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# The Use of IR Spectroscopy to Follow the Absorption of CO<sub>2</sub> in Amine media - Evaluation of the Speciation with Time

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## Abstract

Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) is a concrete option for CO<sub>2</sub> mitigation in the atmosphere. One option is the CO<sub>2</sub> capture from post-combustion industrial effluents followed by storage in secured sites. Capture processes can be based on selective absorption/desorption cycles of gas into aqueous solutions of alkanolamines[1]. The cost of CO<sub>2</sub> treatment with classical alkanolamines is a limitation for the intensive use of this technology. The SIMODEX project is dealing with coupling experimental developments, molecular simulation and thermodynamic modeling to understand structure-properties relationships, and to develop transferable conclusions to optimize processes at low costs.

This chapter will focus on the use of ATR-IR (Attenuated Total Reflection-infrared) spectroscopy to quantify the speciation in mixtures containing alkanolamine and CO<sub>2</sub>, in absence of water, in order to validate the thermodynamic models already used, and to give crucial information for molecular simulation developments.

## Introduction

Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) is a solid option for CO<sub>2</sub> mitigation in the atmosphere. One option is the CO<sub>2</sub> capture from post-combustion industrial effluents followed by utilization or storage in secured sites. Capture processes are generally based on selective absorption/desorption cycles of gas into aqueous solutions of alkanolamines[1]. The following scheme shows the principle of the process.

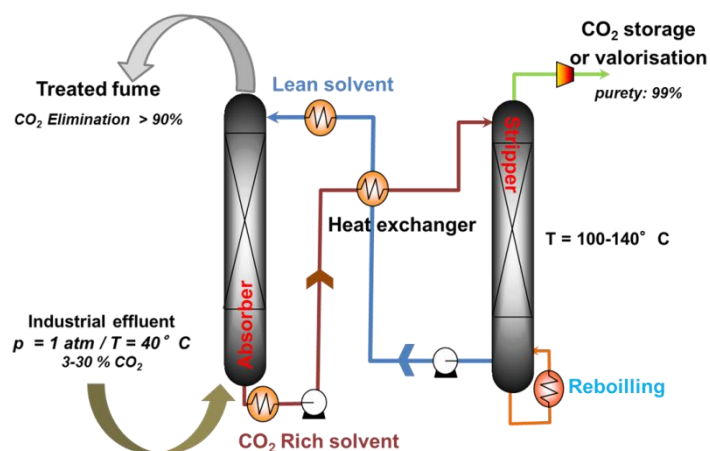


Fig 1: Schematic view of the amine based post-combustion CO<sub>2</sub> capture process.

In this treatment scheme, the industrial effluent is entering in the absorber at atmospheric pressure and at temperature close to 40°C. Due to favorable chemical reactions, and physical absorption, the CO<sub>2</sub> is selectively captured into the aqueous solution, while the other gases are rejected to the atmosphere. The CO<sub>2</sub> rich solvent is then transport to the stripper, where the loaded solution is heated up to 120°C using a countercurrent steam. The CO<sub>2</sub> is then desorbed from the solvent, separated, compressed and transported for further use, while the lean solvent is returned to the absorber. This last step is the most critical in the process cost, as it necessitates high energy consumption for heating up the system. The cost of CO<sub>2</sub> treatment using classical alkanolamine solutions as absorbent is prohibitive and is a clear limitation for the intensive use of this technology.

In order to provide optimized treatment processes, it is necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of the chemical and physical interactions taking place in the mixture. SIMODEX project is a joint program between ANR (Agence Nationale de la Recherche) in France and NSERC (Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada) in Canada dealing with coupling experimental developments, molecular simulation and modeling to understand structure-properties relationships, and to develop transferable conclusions to optimize processes at low costs. The objectives of the project are to understand the complex equilibria taking place in the ternary water-alkanolamine-CO<sub>2</sub> system by studying the elementary mixtures starting with pure compounds and going through binary ones as shown in figure 2.

