Ab initio (first principle) material modeling study on Lio adsorbed by palladium-cobalt (PdCo) nanoparticles

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ABSTRACT

PdCo subnanoalloys have been commonly used as a catalytic material in some important chemical reactions, involving in fisher-tropsch reactions, and oxygen reduction reactions. In terms of understanding the role of catalysis, these smallest bimetallic nanoparticles provide the simplest prototypes of Pd-Co bimetallic catalysts for different compositions. In this study, the effect of LixO (x=1,2) on PdCo nanoalloys has been investigated comprehensively employing the density functional theory (DFT) to identify the mechanism of structural, electronic, and energetic properties of the studied species. Binding energies are calculated for stability analysis, which is very important for nanoparticles. Results show that lithium oxides are generally adsorbed by cobalt sites on the Pd-Co substrate. This is important for determining active sites of the catalytic material. Furthermore, the structures have low symmetric properties. Hence, this study might provide an initial structural evaluation step for future studies related to the possible new catalytic material of Li-air batteries.

Keywords: Ab Initio Method; Bimetallic Nanoparticles; Catalytic Material; Clusters; Computational Material Modeling; DFT; Electronic Properties; First Principle; Nanoalloys; Nanomaterials; Nanoshaping; Stability

INTRODUCTION

Nanoparticles (which range from 1 to 100 nm) can be classified as a new category of material class since they show very different properties from their conventional bulk materials. These properties lead to the current subject of intense investigation and research in many nanoscale applications, such as synthesis and catalysis of polymer[1], gas phase spectroscopy[2], biochemistry[3], magnetic recording media[4], medicine[5] and electronic devices [6], metal[7] and ceramic characterization[8] and catalysis[9-10]. Especially, they are used in catalysis. In the chemical industry, the study of bimetallic nanoalloys or nanoparticles (which are consist of two different elements) catalysts are of greater interest than monometallic ones since their properties may be tuned by changing their compositions, sizes, and geometries. Furthermore, a catalytic activity of a species for a specific reaction is related to the local electronic environments of the catalytic material. Pure transition metal nanoalloys produce more significant charge localization than their bulk surfaces[11].

PdCo nanoalloys have been commonly referred to as catalysts in some important chemical reactions, involving in fisher-tropsch reactions[12-14], and oxygen reduction reaction (ORR) [15], PdCo nanoparticles form ordered patterns at low temperatures and Pd tends to segregate to the
surface in the case of macroscopic samples of PdCo bimetallic nanoalloys[16]. Furthermore, PdCo particles have shown improved selectivity over pure Co particles, scientist and materials and chemical engineers have focused on the improvement of cost-advantage catalysts related to mixed transition metal oxides[17-19]. For the ORR reaction, Leng et al[20] studied catalysis based on highly dispersed PdM (M = Fe, Co, Ni) alloy nanoparticles for catalysts of Li–O₂ reaction. They found a new type of catalyst which shows excellent ORR activity. Sevim et al. [21] investigated the performance of bimetallic PtM (M: Co, Cu, Ni) alloy nanoparticles as cathode catalysts for lithium-oxygen (Li–O₂). They found that alloying Pt with different metals leads to change the morphology of Li₂O₂ product importantly, which affect the subsequent recharge process.

Using DFT that is an efficient technique for studying the properties of nanoscaled materials, for understanding the role of catalytic material in Li–O system, these smallest bimetallic nanoparticles provide the simplest prototypes of Pd-Co bimetallic catalysts. Thus, this study will provide initial, basic information of structural characterization for Pd-Co catalytic mechanism of Li–O to some extent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lowest Energy Structures of PdₙCoₘLiO (2≤n+m≤4)

To check the validity of the computational method for the study of the bimetallic PdCoLiO nanoalloys, the bond length of Pd dimers was calculated as 2.40 Å. The obtained results are in agreement with experimental[28] (2.470 Å) and theoretical result[29] (2.48 Å). The lowest-lying energetic structures of PdₙCoₘLiO (2≤n+m≤4) mixed metal oxides are shown in Fig. 1 and the density plots of the energy of the highest occupied molecular orbital (HOMO) and the energy of the lowest unoccupied molecular orbital (LUMO) calculations are given in Fig. 2.

