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Josefine Schnee, Laurent Delannoy, Guylène Costentin, Frédéric Meunier, Cyril Thomas. Comment on “Direct Decomposition of NO_x over TiO₂ Supported Transition Metal Oxides at Low Temperatures”. Industrial and engineering chemistry research, 2020, 59, pp.4835-4837. 10.1021/acs.iecr.0c00412 . hal-02504389

HAL Id: hal-02504389

<https://hal.sorbonne-universite.fr/hal-02504389>

Submitted on 10 Mar 2020

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Comment on “Direct Decomposition of NO_x over TiO₂ Supported Transition Metal Oxides at Low Temperatures”

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In a recent paper entitled “Direct decomposition of NO_x over TiO₂ supported transition metal oxides at low temperatures”,¹ Damma *et al.* report highly promising results on the catalytic direct decomposition of NO to N₂ and O₂ at temperatures as low as 100 °C, with excellent tolerance to O₂, H₂ and SO₂, making the tested catalysts unique in the field of gas exhaust treatment for pollution control. Progress in this field is scarce,² and the development of efficient formulations for this reaction would be of the utmost interest to meet the ever more stringent emission regulations. However, as we attempted to reproduce the catalytic data of the above-cited paper,¹ we ended up with NO₂ as the product of NO conversion rather than N₂ and O₂, which is consistent with previous reports highlighting materials similar to those prepared by Damma *et al.* as NO oxidation catalysts.^{3,4}

In our attempts to reproduce the catalytic data, we tested two samples of the Mn(20wt%)/TiO₂ Hombikat catalyst prepared according to the method reported by Damma *et al.*, as this material exhibited the highest catalytic activity in the above-mentioned paper.¹ The first sample (here referred to as “sample 1”) was prepared at LRS laboratory (France) using Hombikat TiO₂ (UV 100, Sachtleben Chemie GmbH). The second sample was kindly and diligently provided by one of the authors of the above-cited paper,¹ namely Prof. Smirniotis (University of Cincinnati, USA), following our request after we had informed him about the apparent discrepancy between our catalytic results obtained with sample 1 and those reported in his recent paper.¹ Prof. Smirniotis indicated that this second sample was not the one used to obtain the data reported in the original paper,¹ which was no longer available, but a newly-prepared batch (here referred to as “sample 2”). We wish to underline the constructive manner in which Prof. Smirniotis interacted with us as he prepared a fresh sample and sent it to us at his earliest convenience.

As shown in Figure A, both of the repeat Mn/TiO₂ samples 1 and 2 exhibit powder X-ray diffraction (PXRD) patterns similar to that of the original sample reported by Damma *et al.*,¹ displaying both peaks of anatase TiO₂ (JCPDS 21-1272) and of a Mn oxide phase. We actually identified the latter phase as MnO₂ (JCPDS 72-1984) and not Mn₂O₃, as indicated in the original paper by Damma *et al.*¹ The relative intensity of peaks was somewhat different, possibly due to a preferential orientation of crystallites over the measuring plates. The catalytic performance of the repeat samples in the decomposition of NO_x at 200 °C as a function of the O₂ concentration in the feed, under conditions close to those reported in Figure 3 of the above-cited paper,¹ is given in Figure B(a) (data measured with a MKS MultiGas 2030 analyzer). The conversion of NO increases with increasing concentration of O₂ over both repeat samples. Although the NO conversions over the repeat samples were found to be lower than those measured over the original sample (Figure B(b)),¹ these data are consistent with the positive impact of O₂ reported in the above-cited paper.¹ However, NO was found to be fully converted into NO₂ rather than N₂, as illustrated in Figure C (data measured with a Pfeiffer Vacuum OmniStar mass spectrometer under 3 vol.% O₂) in which the N₂

trace remains essentially constant after contacting sample 1 with the reacting feed. The absence of N_2 was also ascertained by analyzing the gas flow with a μ -chromatograph (Agilent CP490).