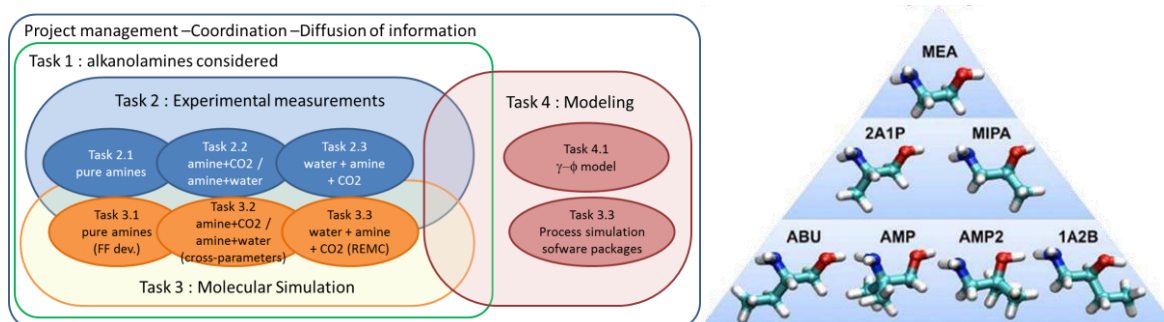
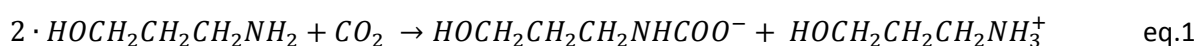


Figure 2: structuration of the SIMODEX project and amine family to be studied

This chapter will focus on the use of IR spectroscopy to quantify the speciation in solutions, in order to validate the thermodynamic models already used, and to give crucial information for molecular simulation developments. The mixtures chosen are binary systems containing initially only amine and CO<sub>2</sub>, where there is almost no publication in the literature. For this binary mixture the only reaction that may happen during the mixing process is the formation of the carbamate that can be written as following:



As experimental issues happened when studying CO<sub>2</sub>-monoethanolamine (MEA) mixtures, such as high increase in viscosity or solid phase formation, a physical solvent, known for not interacting with amine or CO<sub>2</sub> was used. Then ethylene glycol was chosen to dilute the system. [2]

More specifically, the speciation in mixtures containing MEA + ethylene glycol + CO<sub>2</sub> will be studied using IR-spectroscopy, and a new *in situ* cell designed for following absorption of gas in liquid mixtures versus time will be described and first promising results are presented.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Chemicals**

Monoethanolamine (MEA) was purchased in TCI-europe (purity >99%), ethylene glycol is from Riedel and Haën (purity 99.5%) and CO<sub>2</sub> from air products (99.995%). The water quantities in liquids were verified using Karl Fisher measurements, and correspond to 300 ppm and 1000 ppm respectively for amine and glycol.

### **Sample preparation**

As direct measurements of MEA+CO<sub>2</sub> mixtures were not possible due to increase of viscosity and solid phase generation, the MEA was first mixed with a CO<sub>2</sub> physical solvent, namely the ethylene glycol. A first concentration of 30% of MEA in ethylene glycol was chosen as this is comparable to the classical concentration of MEA in water when studying the solvents used in the process. Then a second concentration of 10% MEA in ethylene glycol was considered to reach more easily the complete stoichiometric reaction of the CO<sub>2</sub> on MEA.

### **Experimental device**

The spectroscopic measurements, realized at atmospheric pressure and room temperature, were performed using a heatable Golden Gate™ accessory (Specac, Ltd., UK) with a diamond as ATR (Attenuated Total Reflection) crystal. The ATR-IR spectra were collected by means of Thermo Nicolet™ 380 FT-IR spectrometer with a DTGS (deuterated triglycine sulfate) detector. The spectra were obtained with a resolution of 4 cm<sup>-1</sup>, 32 co-added scans and were recorded in the range of 4000 – 500 cm<sup>-1</sup>. The measurement of one spectrum takes around 50 seconds.

For the spectroscopic measurements under pressurized CO<sub>2</sub> a heatable Golden Gate™ accessory (Specac, Ltd., UK) equipped with a home-designed pressurized cell was used. Briefly, the Golden Gate™ was used to hold the ATR crystal with an incident angle of 45° below the liquid phase of interest. Some modifications on the design of the bridge were realized to support a customized sapphire cell as shown in figure 3. Two aluminum arms (1) were added to the bridge to increase the space between the thumb screw and the diamond in order to fit with the new high volume cell (2+4) and a stirring mechanism (3).

