Temperature Dependence of the Johari–Goldstein Relaxation in Poly(methyl methacrylate) and Poly(thiomethyl methacrylate)

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ABSTRACT: To analyze the Johari–Goldstein (JG) secondary process, dielectric relaxation measurements were carried out on poly(methyl methacrylate) (PMMA) and poly(thiomethyl methacrylate) (PTMA). The latter has a sulfur atom replacing the oxygen in the ester of PMMA, making the pendant group much less polar. This weakens the intensity of the secondary relaxation, enabling facile resolution of the JG and primary structural relaxation peaks. We find that the JG relaxation time of PTMA has a substantially larger activation energy (factor of 2) in the liquid compared to the glassy state. Although deconvolution of the peaks in PMMA is more ambiguous due to the large dielectric strength of its JG relaxation, applying the same analysis leads to a very similar result. In light of previous results, we conclude very generally from their temperature-dependence that JG secondary motions sense the glass transition, consistent with their role as precursor to structural relaxation.

INTRODUCTION

Secondary relaxations are commonly observed in the dielectric spectra of materials.1,3 For polymers these can arise from motion of pendant groups or other moieties involving intramolecular degrees of freedom. Secondary dynamics occur in the glassy state, and usually have no relation to structural relaxation and the glass transition.3-5 The Johari–Goldstein (JG) process is different. Present in all liquids and polymers, even rigid molecules,6,7 this process is the slowest secondary relaxation, and there is a large body of experimental data indicating that the JG relaxation functions as the precursor to structural relaxation (the α process).8,9 Properties of the JG relaxation indicating a connection to the glass transition include: (i) pressure and temperature dependences of the JG relaxation time τJG that correlate with the breadth of the α-dispersion; (ii) the relationship between the separation of τJG and the primary relaxation time τα to properties of the α process; (iii) the change of temperature dependence of the JG dielectric strength across the glass transition temperature; (iv) merging of the JG and α relaxations at temperatures above Tg. Another property, the emphasis of the current work, is a change in temperature dependence of τJG at Tg.

In light of these properties, it can be seen that study of the JG relaxation can yield information about structural relaxation even in the glassy state, where the α-dynamics have largely ceased.10-12 Of particular interest is the narrow range of thermodynamic conditions over which the JG and α processes can be measured simultaneously. This requires the relaxations to be separated in frequency and to have comparable intensities. Usually both relaxations can be measured only over frequencies where the two processes merge (or split), which is not far from the glass transition temperature, Tg. However, nearer Tg there is significant overlap of the dispersions, so that determination of the relaxation times τJG and τα requires deconvolution of the peaks. Two methods to do this have been used: (i) If the processes are statistically independent, the peaks are additive in the frequency domain13,14 and the dielectric loss is

\[ \varepsilon''(\omega) = \Delta \varepsilon_\alpha \varepsilon''_\alpha(\omega) + \Delta \varepsilon_{JG} \varepsilon''_{JG}(\omega) \]  

(1)

Equation 1 assumes the α and JG processes are uncoupled, but this is not obviously the case if the local environment is structurally relaxing while the dipoles undergo the JG relaxation.15,16 (ii) Contemporaneous JG and α processes can be modeled by a relaxation function that in the time domain has the form17

\[ \varepsilon(t) = f_\alpha \varepsilon_\alpha(t) + (1 - f_\alpha) \varepsilon_{JG}(t) \]  

(2)

where fα is the α-relaxation strength, and \( \varepsilon_\alpha \) and \( \varepsilon_{JG} \) are the permittivities for the respective α- and JG processes. This leads to an apparent \( \tau_{JG} \) that is dependent on properties of the α relaxation.16

How overlapping α and JG peaks are separated is significant because it can yield different results for the properties near Tg, a region critical to understanding the role of the secondary relaxation on the glass transition dynamics. One question is whether the temperature-dependence of \( \tau_{JG} \) in the glass changes on heating through Tg but the answer seems to depend on the method used to deconvolute the two peaks. Some workers report a substantial increase in the JG activation energy,14,18-21 while others find there is no change in \( \tau_{JG}(T) \) near Tg. One way to circumvent the deconvolution problem is to separate the peaks by imposing conditions that affect the frequency of the

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processes differently. Some success along these lines has been obtained using high pressure\(^a\),\(^b\),\(^c\) physical aging\(^d\),\(^e\),\(^f\) and the addition of an antiplasticizing diluent.\(^g\),\(^h\)\(^i\)\(^j\)\(^k\)\(^l\) The \(\alpha\) relaxation is more sensitive than the JG process to the imposed changes, yielding greater separation in frequency of the peaks. These types of experiments have led to the conclusion that there is a change in the \(T\)-sensitivity of \(\tau_{\text{fg}}\) near \(T_g\).

