Direct Evidence for the Instability and Deactivation of Mixed-Oxide Systems: Influence of Surface Segregation and Subsurface Diffusion

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ABSTRACT:

In the current contribution, we provide a direct demonstration of the thermally induced surface structural transformations of an alkaline-earth oxide/transition metal oxide interface that is detrimental to the essential catalytic functionality of such mixed-oxide systems toward particular reactants. The BaO_x/TiO_2/Pt(111) surface was chosen as a model interfacial system where the enrichment of the surface elemental composition with Ti atoms and the facile diffusion of Ba atoms into the underlying TiO_2 matrix within 523–873 K leads to the formation of perovskite type surface species (BaTiO_3/Ba_2TiO_4/Ba_xTi_yO_z). At elevated temperatures (T > 973 K), excessive surface segregation of Ti atoms results in an exclusively TiO_2/TiO_x-terminated surface which is almost free of Ba species. Although the freshly prepared BaO_x/TiO_2/Pt(111) surface can strongly adsorb ubiquitous catalytic adsorbates such as NO_2 and CO_2, a thermally deactivated surface at T > 973 K practically loses all of its NO_2/CO_2 adsorption capacity due to the deficiency of surface BaO_x domains.

1. INTRODUCTION

A molecular-level understanding of the fundamental interactions between different metal-oxide domains coexisting on surfaces is crucial in order to improve the performance of functional materials and to design new systems with unprecedented capabilities that can be used in electronics, sensor applications, high temperature superconductivity, energy conversion, fuel cells, photovoltaics, and heterogeneous catalysis.1–7 Alkaline-earth oxide/transition metal oxide interfaces play a central role in most of these applications where understanding and controlling the surface structure and the surface transformations seems to be the ultimate challenge for improving the state of the art in such systems. Along these lines, in the current work, we have focused our attention on a representative model alkaline-earth oxide/transition metal oxide interface (i.e., BaO_x/TiO_2/Pt(111)) and investigated fundamental thermally induced surface structural changes by presenting a direct demonstration of the thermal catalytic deactivation of these mixed-oxide systems due to subsurface diffusion and surface segregation phenomena. Although the implications of the demonstrated surface transformations are currently discussed in the context of heterogeneous catalysis, significant ramifications of the observed results can be certainly envisaged in a large number of applications exploiting analogous families of mixed-oxide interfaces.

2. EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

All experiments were performed in a custom-made ultra high vacuum (UHV) chamber with a base pressure of 2 × 10^-10 Torr. The UHV chamber is equipped with X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS), rear-view low energy electron diffraction (LEED), and temperature programmed desorption (TPD) techniques. XPS spectra were recorded using a Riber cylindrical mirror analyzer and a nonmonochromated X-ray source using Al Kα X-ray irradiation (hν = 1486.6 eV, 300 W). A Dycor DM200 M quadrupole mass spectrometer (QMS) was used for the TPD experiments. A Pt(111) single crystal (10 mm diameter, 2 mm thickness, both sides atomically polished, MaTeck GmbH) was used as the substrate in the current studies. The Pt(111) single crystal was mounted on a tantalum wire assembled to a high-precision manipulator. The heating of the sample was achieved by direct resistive heating of the sample. The sample temperature was monitored by a K-Type thermocouple spot-welded onto the lateral edge of the crystal. The Pt(111) surface was cleaned by multiple cycles of Ar^+ sputtering at 1.5 kV and subsequent...

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heating to 1073 K in vacuum. The cleanliness of the surface was confirmed by XPS and LEED.

TiO₂ films on Pt(111) were grown by thermal evaporation using a Ti wire (99.6% purity, Mateck GmbH) on a clean Pt(111) surface at room temperature in vacuum and subsequent oxidation in 5×10⁻⁷ Torr of O₂ (99.999% purity, Linde AG) at 973 K. TiO₂ film thickness was estimated via the attenuation of the Pt4f7/2 XPS signal using the equation

$$d_{ox} = \lambda \sin \theta \ln \left[ \left( I_{Pt}^\infty - I_{Pt} \right) / I_{Pt} \right] + 1$$

where $\lambda$ is the inelastic mean free path of the Pt4f7/2 photoelectrons in the oxide film determined via QUASES-IMFP-TPP2M Ver 2.2 software (2.7 nm), $\theta$ is the take off angle between the surface plane and the outgoing photoelectrons (i.e., 48°), $I_{Pt}^\infty$ is the intensity of the Pt4f7/2 signal for a clean Pt(111) surface, and $I_{Pt}$ is the intensity of the Pt4f7/2 signal for the TiO₂/Pt(111) surface.