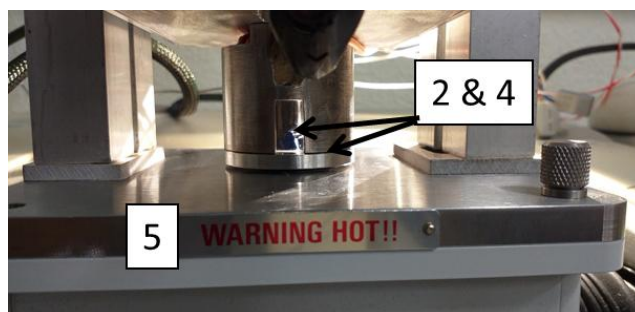
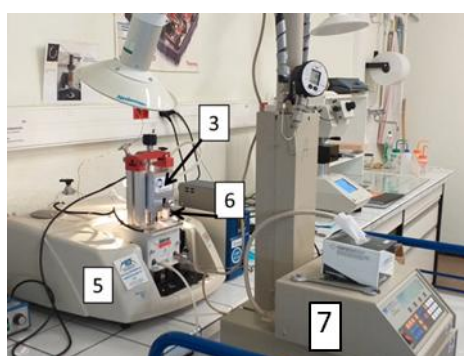
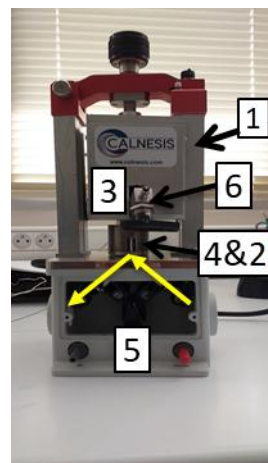
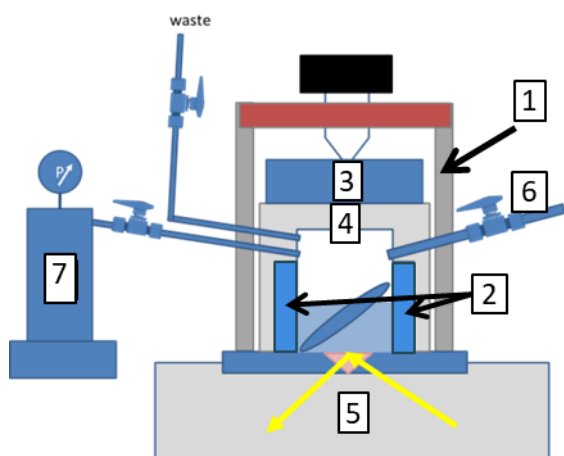


Figure 3 : New experimental setup for gas absorption : 1. Aluminum arms; 2. sapphire cylinder; 3. magnetic stirrer; 4. inox cell, surrounding sapphire cylinder; 5. ATR-IR spectrometer; 6. liquid injection valve; 7 high pressure pump equipped with pressure transducer and gas injection valve.

The liquid cell was installed on the top of the heating plate of the Golden Gate™ as shown on figure 3. The internal volume of the cell is about 2 ml. The cell is composed of a sapphire cylinder surrounded by an inox block. Heating cartridges and PT100 resistances are inserted in the inox cylinder to control the temperature of the sample. Two windows are present in the inox cylinder, so the inside of the cell can be observed during the whole experiment. A Teflon ring was installed between the cell and the plate to prevent leaking.

The liquid is inserted using the injection valve (6) until the needed volume of liquid is obtained. About 1 mL of liquid is introduced in the cell. After reaching the temperature equilibrium, the gas is added using the gas injection valve, while the pressure is maintained constant using the high pressure syringe pump. As the magnetic stirrer is agitating the solution, the diffusion of the gas in the liquid starting immediately.

The IR spectra are then recorded every minute from the beginning of the experiment. When the evolution of the peaks is reduced, the spectra are measured every 5 minutes, until the signal becomes constant, or when the gas contained in the high pressure pump is consumed.

## Results and discussion

### Kinetic of absorption

A first kinetic experiment was realized using a liquid mixture containing initially MEA (10% w/w) and ethylene glycol (90% w/w). IR spectra of direct measurements are reported on the top figure 4. The mixture was introduced in the cell, and a first spectrum was realized. Then the valve isolating the CO<sub>2</sub> from the system was open and the gas started flowing in the head space of the cell.