Our interest herein is the dynamic behavior of polymethyl methacrylate (PMMA) near \(T_g\). Multidimensional NMR experiments on PMMA reveal that the secondary relaxation involves 180° flips of the pendant carboxyl group; however, these are coupled to restricted rocking motion of the chain backbone in order to avoid steric interference from other segments.\(^m\)\(^n\) The amplitude of this rocking motion increases with temperature, eventually becoming the conformational transitions of the backbone that underlie the segmental backbone in order to avoid steric interference from other segments.

Addition of an antiplasticizing diluent.\(^o\) The \(\alpha\) relaxation consists of 180° rocking of the pendant carboxyl group; however, the primary relaxation in PMMA detected mainly as a side-group motion involves all atoms of the repeat unit, whereby it is designated a JG process. The high frequency side of the \(\alpha\)-process is signified by the \(\beta\)-process. The \(\alpha\) and JG secondary peaks of the \(\alpha\) relaxation are about 12 degrees, and also reduces the intensity of the \(\beta\)-process. The \(\alpha\) and JG secondary peaks of the \(\alpha\) relaxation are about 12 degrees, and also reduces the intensity of the \(\beta\)-process. The \(\alpha\) and JG secondary peaks of the \(\alpha\) relaxation are about 12 degrees, and also reduces the intensity of the \(\beta\)-process.

We address the issue by chemical modification of the PMMA, replacing the -OCH\(_3\) moiety in the pendant ester with a –SCH\(_3\) group. This changes the frequency of the segmental dynamics \((T_g)\) increases by 12 degrees), and also reduces the intensity of the \(\beta\)-process. The \(\alpha\) and JG secondary peaks of the \(\alpha\) relaxation are about 12 degrees, and also reduces the intensity of the \(\beta\)-process. The \(\alpha\) and JG secondary peaks of the \(\alpha\) relaxation are about 12 degrees, and also reduces the intensity of the \(\beta\)-process.

EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

The thiomethyl methacrylate monomer and polymer were prepared using a modification of the method of Tatsuda et al.\(^\text{15}\) Briefly, the thiomethyl methacrylate monomer was synthesized by reacting a two phase mixture of 40.3 g of methacryloyl chloride in methylene chloride with 183 g of a 15% aqueous sodium thiomethoxide solution, added dropwise at 0 °C. Distillation yielded 31.24 g of the monomer. The poly(thiomethyl methacrylate) (PTMA) was prepared by bulk polymerization of 1.56 g of monomer with 0.3 mg of AIBN initiator and 1.0 mg of 1-dodecanethiol at 60 °C for 90 h, followed by dissolution and recrystallization to yield 1.56 g of PTMA. Details of the polymerization and structural characterization of this polymer will be described elsewhere.\(^\text{35}\) The PMMA (Arkema, Inc.) was courtesy of Dr. Baer of Case Western Reserve. The PTMA had a weight average molecular weight equal to 86.1 kg/mol and calorimetric \(T_g = 124\) °C; for the PMMA \(M_w = 132\) kg/mol and \(T_g = 112\) °C. The structure of the repeat units is shown in Figure 1; both polymers were atactic and thus completely amorphous.

Dielectric spectra were measured using a Novocontrol alpha impedance analyzer. The sample cell consisted of parallel plates (diameter = 2 cm) with 0.1 mm Teflon spacers. During the measurements the sample was maintained in vacuo, using a custom closed-cycle helium cryostat (Cryo Ind.). Mechanical measurements employed an Anton Parr MCR 502 rheometer, using a parallel plate geometry (diameter = 8 mm), with frequencies in the range \(10^{-3}\)–\(10^{3}\) rad/s. The sample was kept in a nitrogen atmosphere during the mechanical measurements.

Figure 2 compares the dielectric spectra of PTMA with that of PMMA at respective temperatures for which their \(\tau_{\alpha}\) are about the same. The sulfur substitution mainly reduces the intensity of the JG process by the order of magnitude, due to the weaker dipole on the side chain of PTMA; the electronegativity of S is about the same as that of carbon and much less than that of oxygen.\(^\text{37}\) There is minimal difference in the dielectric strength of the \(\alpha\) relaxation for the two polymers.