Several hypotheses can be proposed to account for the observed discrepancy between the present catalytic data and those reported by Damma *et al.* in the above-mentioned paper¹. Firstly, it might be that neither we nor Prof. Smirniotis succeeded in exactly reproducing the original synthesis of the Mn(20wt%)/TiO₂ Hombikat catalyst, which would mean that some key steps dictating the final physico-chemical properties of the latter material remain unclear. Secondly, the setup used by Damma *et al.* to perform the catalytic experiments reported in the above-cited paper¹ might have been contaminated at that time with a reducing agent (NH₃, for instance) having induced selective catalytic reduction (SCR) of NO to N₂, unbeknownst to the authors. As a matter of fact, Prof. Smirniotis previously reported on NH₃-SCR of NO at low temperatures over Mn-, Cr- and Cu-oxides supported on TiO₂ Hombikat.⁵

Whatever the origin of the discrepancy between our results and those reported by Damma *et al.*,¹ the promising catalytic performance of Mn(20wt%)/TiO₂ Hombikat in the direct decomposition of NO_x, as reported in the above-cited paper,¹ could not be reproduced by us at this point. Because of the major impact that the original paper by Damma *et al.*¹ may have on pollution control technologies, it appears crucial that the original authors reassess the validity of their data or other teams attempt to reproduce the work.

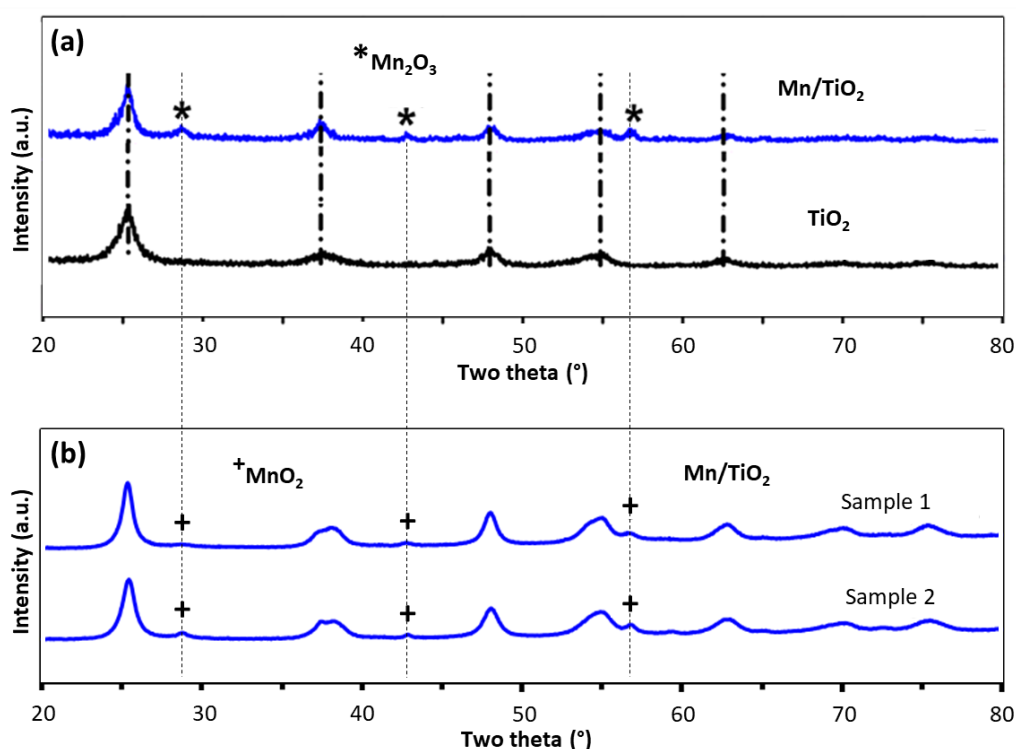


Figure A. (a) PXRD patterns of TiO₂ Hombikat and Mn(20wt%)/TiO₂ Hombikat adapted from Figure 1 of Damma *et al.*'s paper,¹ (b) PXRD patterns of the two newly-prepared Mn(20wt%)/TiO₂ Hombikat samples (sample 1 prepared at LRS, sample 2 prepared at the University of Cincinnati) tested at LRS in the catalytic direct decomposition of NO_x. In (a), peaks marked with a star (*) had been assigned by Damma *et al.* to Mn₂O₃.¹ In (b), those peaks are marked with a (+), because we actually assigned them to MnO₂ (JCPDS 72-1984). All non-marked peaks correspond to anatase TiO₂ (JCPDS 21-1272).