BaO₃ layers on TiO₂/Pt(111) were prepared by thermal evaporation of Ba from a BaAl₄ alloy (ST2/FR wire, SAES Getters) at room temperature and subsequent oxidation in 5×10⁻⁷ Torr O₂ at 523 K. BaO coverages on the TiO₂/Pt(111) were estimated using two independent ways in order to cross-check the calculated coverage values. In the first method, BaO film thickness on TiO₂/Pt(111) was calculated via eq 1, where the attenuation of the Ti2p3/2 signal was used instead of Pt4f7/2. In the second method, BaO thickness was estimated by calibrating the dosing rate of the Ba doser on the clean Pt(111) surface and then calculating the Ba approximate coverage on the TiO₂/Pt(111) surface based on the Ba dosing duration and the Ba doser heating current (ca. 10.0 A). BaO film thickness values obtained by these two independent methods were in good agreement with each other (i.e., with a difference of less than 25%).

In order to estimate the coverage of TiO₂ overlayers in terms of monolayer equivalents (MLE) from the calculated film thickness ($d_{ox}$ in eq 1), the ML thickness of TiO₂ was taken to be 0.325 nm, corresponding to interlayer spacing in the ⟨110⟩ direction in the bulk rutile TiO₂ crystal. For BaO coverage calculations, the ML thicknesses were taken to be 0.39 nm, corresponding to the interlayer spacing in the ⟨110⟩ direction in the bulk BaO crystal. The rutile ⟨110⟩ surface parameters were used in the calculations since this surface is probably one of the most thoroughly investigated titania surfaces in the literature with well-defined parameters, whereas the BaO(110) surface parameters were used since this surface was observed to form on the Pt(111) surface in our recent studies. For reference, 1 ML of TiO₂ rutile (110) surface corresponds to 1.04×10¹⁵ Ti atoms/cm², 1 ML of BaO(110) surface corresponds to 0.47×10¹⁵ Ba atoms/cm², and 1 ML of Pt(111) corresponds to 1.5×10¹⁵ atoms/cm².

NO₂ gas, used in the experiments, was synthesized by the reaction of NO (99.9% purity, Air Products) with O₂ and further purification by subsequent freeze—thaw—pump cycles. CO₂ gas (Linde AG, Purity 99.999%) was used without further purification.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 presents the XPS data obtained during the growth of the TiO₂/Pt(111) and BaO₃/TiO₂/Pt(111) surfaces. Figure 1a (spectrum i) demonstrates that during the initial stages of the TiO₂ film growth Ti sites are partially oxidized, which is evident from the existence of both Ti⁴⁺ (458.9 eV) and Ti⁵⁺ (456.0 eV) Ti2p3/2 signals, whereas a fully oxidized thick (ca. 26 MLE) TiO₂ film (Figure 1a, spectrum ii) reveals exclusively Ti⁴⁺ signal. Evaporation of metallic Ba (3 MLE) on the TiO₂/Pt(111) surface at room temperature (RT) clearly induces a partial reduction of the titania film and the formation of reduced Ti₂p3/2 states within the range of 457.0–456.0 eV (Figure 1a, spectrum iii). After the oxidation of the Ba overlayer on O₂ ($P_{O_2}$ = 5×10⁻⁷ Torr) at 523 K followed by a second Ba deposition and oxidation step at 523 K (resulting in a Ba coverage of ca. 6 MLE) (Figure 1a, spectrum iv), almost all of the Ti sites are oxidized to Ti⁴⁺, whereas the intensities of all of the Ti₂p signal visibly
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The oxidation temperature to 973 K results in a drastic change increases in a pronounced manner which is attributed to the addition oxidation procedure (Figure 1c, spectrum iv), its intensity in feature does not signiﬁcantly shift after oxidation (Figure 1b, spectrum iv) at 973 K in O2 (<1 MLE)/TiO2(26 MLE)/Pt(111) (Figure 2). LEED images corresponding to (a) (2 × 2) TiO2(26 MLE)/Pt(111), (b) BaOx(<1 MLE)/TiO2(26 MLE)/Pt(111), (c) a surface obtained by the oxidation of sample (b) in O2 (P0 = 5 × 10−7 Torr) at 1073 K. LEED patterns were recorded using electron energy values of 85, 85, and 105 eV, respectively.