Both analysis methods (eqs 1 and 2) were applied to the PTMA data. The spectra were fit to a superposition of relaxation functions (eq 1), with the Kohlraush–Williams–
Watts function used for the \( \alpha \) peak and a Havriliak–Negami function for the JG relaxation:

\[
e^{\varepsilon(\omega)} = \frac{\sigma_{\text{DC}}}{\varepsilon_0(\omega)} + \varepsilon_\infty + \Delta \varepsilon L_{\text{sw}} \left[ -\frac{d\varphi_0(t, \tau_0)}{dt} \right] + \frac{1}{1 + (i\omega \tau)_{\text{KWW}}}
\]

with \( \varphi_0(t, \tau_0) = \exp[(-t/\tau)^{\beta_{\text{KWW}}}] \)

\[\text{Eq. 3}\]

\( L_{\text{sw}} \) indicates the Laplace transform, \( \varepsilon_\infty \) is the high frequency permittivity, \( \tau_0 \) are the relaxation times, \( \Delta \varepsilon \) the dielectric strengths, \( a \) and \( b \) the shape parameters for the JG relaxation, \( \beta_{\text{KWW}} \) is the KWW parameter for the \( \alpha \) process, \( \sigma_{\text{DC}} \) the DC-conductivity, and \( n \) a constant less than or equal to one. Applying eq 2, the same forms were assumed for the individual relaxation functions, but the analysis was carried out in the time domain. Figure 3 shows that either method gives good fits to the experimental spectra.

Figure 3. Dielectric loss of PTMA at three temperatures, analyzed assuming \( \alpha \) and JG processes are (top) additive in the frequency domain or (bottom) contemporaneous and thus fit in the time domain using eq 2.

Figure 4 shows the temperature dependence of the relaxation times determined from the peak frequencies. Measurements of the \( \alpha \) relaxation were limited at lower \( T \) by dc-conductivity. The \( \tau_0(T) \) above \( T_g \) is well described over several decades by the Vogel–Fulcher–Tammann (VFT) equation:

\[
\tau_0 = \tau_0^* \exp \left( \frac{B}{T - T_0} \right)
\]

where \( \tau_0^* \) is the high \( T \) limiting value of the relaxation time, \( T_0 \) is the Vogel temperature, and \( B \) a constant. This equation predicts a divergence of \( \tau_0 \) below \( T_g \); however, recent results reveal deviations from the VFT equation in the glassy state,\(^{11,12,38-40}\) casting doubt on the existence of this divergence. Notwithstanding, the equation is adequate for the present data. For PTMA \( \log(\tau_0) = -15.8 \pm 0.7, B = 2960 \pm 280, \) and \( T_0 = 325 \pm 4; \) for PMMA \( \log(\tau_0) = -10.9 \pm 1.9, T_0 = 337 \pm 15, \) and \( B = 1280 \pm 610. \) From these we calculate the fragility, \( m = (d\log(\tau_0))/dt |_{T_g} \) at \( \tau_0(T_g) = 10 \) s, obtaining \( 88 \pm 13 \) for PTMA and \( 99 \pm 15 \) for PMMA. The latter is less than a previously reported value for PMMA, which was based on \( \tau_0 = 100 \) s.\(^{41,42}\) The apparent activation energy and fragility increase with increase \( \tau_0 \) (decreasing \( T_g \)).

Also included in Figure 4 are the local segmental relaxation times, \( \tau_\infty \), for PTMA, determined as the inverse of the frequency of the maximum in the mechanical loss modulus. The mechanical relaxation times have about the same temperature dependence as the dielectric \( \tau_\infty \), although as usual,\(^{43,44}\) the \( \tau_\infty \) are smaller than values from the dielectric loss. The best fit of the VFT equation to \( \tau_\infty \) yields \( \log(\tau_0) = -11.2 \pm 0.3, T_0 = 346.8 \pm 1.3, \) and \( B = 1284 \pm 65. \) The fragility for \( \tau_\infty = 10 \) s is \( 105 \pm 6, \) which agrees with the dielectric value within the experimental error.