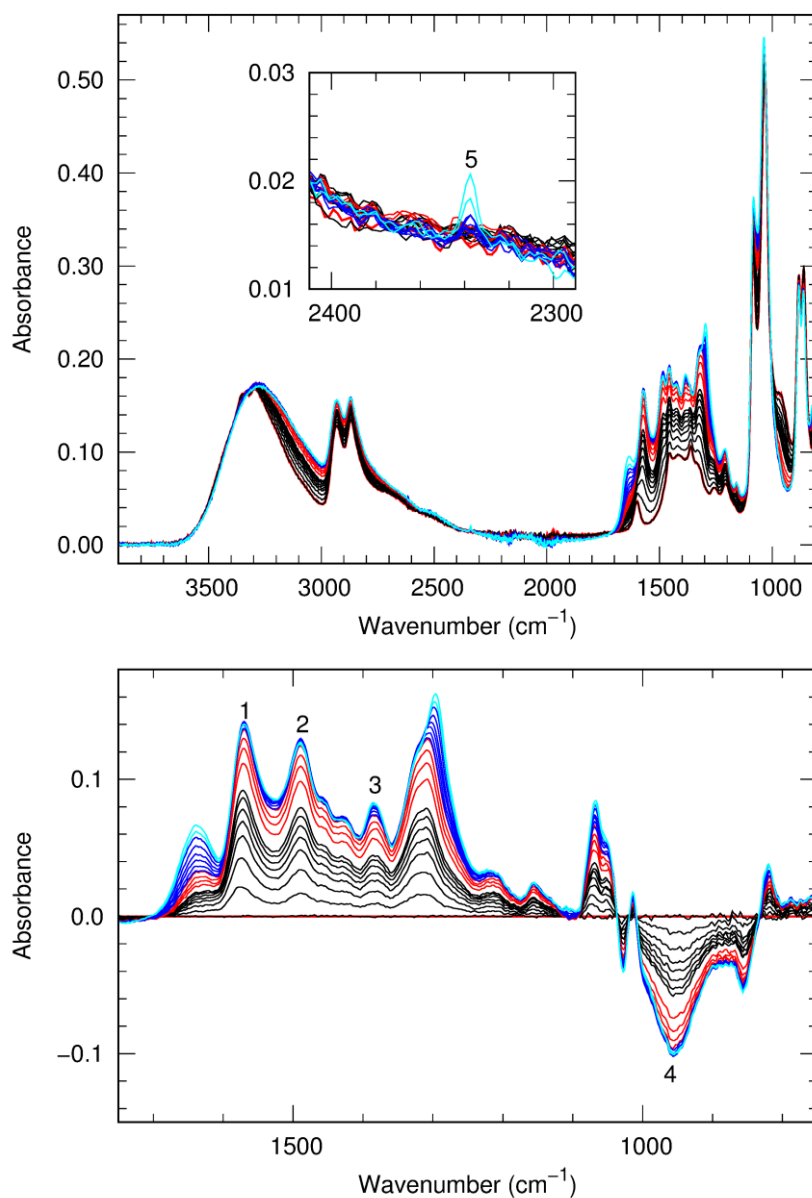


Figure 4 : IR spectra during the kinetic of the sorption of CO<sub>2</sub> in MEA-Ethylene glycol mixture (top) and MEA-Glycol-CO<sub>2</sub> after subtraction of the MEA-Glycol spectrum (bottom) at different time; 1-3 peaks : characteristic peaks for carbamates ; 4 : characteristic peak for non-protonated amine; 5 : asymmetric stretching vibration band for physically absorbed CO<sub>2</sub>. The spectra obtained during the first 10 minutes are the black ones. The red spectra are obtained for time from 10 to 40 minutes, while blue ones are for times higher than 40 minutes after the beginning of the CO<sub>2</sub> sorption.

In order to interpret the results, the spectrum obtained for the binary mixture without gas ( $t=0$  minute) was subtracted to the subsequent spectra as shown on the bottom figure 4. All positive peaks after subtraction are characteristics of new species appearing in the liquid during the sorption while negative peaks correspond to the disappearance of pre-existing species. In order to quantify the speciation versus time in such systems, it is necessary to determine a relation between the intensity of the IR signals and the quantity of each species.

## Calibration of speciation

### Sample preparation

In order to realize the calibration of the absorption of  $\text{CO}_2$  in MEA as function of the loading charge, it was necessary to record spectra containing very well know concentrations of MEA and  $\text{CO}_2$ . For that purpose, a mixture of MEA + ethylene glycol was prepared by weight. Then  $\text{CO}_2$  was added above the liquid sample, for 12 hours, under a pressure of  $\text{CO}_2$  of 0.2 MPa (2 bar), while the liquid phase was agitated using a magnetic stirrer. Then the mixture was returned to atmospheric pressure. The sample was then weighted, and the mass difference with the sample without  $\text{CO}_2$  was considered as corresponding to the mass of  $\text{CO}_2$  absorbed in the sample. This very concentrated sample was diluted using the initial mixture of MEA+Glycol, in different proportions to reach various  $\text{CO}_2$  loading charges.

