu$m. No clear structure is observed in the IR emission shape. This is opposite to MgO : Ni$^{2+}$ [12] [10] and MgF$_2$ : Ni$^{2+}$ [2], for which sharp zero-phonon lines are observed at low temperature as well as structure in the vibrational sidebands. This confirms that the electron-phonon coupling is very strong in MgAl$_2$O$_4$ : Ni$^{2+}$.

The decrease in IR lifetimes temperature found in MgAl$_2$O$_4$ : Ni$^{2+}$, MgF$_2$ : Co$^{2+}$ and KZnF$_3$ : Co$^{2+}$ indicates that non radiative deexcitation processes are important even at low temperatures in these materials (Fig. 2). This hypothesis is strengthened by measuring the quantum efficiencies of the IR transitions at room temperature with an integrating sphere and by comparing the materials to each other as given in table I. Now if one looks at fig. 2 when nickel concentration is increased from 2 % to 10 % in MgF$_2$ then the IR lifetime, at 80 K for instance, is reduced by 7.5 %. In MgF$_2$ : Co$^{2+}$, a cobalt concentration increase from 1.5 % to 5.3 % induces an IR lifetime variation of 72 % at 80 K. In contrast when cobalt concentration in KZnF$_3$ increases from .8 to 2.2 %, the IR lifetime remains unchanged at any temperature. As for MgAl$_2$O$_4$ : Ni$^{2+}$, only one sample was studied. From these experimental facts, it is concluded that MgF$_2$ : Ni$^{2+}$ laser crystal may be used with higher nickel concentration (-5 %), at 80 K, than usually considered [12] without having an important self-quenching. However in KZnF$_3$ : Co$^{2+}$ and in MgF$_2$ : Co$^{2+}$, cobalt concentration has to be weaker than 2 % otherwise non radiative effects are dominating.

2.2 Multiphonon processes

For each compound, the non radiative decay rate ($W_{nr}$) has been determined as a function of temperature by $W_{nr} = 1/\tau_T(T) - 1/\tau_0$ where $\tau_T(T)$ is the total IR fluorescence lifetime at temperature T and $\tau_0$ is the radiative lifetime. $\tau_0$ is obtained by measuring the IR quantum efficiency at room temperature as above mentioned. $\tau_0$ has been verified to be temperature independant since integrated absorption of the vibronic transition is about constant with temperature: vibronic bands do not contain vibration forced electric-dipole transitions. On the
basis of a single frequency $\omega$ model, the transition probability thermal behaviour for multiphonon non radiative desexcitation can be written [13]:

$$W_{nr}(t) = W_{nr}(0) \exp[-2 n S_0] N! S_0^N \left(\frac{(n+1)}{n}\right)^{n/2} \times I_N [2S_0/n(n+1)]$$

(1)

where $S_0$ is Huang-Rhys parameter, $W_{nr}(0)$ the probability at OK. $I_N$ is the modified Bessel function and $n = [\exp(kT)-1]^{-1}$. The number of phonons involved is $N$ where $N \hbar \omega = \Delta E$, $\Delta E$ is the energy gap, namely the energy difference between the lowest spin-orbit level in the first excited state and the highest spin-orbit level in the fundamental state. There is always a good agreement between the theoretical curves and the measured values of decay rates. Phonon energies determined in this way, correspond to maxima of the phonon states density curves for Mg F$_2$ matrices. For all materials studied here, the number of phonons involved in the non radiative processes is between 20 and 30 with energies varying from 200 to 400 cm$^{-1}$ with very various coupling factors (Table I). In spite of these fluctuations these parameters are similar to ones given in other works ($\text{Ni}^{2+}$, $\hbar \omega = 308$ cm$^{-1}$, $N = 26$ [10]; $\text{LiGa}_2\text{O}_4$ : $\text{Ni}^{2+}$, $\hbar \omega = 250$ cm$^{-1}$, $N = 25$ [8]).

It must be noted in fig. 3 that phonon energies for non radiative multiphonon processes remain near average lattice energy.

In Mg Al$_2$O$_4$ : $\text{Ni}^{2+}$ we have not at hand any states density curves but the value (409 cm$^{-1}$) is no doubt much lower than the cut-off frequency in an oxide (usually 600 cm$^{-1}$).

Another important fact has to be noticed; it is the apparent variation of the coupling factor $S_0$, as a function of concentration. This effect of concentration sensitive electron-phonon coupling was already noticed for radiative transitions [14]. However, for radiative transitions, it is difficult to avoid completely any reabsorption on the 0-phonon line at higher concentration and coupling parameter determined from side bands to 0-phonon intensity may contain some errors. Here for the first time an analogous phenomena is observed in an inorganic material directly for non-radiative transitions so without such uncertainty.
3. Conclusion

Luminescent and absorption experiments have been carried out on many Ni$^{2+}$ and Co$^{2+}$ doped systems. Among these materials, Mg Al$_2$O$_4$: Ni$^{2+}$ is a new compound for tunable laser applications. Unfortunately non radiative desexcitation processes in Mg Al$_2$O$_4$: Ni$^{2+}$ are dominating even at low temperature ($\eta = 10\%$, $W_{nr}(0) = 570\; \text{sec}^{-1} \text{at} \; 80\; \text{K}$) which will reduce considerably the laser capabilities of this material. So, though being of interest for the wavelength domain covered by its infrared emission ($1.1\; \mu\text{m} < \lambda < 1.5\; \mu\text{m}$), Mg Al$_2$O$_4$: Ni$^{2+}$ does not seem in the long run to be a very good laser candidate.

The IR fluorescence lifetime self-quenching allowed us to define concentration limits for nickel ($\approx 5\%$) and cobalt ($\approx 1\%$ to $2\%$) in Mg F$_2$ and K Zn F$_3$. Beyond these limits the quality of the laser emission will be certainly compromised.

The dependence of the electron-phonon coupling as function of the concentration is not quite understood, actually this effect and its origins and consequences are under investigation. As in [14] this phenomena should be considered as a new self-quenching process to be taken into account when direct resonant or phonon assisted energy transfers cross relaxation do not exist. However from [14] the absolute value of $W_{nr}(T)$ should increase much more than it is observed when the S coupling factor increases even slightly because a factor $S^2_{\text{c}}$ is hidden in $W_{nr}(0)$.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to R. Moncorge from Université de Lyon I, France who allowed us to use his integrating sphere quantum efficiency measurement set up, to J.Y. Henry and J.J. Aubert from LETI (Grenoble) for powing the crystals of Mg F$_2$ and Mg A$_2$O$_4$, and to J.Y. Gesland from U. du Maine for handing to us the K Zn F$_3$ crystals.

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