The behavior of \( \tau_\infty \) in the glassy state is accurately described by the Arrhenius equation:

\[
\log(\tau_\infty) = \log(\tau_\infty^\infty) + \frac{E_{\text{JG}}}{RT}
\]

where \( \tau_\infty^\infty \) is the high temperature limit of \( \tau_\infty \) and \( E_{\text{JG}} \) is the activation energy. \( E_{\text{JG}} \) for the PTMA and PMMA are equivalent in the glassy state \( (T < T_g) = 84 \pm 2 \) and \( 86 \pm 2 \) kJmol\(^{-1}, \) respectively. The results are within 10% of the values from an empirical relationship proposed by Kudlik et al.,\(^{45}\)\( E_{\text{JG}} = 24RT \). However, these activation energies are 30% higher than predicted by ref 46 based on the coupling model. The \( \tau_\infty^\infty \) differ by more than 2 orders of magnitude, \( \log(\tau_\infty^\infty) = -13.4 \pm 0.3 \) for PTMA and \( -15.9 \pm 0.3 \) for PMMA. Extrapolation of the \( \tau_\infty \) in Figure 4 above \( T_g \) would yield intersection with a value of \( \tau_0 \) about one hundred times smaller for PTMA than for PMMA. Thus, substitution of oxygen with sulfur results in a slower \( \alpha \) relaxation, as well as a JG relaxation that is slower.
relative to the \( \alpha \) dynamics. Together with the observed decrease of the dielectric strength of the JG relaxation for PTMA, the behavior is consistent with the determination by Schmidt-Rohr\(^{30,31} \) that the process involves flipping of the bulky pendant group, which requires rearrangement of the entire repeat unit. The sulfur atom is larger than oxygen, making the side group bulkier and its mobility more constrained. Results for a number of glass-forming materials have indicated that the time scale separating the JG and \( \alpha \) processes at \( T_g \) varies inversely with the magnitude of the stretch exponent \( \beta_{KWW} \) for the \( \alpha \) dispersion.\(^{47} \) For PTMA \( \beta_{KWW} = 0.38 \) close to \( T_g \), which is larger than the value of \( \beta_{KWW} \) = 0.30 for PMMA; this is consistent with the larger \( t_{fi}(T_g) \) for PTMA.

Our main interest herein is the temperature dependence of the JG relaxation in the vicinity of \( T_g \). For PTMA this is easily obtained from the fits to the permittivity spectra, since the JG peak is less dominant, so that either deconvolution method, eqs \( 1 \) or \( 2 \), gives the same \( \tau_{fi} \). As seen in Figure 4, there is a significant increase in the activation energy above \( T_g \); \( E_{fi} = 176 \pm 4 \) kJ/mol, which is twice the value for the glassy state. Using the same analysis method, the behavior of PMMA is very similar, \( E_{fi} \) increasing above \( T_g \) to 172 \pm 6 \) kJ/mol. In aging experiments on a lower molecular weight PMMA,\(^{12} \) the temperature sensitivity of the \( \alpha \) process decreased in the glassy state, exhibiting Arrhenius behavior below \( T_g \). Thus, the smaller activation energy of the JG process below \( T_g \) mimics the change in temperature dependence of the \( \alpha \) process. Finally we note that in accord with published results, the dielectric strength of the JG process changes at \( T_g \) (Figure 5). Such behavior, which mirrors the change in activation energy, has been reported for other glass-forming materials.\(^{9} \)

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**SUMMARY**

A chemical variation of the structure of PMMA reduces the dipole moment of the pendant group; consequently, the JG relaxation has lower dielectric strength and does not overwhelm the \( \alpha \) relaxation. The uncertainty in deconvoluting the two peaks in PMMA is reduced for PTMA, enabling an unambiguous determination of the relaxation times for both the JG and \( \alpha \) processes. The activation energy of \( \tau_{fi} \) for PTMA increases 2-fold for temperatures above \( T_g \) compared to the glassy state. Very similar behavior is found for PMMA, when the same statistical independence of the \( e \) and JG relaxations is assumed. We conclude that the two processes can be analyzed using eq \( 1 \), and moreover the conclusion drawn from earlier data analyzed in this manner\(^{4,10-21} \) are correct: The activation energy of the JG relaxation changes at \( T_g \). This means that the JG process senses the thermodynamic changes associated with the glass transition, consistent with its putative role as a precursor to structural relaxation.\(^{12,27,30} \) Thus, the study of the JG secondary relaxation in glasses can yield insights into structural relaxation in glass-forming liquids.

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**AUTHOR INFORMATION**

**Notes**

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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