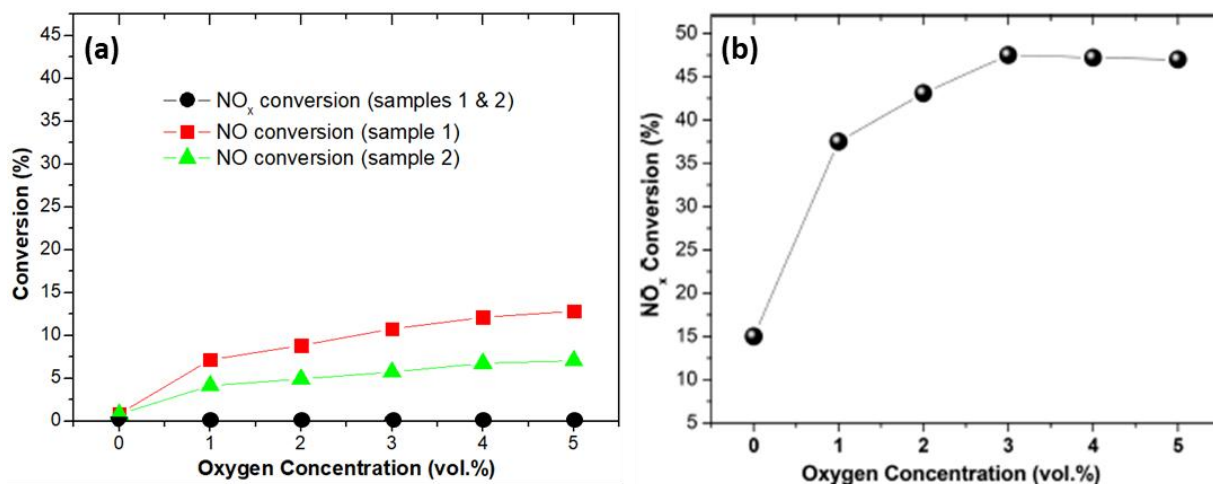


Figure B. (a) Catalytic performance of the two newly-prepared Mn(20wt%)/TiO₂ Hombikat samples tested at LRS (sample 1 prepared at LRS, sample 2 prepared at the University of Cincinnati) in the catalytic direct decomposition of NO_x at 200 °C as a function of the concentration of O₂ (GHSV = 80000 h⁻¹, catalyst weight = 60 mg, total flow rate = 140 mL/min, NO concentration = 2000 ppm, Ar concentration = 8 vol.%, O₂ concentration = 0-5 vol.%, He is used as a carrier gas), (b) Figure 3 of Damma *et al.*'s paper.¹

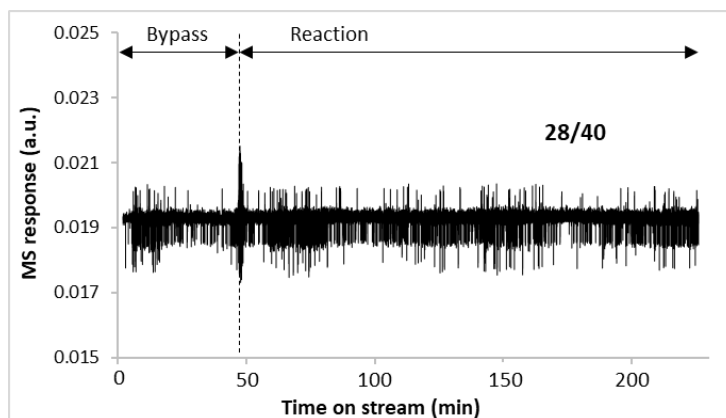


Figure C. Mass to charge (m/z) ratio 28 associated with N₂, normalized by m/z 40 associated with Ar (8 vol.% in the reaction feed), as a function of time on stream in the catalytic direct decomposition of NO_x at 200 °C under 3 vol.% of O₂ over the Mn(20wt%)/TiO₂ Hombikat sample newly-prepared at LRS (sample 1 in Figures A and B). During the "Bypass" period, the reacting feed is analyzed by the mass spectrometer without being contacted to the sample.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has benefited from a funding managed by the French National Research Agency (DECOMPNOx project: ANR-18-CE07-0002). We warmly acknowledge Prof. Smirniotis for helpful discussions and readily providing a repeat Mn/TiO₂ sample (sample 2).

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interests.

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