CHARACTERIZING CATALYST PERFORMANCE OF DMCS ON PO HOMOPOLYMERIZATION

S.-F. Stahl, University of Hamburg, Institute of Technical and Macromolecular Chemistry, Germany
stahl@chemie.uni-hamburg.de

J. Marbach, University of Hamburg, Institute of Technical and Macromolecular Chemistry, Germany

G. A. Luinstra, University of Hamburg, Institute of Technical and Macromolecular Chemistry, Germany

Key Words: DMC catalysis, ring-opening polymerization, kinetics, polyether polyols, PPG

Double metal cyanide (DMC) complexes are known effective catalysts for the ring-opening polymerization of propylene oxide to generate polyether polyols (Scheme 1).\(^1\)\(^,\)\(^2\) The high activity of DMC catalysts relative to basic alkaline catalysts eliminates the need for expensive removal of residual catalyst from the product. Furthermore, the poly(propylene glycol) (PPG) products prepared by DMC catalysts have - contrary to products from alkaline catalysis - a low degree of unsaturation and narrow molecular weight distributions. Latter is advantageous with respect to the resulting low viscosities. A common challenge when applying DMC catalysts is the need for an activation procedure, leading to an induction period of unknown length (Figure 1).\(^2\)\(^,\)\(^3\) In a larger, usually semibatch process, PO monomer can only be added after the activation has been secured; the concentration of PO must not reach certain limits as its ring-opening is highly exothermal.

![Scheme 1: Homopolymerization of PO to PPG](image)

Plotting the kinetic data along Arrhenius and Eyring equation provides information on pre-exponential factor \(A\), activation energy \(E_a\), and entropy of activation \(\Delta S^*\), as well as enthalpy of activation \(\Delta H^*\). This characteristic numbers are different for all catalysts studied, give deeper insights into the mechanism of the propagation step and allow to determine whether transport phenomena or the ring-opening of PO are the rate-determining reaction steps. A correlation between catalyst surface structure, especially pore size diameter, and rate-determining step will be presented. This work will also demonstrate the influence of that rate-determining step on the molecular weight distribution of resulting PPGs.

References