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Modelling Physical Vapor Deposited Nano-scaled Nickel Cermet Anodes for Fuel Cells Operating on Biomass

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Nickel-Gadolinium Doped Ceria (Ni-GDC) cermet anodic thin films were prepared on zirconia electrolyte supports by two distinct physical vapor deposition (PVD) processes, 1) pulsed laser deposition (PLD) 2) radio frequency (RF) sputtering. For PLD, the deposition was carried out at a target temperature range of 0°C~700°C. For RF sputtering, the target temperature was kept constant at room temperature of 25°C, however the background sputtering gas was Ar:O₂/80:20. The fuel cell configuration was completed by screen printing of lanthanum strontium manganite (LSM/YSZ) cathodes on the other side of electrolyte supports. Peak performance comparison of these cells was measured under hydrogen (H₂) fuel source at an intermediate temperature range of 600°C ~ 800°C by voltage-current-power curves. The resistances of various cell components were observed by nyquist plots. Initial results showed that anode thin films made at increased target temperature, pressure, and high deposition power, performed better than the low powered ones, for a specific Ar or O₂ pressure. Interestingly, however, anodes made at the highest power and the highest pressure, were not the ones that showed the maximum power output at an intermediate oxide fuel cell temperature range. These high performance anodes were then tested under the product fuel of CO₂ electro-reduced via biomass carbon obtained from industrial waste(IWC). IWC fuel performance matched up to the H₂ fuel performance in terms of peak power density and longevity, with an added lower fuel cost advantage. High resolution transmission and scanning electron microscope 2D images were utilized to understand the three phased (Ni, Ce, Pores) of the cermet anode made by both PVD processes. The electrochemical model was used to simulate the kinetics of nanostructured porous thin film cermet anodes. Experimental and simulation results were coherent with each other, especially for IWC operated fuel cells working at the upper range of intermediate SOFCs.

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