Also, total spin moments, binding energies (BEs), fermi energies (FEs) and HOMO-LUMO Gaps (HLGs) of the studied nanoparticles are presented in Table 1. For each case in the present study, LiO is adsorbed on the PdCo nanoparticles molecularly with oxygen rather than lithium. When LiO molecule absorbed at PdCo surface, a top or bridge site is observed and in these complexes, LiO favors to bind Co atom. The most stable structure of Pd₂LiO having Cs symmetry is in the quartet magnetic state with a Pd-Pd bond distance of 2.44 Å. The patterns of molecular orbitals demonstrated that PdCoLiO has similar bonding behaviours to those of Pd₂LiO (see Fig. 2). The addition of Co atom instead of Pd atom causes a very little stretch in the Co-O bond length that has value of 1.75 Å. The BE of Co₂LiO is the highest value among the species at size 2. For these structures, the BE increases when the ratio of Co/Pd increases. In the lowest energy structure of Pd₃LiO as shown in Fig. 1d, LiO is adsorbed as bridge site of the triangularly oriented Pd atoms. In comparison to the structure of Pd₂LiO, the Li–O bond distance is stretched by 0.14 Å while the Pd–O bond distance is elongated as 0.1 Å. The average Pd–Pd bond distance of Pd₃LiO is 2.73 Å. The magnetic spin moment of Pd₃LiO is 1 µₜ. The symmetry group is also Cs. Its FE is found as 3.78 eV and the HLG is calculated as 0.50 eV. It's BE per atom is 2.36 eV (see Table 1). As one of the Pd atoms replaced with Co, the ground state of Pd₂CoLiO structure becomes the structure having triangular bimetallic unit (consisting of a Co atom at the apex and two Pd atoms of the base). Replacement of Pd atom with Co atom has very little effect on Li-O bond length (1.83 Å), while it is 1.82 Å for Pd₃LiO. The Pd-Pd bond distance is longer by 0.18 Å than that of Pd₂LiO while the Pd-Co bond distances are 2.40 Å and 2.41 Å in
CoPd2LiO. The FE is 0.17 eV, which is less than the FE of Pd3LiO. The magnetic moment of Co3LiO is septet. The Li-O bond distance becomes 1.76 Å when the LiO molecule is adsorbed on the bridge site whereas the value of the bond distance in the case of atop adsorption is 1.83 Å. These values can be compared to Li-O bond length of the free LiO molecule, which is calculated as 2.43 Å. This means that Li-O bond distance is shrunk notably upon the adsorption of the molecule on the Pd-Co nanoparticles.

The structure of Pd4LiO complex has tetrahedral unit (see Fig. 1h) where the average Pd-Pd bond distance is 2.72 Å. The LiO is adsorbed on the bridge site for Pd tetramer, where the Pd-O distances are 2.08 Å and 2.09 Å, which are very close to those of Pd3LiO. The FE value is 2.11 eV while the HLG is 0.03 eV. In the ground state structure of Pd3CoLiO having anti π bondings (see Fig. 2), LiO binds to the Co site. The Co-O bond distance is 1.71 Å, which is similar to the other atop site absorptions. The addition of a Pd atom to Pd2CoLiO has little effect on the Li-O bond distance. In the quintet magnetic state, the BE of Pd3CoLiO is 2.65 eV. The HLG is 0.50 eV while the FE of this structure is 3.59 eV. With FE of 3.36 eV, the spin moment of Pd2Co2LiO is 5 µB.

**Lowest Energy Structures of Pd\(_n\)Co\(_m\)Li\(_2\)O (2≤n+m≤4)**

The lowest lying energetic structures of
Fig. 2. The HOMO-LUMO density plots of Pd$^{n}$Co$^{m}$LiO Nanoparticles ($2 \leq n+m \leq 4$)