### Spectra and results

The spectra obtained for the calibration are given in figure 5. The first graph shows the direct spectra obtained for mixtures at known loading charge, from  $\alpha=0$  to 0.5 ( $\alpha = \text{mol of } \text{CO}_2 / \text{mol of amine}$ ) while the second one present a zoom of the fingerprint region ( $1700 - 750 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ), where most of the bands of organic compounds are regrouped. The red spectrum corresponds to the sample obtained for MEA+Glycol solution without  $\text{CO}_2$ .

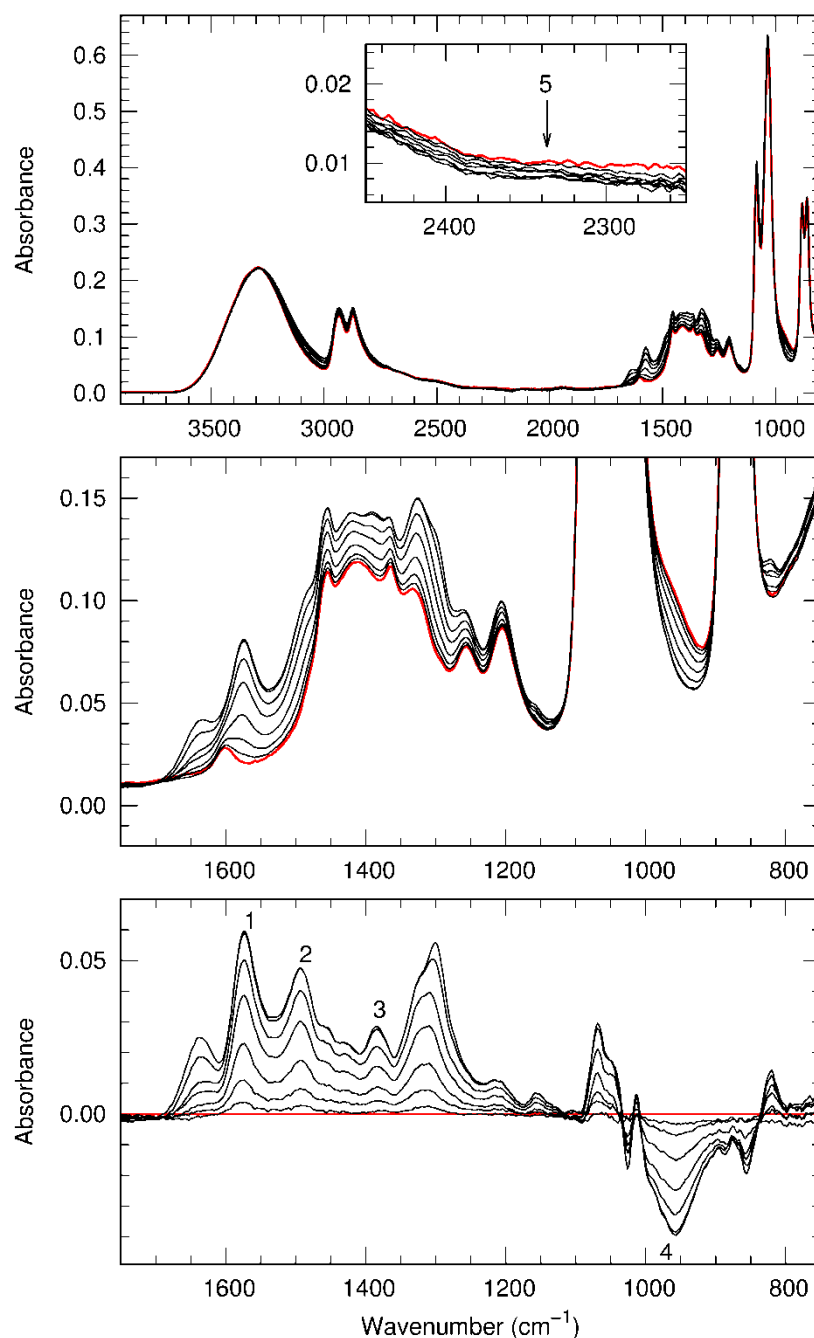


Figure 5: IR spectra for mixtures containing MEA (30%) ethylene glycol (70%), at different and well known loading charges from  $a = 0$  up to  $a = 0.53$ . top figure: direct spectra; middle figure: zoom of the spectra in the range of  $1700\text{--}750\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ; bottom figure: fingerprint region of the IR spectra of the MEA-ethylene glycol- $\text{CO}_2$  mixtures after subtraction of the MEA-ethylene glycol spectrum.