Ba3d5/2 spectra given in Figure 1c are in good agreement with the observations discussed above. After the initial deposition of the Ba on TiO2/Pt(111) at RT (Figure 1c, spectrum iii), the Ba3d5/2 signal at 780.6 eV is detected. Although the BE of this feature does not signiﬁcantly shift after oxidation – Ba deposition – oxidation procedure (Figure 1c, spectrum iv), its intensity increases in a pronounced manner which is attributed to the additional dose of Ba and an improved forward photoelectron scattering due to the increasing wetting/surface dispersion of the BaOx/Ba2TiO4 domains. After oxidation at 973 K (Figure 1b, spectrum v), the Ti2p signal reveals a pronounced increase and the shoulder at 532.1 eV almost completely disappears, yielding an O1s spectrum that is quite similar to that of TiO2/Pt(111) (Figure 1b, spectrum ii).

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In the light of the observations presented above, it can be argued that metallic Ba adsorption on the TiO2/Pt(111) surface at RT in vacuum induces a strong interaction between surface O2− sites and Ba atoms, oxidizing the Ba3d species while reducing the Ti4+ sites. Oxidation of this surface with O2 at an intermediate temperature such as 523 K triggers the formation of BaOx as well as perovskite-type mixed oxide domains such as BaTiOx, Ba2TiO4, and possibly their defective forms (BaO/Ba2TiO4). Decrease in the Ti2p signal after Ba deposition at RT and oxidation at 523 K in comparison to the clean TiO2/Pt(111) surface is in agreement with the fact that the titania layer resides below the BaOx/Ba2TiO4 overlayer under these conditions. Meanwhile, increasing the oxidation temperature to 973 K results in a drastic change in the surface composition. This is evident from the considerable decrease in the Ba 3d5/2 signal intensity, concomitant to a significant rise in the Ti2p signal intensity. These observations can be explained by the segregation of the Ti sites to the topmost surface and the diffusion of BaOx/Ba2TiO4 domains beneath the TiO2 overlayer, giving rise to a TiO2-terminated surface.

The temperature-dependent structural changes on the BaOx/TiO2/Pt(111) surface were also further investigated via LEED (Figure 2). Figure 2a presents the LEED image corresponding to a thick (ca. 26 MLE) TiO2 film grown on a clean Pt(111) substrate as described above. In spite of the significant thickness of the TiO2 overlayer, broad but discernible LEED spots are apparent in Figure 2a, indicating the presence of a long-range ordering in the TiO2 film revealing a (2 × 2) structure. A similar (2 × 2) reconstruction has also been observed on a rutile TiO2(100) surface14,15. Former reports in the literature demonstrated that TiO2 ultrathin ﬁlms grown on Pt(111) can exhibit a variety of ordered structures.16,17 For instance, TiO2 ultrathin ﬁlms grown on Pt(111) with a titania overlayer coverage of 0.8 ML present a LEED diffraction revealing zigzag-like TiO2 features which is ascribed to the “z-TiO2” overlayer.16 This so-called z-overlayer was assigned to an incommensurate superstructure with respect to the Pt(111) substrate with a rectangular unit cell of about (6.8 ± 0.1) × (8.6 ± 0.1) Å2.18 Former STM studies in the literature also suggested that the z-TiO2 structure was comprised of an O−Ti dimer, with an oxygen terminations.16 Other ordered TiO2 overlayers on Pt(111) were also observed in the literature16 for a TiO2 overlayer coverage of 1.2 MLE. This latter ordered overlayer was called wagon-wheel-like or w-TiO2 structure.16 A detailed analysis of this w-TiO2/Pt(111) surface revealed that w-TiO2 overlayer formed an ordered (√43 × √43) R 7.6° structure with a unit vector of 18.2 Å.16 The ordered overlayer in Figure 2a is lost when Ba (<1 MLE) is deposited on TiO2/Pt(111) and oxidized at 523 K in O2 (Figure 2b) suggesting that Ba2Ox/Ba2TiO4 overlayer on TiO2/Pt(111) has an amorphous structure. Interestingly, oxidation of the BaOx/Ba2TiO4 overlayer on TiO2/Pt(111) at 1073 K in O2 regenerates the (2 × 2) LEED pattern that is obtained for the clean TiO2/Pt(111) surface. These LEED results are in agreement with the conclusion that oxidation of the BaOx/Ba2TiO4 overlayer on TiO2/Pt(111) gives rise to the diffusion of the BaOx/Ba2TiO4 domains into the TiO2 matrix leading to the segregation of Ti sites on the surface and the formation of a TiO2-terminated overlayer. Reconstruction of perovskite surfaces and the formation of TiO2/TIO-terminated surface structures at elevated temperatures have also been reported for SrTiO3(001)18,19 and SrTiO3(111)20 surfaces. TiO2-terminated surfaces have been observed for the (2 × 1) reconstruction3 and the (4 × 4) reconstruction of SrTiO3(001) at elevated temperatures,18,19, and a TiO(111)-(2 × 2) terminated reconstructed surface was observed on SrTiO3(111).20