Table 1. The Electronic Properties of Pd$^{n}$Co$^{m}$LiO Nanoparticles ($2 \leq n+m \leq 4$) Structures$^*$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nanoparticles</th>
<th>SYM</th>
<th>SM</th>
<th>BE*</th>
<th>BE**</th>
<th>FE</th>
<th>HLG</th>
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<td>3.19</td>
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<td>2.81</td>
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<td>3.11</td>
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<td>0.73</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.82</td>
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<td>2.87</td>
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<td>2.57</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.95</td>
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$^*$SYM, Point Group Symmetry; SM, Spin Moment in $\mu_B$; BE, Binding Energy in eV/atom; Fermi Energy, FE in eV; HLG, HOMO-LUMO Gap in eV
$^*$non-vdw corrected
$^{**}$ vdw corrected
Fig. 3. The optimized structures of Pd\textsubscript{n}Co\textsubscript{m}Li\textsubscript{2}O Nanoparticles (2\leq m+n\leq 4)

Table 2. The Electronic Properties of Pd\textsubscript{n}Co\textsubscript{m}Li\textsubscript{2}O (2\leq m+n\leq 4) Structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nanoparticles</th>
<th>SYM</th>
<th>SM</th>
<th>BE*</th>
<th>BE**</th>
<th>FE</th>
<th>HLG</th>
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</thead>
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<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.02</td>
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<td>C\textsubscript{1}</td>
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<td>0.73</td>
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<td>C\textsubscript{1}</td>
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<td>2.58</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>0.46</td>
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<td>C\textsubscript{1}</td>
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<td>2.66</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>C\textsubscript{1}</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pd\textsubscript{2}Co\textsubscript{2}Li\textsubscript{2}O</td>
<td>C\textsubscript{1}</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.88</td>
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<td>0.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Co\textsubscript{2}Li\textsubscript{2}O</td>
<td>C\textsubscript{1}</td>
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<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*SYM, Point Group Symmetry; SM, Spin Moment in \mu\textsubscript{B}; BE, Binding Energy in eV/atom; FE, Fermi Energy in eV; HLG, HOMO-LUMO Gap in eV
*non-vdW corrected
** vdW corrected
Pd$_n$Co$_m$Li$_2$O (2≤n+m≤4) mixed metal oxides are shown in Fig. 3 and the density plots of HOMO and LUMO calculations are given in Fig. 4. The total spin moments, BEs, FEs and HLG of these nanoparticles are listed in Table 2. The BEs per atoms of these species is plotted in Fig. 6.

The Li$_2$O is, see Fig. 3a, adsorbed on Pd$_2$ dimer molecularly at the top site where O is bonded to one of the Pd atoms. The BE of the lowest energy structure of Pd$_2$Li$_2$O is 2.48 eV. This structure, including π bonds has closed shell magnetic moment. The HLG energy of Pd$_2$Li$_2$O having C$_s$ symmetry is 0.77 eV, while its FE is 1.93 eV. The ground state structure of the PdCoLi$_2$O is in the quartet magnetic state with C$_s$ symmetry. Li$_2$O molecule is absorbed on the Co atom in this structure. The Li-O bond length is 1.82 Å in this structure while that bond length in PdCoLiO nanoparticle is 1.66 Å. The addition of the Li atom to LiO molecule at the PdCo cluster leads to expand Co-Pd distance by 0.1 Å. The HLG of the particle is 1.02 eV, whereas the FE is 1.25 eV. The BE of PdCoLi$_2$O is 2.66 eV. The Co-Co bond distance of the Co$_2$ dimer after Li$_2$O adsorption became 2.20 Å, which is longer than that of Co$_3$LiO structure.

Furthermore, the Co-O bond length is 1.83 Å, while Li-O bond lengths in this structure (see Fig. 3c) are 1.69 and 1.78 Å. The HLG energy is 0.73 eV.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOMO</th>
<th>LUMO</th>
<th>HOMO</th>
<th>LUMO</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Pd$_n$Co$_m$Li$_2$O</td>
<td>Pd$_n$Co$_m$Li$_2$O</td>
<td>Pd$_n$Co$_m$Li$_2$O</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 4. The HOMO-LUMO density plots of Pd$_n$Co$_m$Li$_2$O Nanoparticles (2≤n+m≤4)
The BE per atom of this structure, which has 4 $\mu_B$ magnetic moment, is 2.56 eV.

