

Demulsification of Benzene-in-Water Emulsion by Electric Field

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Abstract: Separation of fluid in fluid emulsions has been found to be induced by applying a non-uniform electric field. Electric current leads to move oil particles in emulsion contact each other and also create bigger oil drops by induction of negative charge, then the oil moves upward due to density difference and can be measured. Based on these experiments, about 80% benzene demulsify from the emulsion in lower than 95s, which indicates that the mutual contact of oil droplets through thin water layers is necessary for the rapid demulsification. All this evidence strongly suggests that the applied electric field causes the rearrangement of surface charges on oil droplets, which results in the reduction of the height of an energy barrier for the coalescence of the droplets. In the present paper, benzene is used as disperse phase and water is used as continuous phase.

Key words: O/W emulsion • Demulsification • Electric field

INTRODUCTION

Although emulsion systems have been widely used in many industrial fields, the formation of an emulsion is not always desirable in chemical industries. There are two forms of emulsions: oil-in-water (O/W) and water-in-oil (W/O). The demulsification of O/W emulsions can be accelerated by several chemical and physical methods. Chemical methods include the use of demulsifiers [1-5] or acids or bases [6-8]. Although chemicals used for the demulsification increase the coalescence rate of oil droplets by affecting the interfacial properties of oil droplets,

They inevitably contaminate the purification systems. The chemical methods are, therefore, not the preferable choice. Physical methods include the use of heat [9-10], electric field [11-14], filtration and membrane of fabrics application [15-22]. These physical methods are considered to increase the contact frequency of oil droplets. The demulsification of W/O emulsions under high electric field has been extensively studied [23], since the electrostatic separation of water from crude oil is one of key technologies in the petroleum industry. However, the electrical demulsification of O/W emulsions has not been much studied.

In the present paper, we will demonstrate that dense O/W emulsions may be separated into water and oil by applying an electric field. This phenomenon is not due to electrolysis or the electrophoresis of oil droplets but to the electrostatic reduction of the height of energy barrier for the coalescence of the droplets.

2. Experimental section

2.1. Used materials and instruments: The used materials in this experiment are as following: benzene, distilled water, sulfuric acid with 30% volume, sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS, ionic surfactant), as an emulsifier and instruments like magnet mixer, electric current source, electrode and glass dishes can be used as well.

2.2. Preparation of emulsion: Emulsion is made by a magnet mixer, a super facial actuator material, sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS). To make emulsion with different percents, we should take enough oil and add 1-2 drops of emulsifier into the oil that is stabilizer. The total amount of emulsifier in whole emulsion is about 2-4ppm, then extend the emulsion volume with distilled water to 250ml. then we transfer it into the glass dish which is prepared for blending after 25 times shaking. It is blended by a magnetic mixer during 15min. After the mixture, let the

combination separate until the amount of oil that demulsifies itself from the emulsion. We should write the separated oil rate.

2.3. The plant specification: The demulsification plant is made of three involutes glass cases. The central glass case includes emulsion sample and can be seen by outside. It is diameter is 40mm, thickness 1.6mm and height 330mm; this case is for demulsifying the emulsion. The second cylinder includes 30% sulphuric acid as an electrolyte solution, the diameter is 70mm and the height is 320mm. The biggest case relates to hot bath in order to control the temperature parameter. The experimental is done on a still emulsion and in atmosphere pressure to create different voltages we use an auto-trans plant, having capability of creating AC and DC currents. All the currents were experimented by two steel electrodes, placing in two separate glass cases.

RESULTS

The O/W emulsion was made by benzene oil. The oil content in water was 4% volume (10 mile in 250 mile emulsion). To prepare this emulsion, we mixed 20cc desired oil with water, kept it for a while, about half an hour, there was no change in volume and then we would use emulsion for experiment. Immediately after putting emulsion in electrical field, the demulsification took place. Of course the demulsification does not take place in vicinity of an electrode; rather the demulsification simultaneously takes place over the entire space between two electrodes. The result of olive oil and toluene mixture are similar to the results of benzene. The demulsification completes in 30s and the transparent oil layer accumulates above. While we use DC current for separating, we can see the charge induction over the oil particles well, during the experiments we also found that benzene in water emulsion, using 3ppm emulsifier is one of the best O/W emulsion systems to show sever influence of outside electric field in each lab.

We found that the emulsions which was separated under the applied electric field, has three following conditions:

First: The emulsion should be O/W, not W/O.