As previously described, and in order to be able to analyze the results, the red spectrum was subtracted to the others as shown on the third graphic of figure 5. On this graph, 4 peaks have been identified and used to calibrate the amount of absorbed  $\text{CO}_2$ . Peaks labelled from 1 to 3 correspond to peaks characteristic of vibration in carbamate molecules [3]. The peak 4 centered at  $960\text{ cm}^{-1}$  is characteristic of non-protonated nitrogen of MEA [3]. When increasing  $\text{CO}_2$  loading charge, the height of all those peaks increases. Peaks 1 to 3 are more and more positive while the peak 4 is more and more negative. This corresponds naturally to the generation of carbamate and consumption of non-protonated MEA following



the equation 1 shown above. The signal corresponding the physisorbed  $\text{CO}_2$  (band label 5 in figure 5 at around  $2340\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) has not been detected for the concentrations realized during the calibration.

In order to calibrate the system, it is necessary to relate the height (or the area) of each peak to the loading charge. The peak 4 was truncated on the left side due to peak displacements during the absorption. Then, for this peak we considered the height of the peak as the characteristic data. For peaks 1 to 3 it was possible to use the integration that reduces the uncertainty on the result. The curves representing area of peaks 1 to 3, and height of peak 4 versus loading charge are given in figure 7.

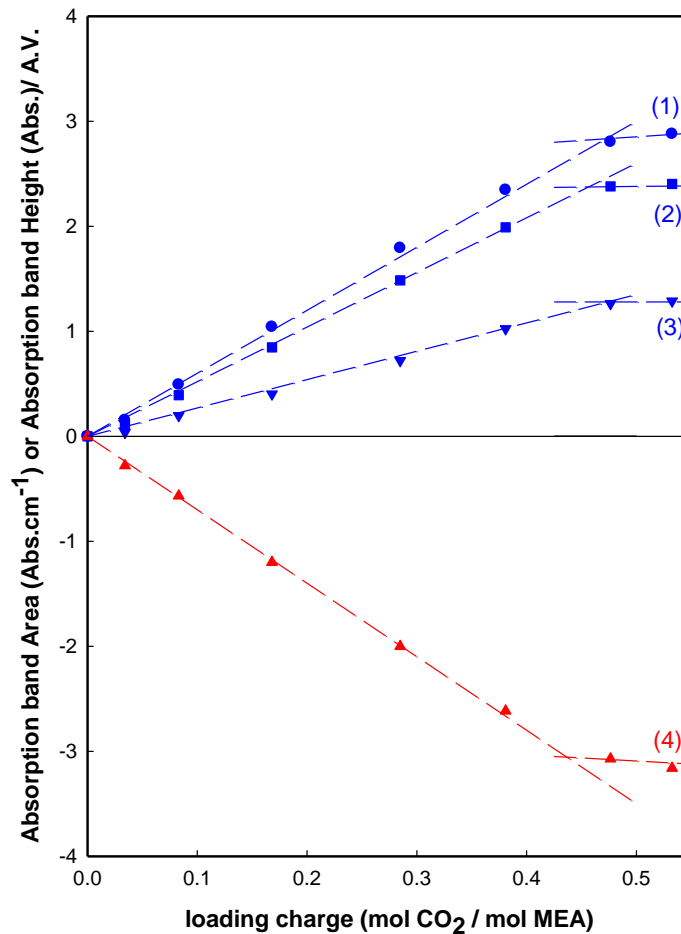


Figure 6 : area (peak 1 to 3) and height (peak 4) of the IR signals characteristic to chemical reaction occurring in the mixture.

From those calibrations, it is then possible to recalculate at any time of a kinetic experiment the quantity of each species formed when the loading charge is below 0.45. When the concentration of  $\text{CO}_2$  is higher the increase of the IR signals are much slower, probably part of the  $\text{CO}_2$  does not react but is physisorbed. Furthermore, it was not possible to prepare mixtures containing high amount of  $\text{CO}_2$  physically absorbed in the binary mixture. For that purpose,  $\text{CO}_2$  was then absorbed in pure ethylene glycol under higher pressure directly in the ATR-IR cell.