Pd$_3$Li$_2$O has a triangular unit like Pd$_3$LiO. The magnetic state of this structure is a triplet. The BE of the cluster is 0.04 eV less than that of Pd$_3$LiO. The adsorption of Li$_2$O is again on a top site. This type of adsorption is also observed for all studied Pd$_{m}$Co$_{n}$Li$_2$O nanoparticles. Furthermore, the HLG energy of this structure is 0.15 eV. As one of the Pd atoms replaces with a Co atom, the BE of the lowest energy structure of the Pd$_2$CoLiO becomes 2.65 eV, where O binds to the Co atom. The FE of this structure is 1.04 eV, while the HLG is 0.84 eV. The Co-Pd distances are 2.56 and 2.37 Å and the Co-O bond length is 1.80 Å, which is longer than the Co-O bond length of Pd$_3$CoLiO. The BE per atom of PdCo$_2$Li$_2$O is 2.58 eV. The lowest energy morphology is similar to that of Pd$_3$CoLiO. Li$_2$O is adsorbed on the Co side as usual. The magnetic state of PdCo$_2$Li$_2$O is quintet. The Co-Co bond length of this cluster is 2.21 Å, which is nearly the same as that of Co$_3$LiO cluster. The HLG of Co$_3$LiO is calculated as 0.89 eV while the FE is 2.59 eV. The BE of Co$_3$LiO is 0.02 eV less than that of PdCo$_2$Li$_2$O.

The Co-O bond length is also very similar to that of the previous cluster. Li-O bond lengths are 1.71 Å and 1.77 Å. The geometries of Co$_3$ unit in Co$_3$LiO and Co$_3$Li$_2$O are highly different.

The ground state structure of Pd$_3$Li$_2$O has distorted tetrahedral metallic unit in the triplet magnetic state with the average Pd-Pd bond distance of 2.72 Å, which is longer than that of the Pd$_3$Li$_2$O. The BE of this structure is, see Table 2, 2.45 eV with Pd-O bond length of 2.07 Å, while FE is 3.10 eV. The HLG is calculated as 0.07 eV. Placing a Co atom instead of a Pd atom leads to stretch the bonds between Li and O, which are 1.77 Å and 1.82 Å in Pd$_3$CoLiO, while they are 1.69 Å and 1.75 Å in Pd$_3$Li$_2$O. The Co-O bond length in Pd$_3$CoLi$_2$O is nearly the same with that of Pd$_3$CoLiO. Moreover, the distorted tetrahedral configuration of metallic unit is kept in Pd$_3$CoLi$_2$O cluster. The BE per atom for this structure is calculated as 2.66 eV with a FE of 3.18 eV, while the HLG is calculated as 0.59 eV. The magnetic moment of the structure is found as 3 $\mu_B$. As Co doping increases by keeping a number of metallic atoms fixed, there is no important change for Li-O and Co-O bond lengths. However,

![Fig. 5. The Binding Energies (BEs) per atom of Pd$_{m}$Co$_{n}$LiO Nanoparticles (2\leq m+n\leq 4)](image)

![Fig. 6. The Binding Energies (BEs) per atom of Pd$_{m}$Co$_{n}$Li$_2$O Nanoparticles (2\leq m+n\leq 4)](image)
the tetrahedral metallic unit becomes an out of plane rhombus for Pd_{2}Co_{2}Li_{2}O. Furthermore, Li_{2}O molecule binds to the top site of a Co atom where the Co-O bond length is 1.79 Å, while this bond length in the Pd_{2}Co_{2}Li_{2}O is 1.90 Å with bridge site adsorption. Moreover, the average Co-Pd bond distance is 2.48 Å and the Co-Co bond distance is 2.25 Å in this structure (see Fig. 3). The HLG is 0.57 eV, while FE is 1.76 eV. The BE of the structure is 2.69 eV in the quintet magnetic state. When one of the Pd atoms of Pd_{2}Co_{2}Li_{2}O is changed with a Co atom, the rhombic morphology does not change. In the ground state structure of PdCo_{3}Li_{2}O, the BE is calculated as 2.64 eV, where Li_{2}O is adsorbed on the Co side again. The Co-Co bond distances are 2.24 Å and 2.38 Å (see Fig. 3k) and the Co-Pd bond distances are 2.45 Å and 2.53 Å. The magnetic moment of this structure is 7 μB while the FE is 3.01 eV. The HLG energy of Pd_{2}CoLi_{2}O is 0.59 eV. The BE per atom of Co_{2}Li_{2}O cluster with C_{s} symmetry is 2.60 eV/atom. Its magnetic state is 8 μB. The replacement of the single Pd atom of PdCo_{3}Li_{2}O structure by a Co atom has little effect on Li-O bond length. The Co-Co bond distance of 2.28 Å is 0.10 Å longer than the corresponding distances of Co_{2}Li_{2}O structure. It can be concluded that the addition of a new Co atom to Co_{2}Li_{2}O leads to an expansion in the Co-Co distances. Moreover, the FE of this structure is 2.71 eV, whereas the HLG is 0.66 eV