We have investigated these thermally induced structural changes for a variety of temperatures in which we have monitored the Ba/Ti surface atomic ratio via XPS after oxidation steps carried out at temperatures ranging from 300 to 1073 K. In these experiments Ba with an estimated coverage of <1 MLE was
deposited on a TiO₂(26 MLE)/Pt(111) surface. As summarized in Figure 3, Ba/Ti surface atomic ratio displays a monotonic decrease with increasing oxidation temperatures. Note that the oxidation steps were typically performed with an O₂ partial pressure of 5 × 10⁻⁷ Torr and for durations of 20 min. Sample i in Figure 3 was treated with O₂ at 1073 K for 30 min. Sample ii was obtained by annealing sample i in vacuum at 1073 K for 30 min, and sample iii was obtained by dosing 1 × 10⁻⁷ Torr NO₂ (a more aggressive oxidizing agent than O₂) on sample ii at a temperature of 300 K for 30 min followed by annealing at 1073 K (to further oxidize the surface and desorb the residual NO₂ species). Figure 3 reveals that, even after the oxidation steps at relatively low temperatures (T < 573 K), a rather sharp decrease in the Ba/Ti surface atomic ratio is visible, indicating that the Ba diffusion into the TiO₂ matrix has a rather small activation barrier and is likely to occur even at relatively low temperatures. Note that the Ba/Ti surface atomic ratio variation under these conditions may partly be ascribed to the agglomeration of the BaO domains and sintering; however, observed changes in the O1s region in XPS definitely indicate the presence of additional surface phenomena such as the formation of perovskite-type species due to BaO diffusion and reaction with the TiO₂ matrix. Under these low-temperature oxidation conditions, the surface is dominated with BaO₂ species with a smaller contribution from Ba₅Ti₇O₂₆ domains. Figure 3 also reveals that the Ba/Ti surface atomic ratio is observed to stay fairly stable within a broad band of intermediate temperatures (i.e., 573–873 K). Within this temperature window, current XPS results indicate that the surface contains a larger contribution from perovskite-type species (Ba₅Ti₇O₂₆). At oxidation temperatures above 873 K, a steep decline in the Ba/Ti surface atomic ratio is visible suggesting a fast and an efficient diffusion of Ba sites into the underlying TiO₂ framework. It is also apparent in Figure 3 that, after extended oxidation and/or annealing steps performed at 1073 K, Ba/Ti surface atomic ratio reaches a rather steady value where the surface is characterized by LEED pattern presented in Figure 2c and its XPS analysis reveals similar characteristics to the topmost XPS spectra in Figure 1.