Second: The emulsion particles have close contacts.

Third: The emulsions particle separated due to the electrostatic force resulting from particle surface charges. By increasing the voltage, the separation speed raises.

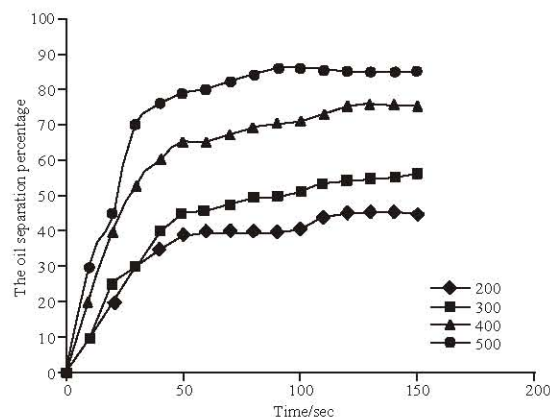


Fig. 1: Effect of AC and DC fields on the demulsification of the benzene /water emulsion by 500 volt

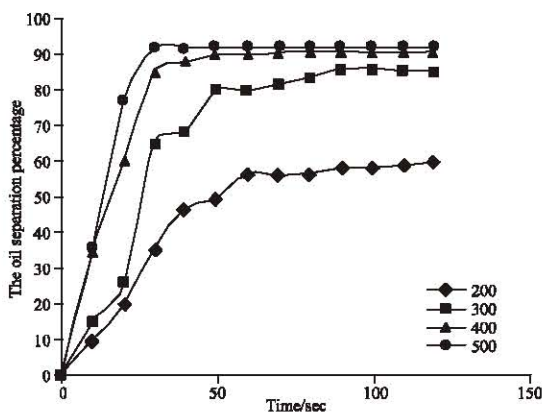


Fig. 2: Effect of AC and DC fields on the demulsification of the benzene /water emulsion by 200 volt

But using voltages higher than 500V leads water and electrodes to electrolysis severely as a result, in progress of separation, the emulsion layers volume among electrodes and separation speed decrease.

In this experiment, we use electric field with DC current for separating emulsion as well that you see in figure 2. DC field performs better than AC current in dielectrophoresis due to connecting and disconnecting the electrical current. As can be seen in figures, in separating by DC current, the lower voltage was used to obtain the same percent of separating AC current. It shows the superiority of DC over AC.

As we can see in figures 1-2, by increasing voltage, the demulsification efficiency in an electric non-uniform field by AC and DC increases. The biggest electric field in this way is placed in middle, where a metal electrode places in emulsion. This is in center because of voltage gradient and more accumulation of electric charge that has so much effect on the demulsification efficiency.

DISCUSSION

The Demulsification of O/W emulsions composed of closely packed charged oil droplets under electric fields indicates that the electric field perturbs the stability of the emulsions through electrostatic interactions. According to the DLVO theory, the stability of charged colloidal or emulsion particles in an ionic solution is determined by the balance of two forces acting between them [24]. They are attractive van der Waals force and electrostatic force that is usually repulsive. The latter force is further divided into Maxwell's electrostatic stress and osmotic pressure [25-26] arising from the difference of the ionic concentration from the bulk solution and is determined by the distribution of electrostatic potential between the droplets. Two emulsion particles do not coalesce if the total force is repulsive. Hogg *et al.*, derived the electrostatic potential energy for two charged particles in an ionic solution, U_E , which is given by [27].

$$U_E = \frac{\pi\epsilon_1 a_1 a_2}{a_1 + a_2} (\Phi_1 + \Phi_2)^2 \log(1 + e^{-kH}) - \frac{\pi\epsilon_1 a_1 a_2}{a_1 + a_2} (\Phi_1 - \Phi_2)^2 \log\left(\frac{1}{1 - e^{-kH}}\right)$$

here a_i and Φ_i are the radius and the surface potential of particle i , ϵ_1 the dielectric constant of water, H the shortest distance between the surfaces of two particles and $\hat{\epsilon}$ is the Debye-Hückel reciprocal length given by

$$k = \sqrt{\frac{2\pi z^2 e^2}{\epsilon_1 kT}}$$

Where n and z are the number density and the valence of ions in solution, e is the electronic charge, k is Boltzmann's constant and T is the absolute temperature. Eq. (1) is valid only for values of Φ less than 50 mV, since the equation was derived by using the approximation of $e^x \sim 1 - x + x^2/2$. It is noted that the first and the second terms in the right hand of Eq. (1) are always positive and negative, respectively, since $0 < e^{-kH} < 1$. The first and the second terms therefore contribute to the stabilization and destabilization of emulsion, respectively.