### Physisorption

As it can be seen on figure 4, during the kinetic of the  $\text{CO}_2$  sorption in the MEA-Ethylene glycol mixture, after one hour, it is possible to observe a small signal at around  $2340\text{ cm}^{-1}$  corresponding to the

asymmetric stretching vibration of the  $\text{CO}_2$  physically absorbed in the mixture. In order to quantify this  $\text{CO}_2$ , it is then necessary to calibrate this band. For that purpose, a mixture of ethylene glycol +  $\text{CO}_2$  was measured at high pressure.

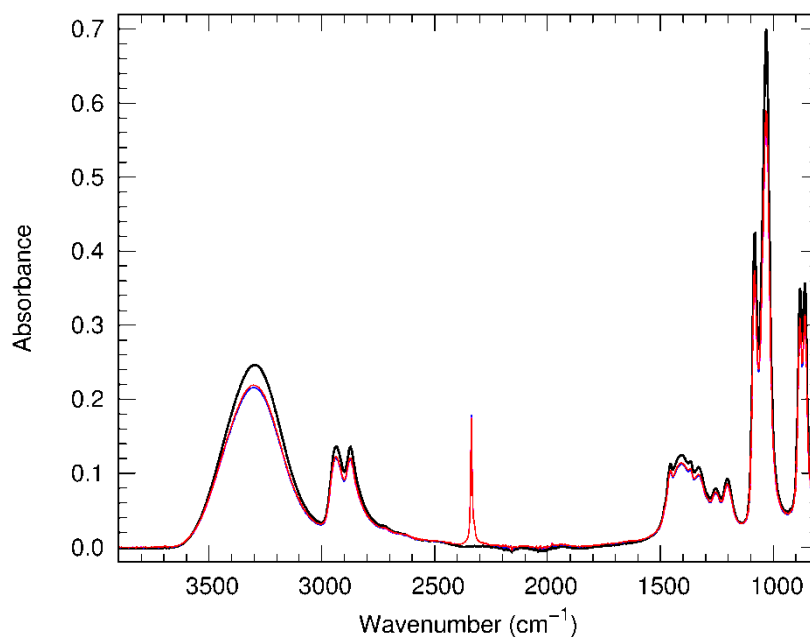


Figure 7: IR spectra for pure ethylene glycol (black curve) and  $\text{CO}_2$  in ethylene glycol (red and blue curve) at 20.0 bar and 35°C.

On figure 7, the black curve shows the signal obtained for pure ethylene glycol. Measurements have then been realized for mixtures of  $\text{CO}_2$  + glycol, at 2.0 MPa, 35°C at different times. Two spectra obtained for different times are shown on figure 7 (red and blue spectra). Two phenomena have to be observed. The intensity of all bands corresponding to the ethylene glycol is decreasing with the sorption of  $\text{CO}_2$ . These decreases of intensity are explained by the swelling of the solvent due to the presence of  $\text{CO}_2$ . This phenomenon is well known and documented in the literature, particularly in the case of liquid [4,5].

When looking at absorbance close to 2340  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  it is easy to observe an intense peak corresponding to the  $\text{CO}_2$  physically absorbed in ethylene glycol. The rest of the spectra is identical with and without  $\text{CO}_2$ , apart from the decreasing of the intensity of bands corresponding to the swelling of the ethylene glycol, meaning that no chemical reaction happened in those mixtures. The area of the  $\text{CO}_2$  peak at 2340  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  can then be directly associated to the solubility of  $\text{CO}_2$  in ethylene glycol using literature value [6], at this temperature and pressure, the solubility of  $\text{CO}_2$  in ethylene glycol is  $x_{\text{CO}_2} = 0.0369 \pm 0.0006$ . Admitting that the absorption of  $\text{CO}_2$  in ethylene glycol follows the Beer-Lambert law, a linear regression was determined between zero and this concentration to estimate the quantity of  $\text{CO}_2$  absorbed in solutions of interest.

### **Full curve speciation**

The evolution of absorptions of the characteristic bands of different species versus time shown in figure 5, were plotted in figure 8. Carbamate vibrations are shown in blue, while the vibration of the non-protonated amine group of MEA is in red. The signals of the physically absorbed  $\text{CO}_2$  in the MEA-Glycol mixture correspond to the black empty circle.