Chemical reactivity of the BaOₓ/Ba₅Ti₇O₂₆ overlayers on TiO₂/Pt(111) were also studied toward various ubiquitous adsorbates in heterogeneous catalysis (i.e., NO₂ and CO₂) which are relevant to numerous catalytic systems including (but not limited to) NOₓ-storage reduction systems. In order to achieve this, adsorption experiments were performed by saturating the surfaces with either NO₂ or CO₂ at RT (P(NO₂) = 1 × 10⁻⁷ Torr for 30 min at RT and P(CO₂) = 5 × 10⁻⁷ Torr for 5 min at RT) and then monitoring the desorption profiles at elevated temperatures via TPD. Figure 4a depicts a TPD profile obtained after NO₂ saturation of a BaO(O6 MLE)/TiO₂(26 MLE)/Pt(111) surface at RT. On the basis of the current XPS results, this surface is dominated by BaOₓ domains with a smaller contribution from Ba₅Ti₇O₂₆ domains. TPD spectrum given in Figure 4a, spectrum i, corresponding to m/z = 30, clearly indicates that this surface can efficiently store NO₂ most likely in the form of nitrates resulting in a desorption maximum at 635 K that is consistent with the strongly bound ionic NO₃⁻/NO₂⁻ species adsorbed on BaOₓ and Ba₅Ti₇O₂₆ domains. It should be mentioned that, although NO₂ storage capacity of supported BaO surfaces are typically higher than that of BaO, the Ba/TiO₂ surfaces can also store appreciable amount of NO₂ or CO₂ in the form of nitrates/nitrites or carbonates, respectively. This might be partly ascribed to the BaO termination of the Ba/TiO₂(100) surface. It is also worth mentioning that no oxygen (m/z = 32) evolution was detected in this TPD experiment suggesting that the oxygen atoms produced during the decomposition of nitrates/nitrites are either dissolved in the subsurface or take part in the oxidation of BaO to BaO₂ as commonly observed in the case of NO₂ desorption from BaO overlayers.  

Figure 3. Ba/Ti surface atomic ratio values obtained from the XPS data for a BaOₓ(<1 MLE)/TiO₂(26 MLE)/Pt(111) surface after various oxidation and thermal aging steps at various temperatures (see text for details).
a TiO$_2$(26 MLE)/Pt(111) surface at RT (Figure 4a, spectrum iii). In this control experiment, a characteristically weak $m/z = 30$ desorption signal was detected with a significantly lower desorption maximum within 400-450 K pointing to the fact that the saturation coverage and the adsorption strength of adsorbed NO$_2$ species on a TiO$_2$-terminated TiO$_2$/Pt(111) surface at RT is much smaller compared to that of BaO$_6$/TiO$_2$/Pt(111) (Figure 4a, spectrum i) and BaO$_6$/Pt(111)$^8$ surfaces.

This observation is also in perfect agreement with the additional TPD experiments performed by saturating the surfaces given in Figure 4a, spectra i and ii with CO$_2$ at RT (Figure 4b). Figure 4b, spectrum i reveals a strong $m/z = 44$ desorption signal at 751 K associated with the decomposition of strongly bound ionic carbonate-like surface species. It is also crucial to emphasize that the CO$_2$ uptake of the surface given in Figure 4b, spectrum i seems to be completely suppressed after annealing at 793 K (Figure 4b, spectrum ii). The reason for the suppression of CO$_2$ uptake is also associated with the formation of a Ti-enriched surface overlayer on a thermally aged BaO$_6$/TiO$_2$/Pt(111) system.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Current results shed light on the fundamental aspects of the thermally induced surface structural transformations of alkaline earth oxide/transition metal oxide interfaces and provide valuable insights regarding their catalytic deactivation pathways. By utilizing the BaO$_6$/TiO$_2$/Pt(111) model system, it was demonstrated that perovskite-type surface species (i.e., BaTiO$_3$/Ba$_2$TiO$_4$/Ba$_2$Ti$_2$O$_5$) form even at temperatures as low as 523 K, concomitant to the diffusion of BaO$_6$/Ba$_2$Ti$_2$O$_5$ species into the underlying TiO$_2$ framework. Diffusion of Ba-containing species into the TiO$_2$ framework is further facilitated at $T > 873$ K. These surface phenomena result in a TiO$_2$-terminated surface which is almost completely deficient of Ba-containing domains exposed on the surface. The surface segregation of TiO$_2$ species yields a surface structure that is incapable of performing some of the vital catalytic functions of the investigated alkaline earth oxide/transition metal oxide interface, such as NO$_2$/CO$_2$ adsorption and storage. Currently observed surface phenomena unveil a general behavior that has direct potential implications in high temperature superconductivity, solid oxide fuel cells (SOFC), sensors, and electronic device applications. Further surface scientific investigations are required in order to elucidate and control such surface/subsurface diffusion phenomena and diffusion kinetics and to design advanced structural promoters that can act as diffusion barriers in mixed oxide interfacial systems.

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