Under no applied field, the surface potentials of both the two particles are given by [28]

$$\Phi_0 = \frac{\sigma_0}{\sqrt{\frac{2\epsilon n z^2 e^2}{kT}}}$$

The value of Φ_0 is usually less than 100 mV. Substitution of Eq. (3) into Eq. (1) gives

$$U_E = 2\pi\epsilon_1 a \Phi_0^2 \log(1 + e^{-kH})$$

The electrostatic energy given by Eq. (4) monotonously increases with decreasing H , which indicates that the electrostatic energy prevents the coalescence of the emulsion particles.

An external electric field is possible to change the electrostatic energy to result in the coalescence of two emulsion droplets. The thickness of water preventing the coalescence of the droplets, H , is the order of $1/k \approx 10$ nm. The external field does not perturb the distribution of surface charges, if the charges are immobilized on the surface of the droplets. The surface potential is then simply given as a sum of the applied external potential and Φ_0 . Taking the standard of the potential at the middle of the adjacent droplets, the electrostatic potentials of the adjacent surfaces are given by [28]

$$\Phi_1 = \Phi_0 - \frac{E_0 H}{2} \approx \Phi_0, \quad \Phi_2 = \Phi_0 + \frac{E_0 H}{2} \approx \Phi_0$$

Since the value of $E_0 H/2$ is generally much smaller than that of Φ_0 . The external field therefore gives no effect on the stability of the emulsion droplets.

Now, let us consider what happens if charges on emulsion droplets moves freely like conduction electrons in metal. The droplets are then regarded as two metallic spheres immersed in an ionic solution. Application of an external electric field to a metal sphere causes the induction of surface charges that compensate the non-homogeneity of the external potential on the surface. The surface electrostatic potential under a homogeneous parallel electric field E_0 is given by $E_0 x$, where x is the location of the center of the sphere. Assuming the radii of the droplets are the same, the electrostatic potentials of the adjacent surfaces are given by [28]

$$\Phi_1 = \Phi_0 - E_0 a, \quad \Phi_2 = \Phi_0 + E_0 a$$

Substitution of Eq. (6) into Eq. (1) gives

$$U_E = 2\pi\epsilon_1 a \Phi_0^2 \log(1 + e^{-kH}) - 2\pi\epsilon_1 a (E_0 a)^2 \log\left(\frac{1}{1 - e^{-kH}}\right)$$

The first and the second terms of the above equation contribute to the stabilization and destabilization of

emulsion, respectively. The value of the first term decreases with decreasing Φ_0 , so that the decrease of SDS concentration or the increase of ionic concentration in water accelerates the electric field-induced demulsification. The absolute value of the second term increases with increasing E_0 , so that the increase of the external electric field accelerates the demulsification. The second term rapidly decreases with increasing separation distance H between adjacent emulsion particles, so that the electric field-induced demulsification is operative only for dense O/W emulsions. Emulsions stabilized with nonionic polymer surfactants, are not demulsified by the external field, since they are stabilized not by electrostatic interactions but by steric effects of polymer molecules adsorbed on the surface of emulsion droplets.

For estimating the effect of external electric field on the stability of emulsions, we have regarded charged O/W emulsion droplets as metal particles with approximately infinite number of positive and negative charges. This may be an oversimplified assumption, since an emulsion droplet has infinite number of charged particles only on the surface. However, as long as the charged particles on the surface are mobile, the essence of the discussion is applicable to real O/W emulsion systems. A detailed theory for the electrostatic demulsification of O/W emulsion will be given in a subsequent paper.

CONCLUSION

In general, using the electric field is useful and interesting for separating the O/W emulsion due to electrostatic system, separation time and efficiency. To preparing emulsion, we used 3ppm emulsifier. By increasing voltage in AC and DC in efficiency, the separation increases in non-uniform electric field. Based on the electrode cover kind, oil kind, oil volume decreasing amount and temperature, the effect of voltage increasing on the separation is variable, but always has increasing trend. In this article, we could obtain 80% separation by 4% volume emulsion of benzene in water and using AC with 500V voltage in 60s and 92% separation by using DC with 500V voltage 30s.

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