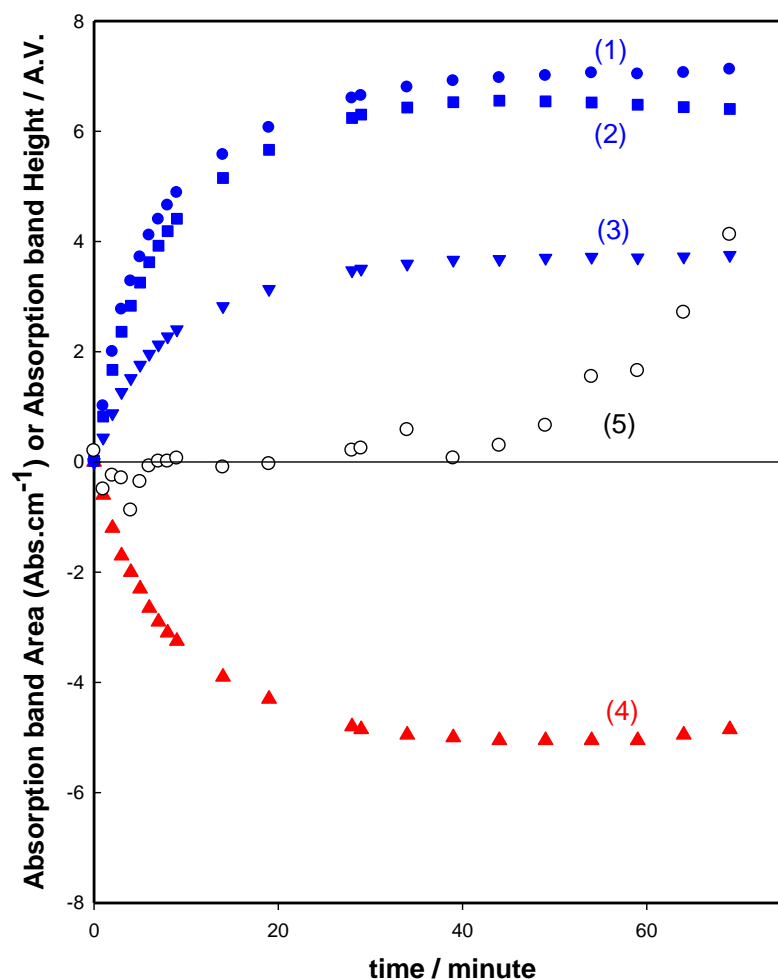


Figure 8: Area/height of the peaks versus time. Blue curves: area of characteristic peaks for carbamate (wavelength  $1573$ ,  $1495$  and  $1385\text{ cm}^{-1}$  respectively for peaks 1 to 3); red curve: height of characteristic peak for non-protonated MEA (peak 4); black circle: area of characteristic peak for physically absorbed  $\text{CO}_2$  (peak 5; signal multiply by 100 for visibility).

On this figure one can see that the absorbance area for peaks corresponding to carbamate increases quickly during the 20 first minutes. The quantity of none protonated amine decreases synchronously to the appearance of carbamate. All the blue and the red curves reach a plateau after 30 minutes. Using the calibration curves shown before, at this time, the value of absorbance correspond to a loading charge of about 0.4. Parallel, during the first 40 minutes, no peak for physical absorption is observed. After this time, the intensity of the band starts to increase continuously. After 70 minutes the  $\text{CO}_2$  physically absorbed corresponds to a molar fraction of 0.002. With this graph, it is confirmed that the chemical reaction is the first step of the process, while the physical absorption starts only when most the non-protonated amine has react with  $\text{CO}_2$  to form carbamate and protonated amine.

### Conclusion

*In situ* ATR-IR spectroscopy has been used successfully to follow the absorption of  $\text{CO}_2$  in binary liquids containing MEA and ethylene glycol. The spectra obtained have shown peaks characteristic of carbamate formation, and none protonated amine consumption. After calibrating the signal, the area

of the peaks linked to carbamates, and the height of the peak corresponding the none protonated amine has been associated to an advancement of the reaction of formation of carbamate.

The same experiments will be carried out with amines with a skeleton similar to MEA, as shown on figure 2. The results obtained will allow evaluating the influence of the substituents on the carbons of the MEA on the chemical reaction leading to carbamate formation. It will be possible to compare the kinetic of the reaction as well as the final advancement of the reaction.

### **Aknowledgements**

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