Stability and Electronic Properties

The BEs of the clusters can be used as a measure for their thermodynamic stabilities. Accordingly, to predict the relative stabilities of the Pd_{n}Co_{m}Li_{x}O structures, the BEs per atom are calculated, tabulated in Table 1 and Table 2 and plotted in Fig. 5 and Fig. 6.

The BEs per atom can be obtained in the following way:

\[
BE = \frac{-E[Pd_{m}Co_{n}Li_{x}O] + mE[Co] + nE[Pd] + xE[Li] + E[O]}{n + m + x + 1}
\]

(1)

Where E[*] is the total energy of Co, Pd, Li and O atoms respectively for 2≤n+m≤4 and x=1 or 2. While the BEs of the lowest energy structures of Pd_{2}Co_{2}Li_{2}O vary between 2.07 eV and 2.68 eV, those of Pd_{2}Co_{2}Li_{2}O changes from 2.44 eV to 2.69 eV. On the other hand, for a comparison of BEs values in terms of London dispersion effect, we have calculated the vdW corrected BE values, as listed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Similar trends are observed in vdW corrected BE. The BE values shift approximately 0.5 eV when compared to the non-vdW corrected calculations.

The HOMO can be defined as an ability of the structure to give an electron, while the energy of the LUMO is an ability of the structure to accept an electron. The higher the HOMO energy, the higher the ability to give an electron, and the lower the LUMO energy, the higher is the tendency to accept an electron. A large HLG can be defined as a significant requirement for chemical stability to a certain degree. The HLG values are listed in Table 1 and Table 2. According to the HLG results, the studied structures indicate conductor properties since the HLG values range from 0.05 eV to 1.26 eV, which are chemically very active. The HLG and BE analyses show that the smallest stability or highest activity belongs to the Pd_{2}Li_{2}O nanoparticle.

The charge transfer between PdCo and Li_{x}O has been analyzed based on Mulliken charge analyses. The charge calculations of each atom of PdCo_{2}Li_{x}O structures are listed in Table S1 and S2. Generally, in the structures, for cobalt atoms, it loses their electrons to mostly O atom and Pd atoms almost keep their charges, but in the absence of Co atoms, Pd loses their electrons to mostly O atom. Li atoms in the structures gain ignorable charges. This is supported by Homo-Lumo plot. The intensity of the charge transformation around Co atoms is high but the intensity of the charge transformation around Li atoms is low.

CONCLUSION

In terms of electronic, structural and magnetic properties, Pd_{2}Co_{3}Li_{2}O (2≤m+n≤4 and x=1 or 2) nanoparticles were studied by means of the DFT method. The effects of LiO and Li_{2}O adsorptions on the lowest energetic structure of the small bimetallic Pd-Co nanoparticles were examined. Results show that LiO molecule is adsorbed on atop or bridge sites of small Pd-Co bimetallic clusters while Li_{2}O molecule prefers to be adsorbed on atop sites. This information may be important for determining active site in catalytic reaction to design effective catalytic material. We do not also observe any hollow site adsorption in this study. The topology of the bare Pd-Co bimetallic nanoparticles generally does not change due to the Li_{x}O adsorptions. Li_{x}O (x=1 and 2) molecules tend to bind Co atoms instead of Pd atoms. The
structures having an equal or nearly equal number of Pd and Co atoms possess the highest BEs. The charge analyses and HOMO-LUMO density plot reveal that Co atoms are very active in charge transformation. This may be due to the unpaired electrons of Co atoms. In addition, According to the HLG analyses, the studied nanoparticles show conductive properties.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript.

REFERENCES