



## Tetrahedrally modified $\text{MnMe}_{0.1}\text{Co}_{1.9}\text{O}_4$ (Me = Zn, Mg, Li) spinels for non-enzymatic glucose sensing

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### ABSTRACT

In this work, tetrahedrally modified  $\text{MnMe}_{0.1}\text{Co}_{1.9}\text{O}_4$  (Me = Zn, Mg, Li) spinels were prepared via the sol-gel synthesis method with subsequent ball-milling fragmentation. The prepared samples were evaluated as glucose-sensing catalyst. The reference  $\text{MnCo}_2\text{O}_4$  spinel exhibited a sensitivity of  $49 \mu\text{A mM}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-2}$  and a nonlinearity error of 5.2% in the response range from 0.02 to 1 mM. The partial substitution of cobalt in the reference spinel enhanced the glucose-sensing abilities, and the sample with Li was found to be the most active catalyst, exhibiting a sensitivity of  $73.1 \mu\text{A mM}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-2}$ . Finally, the proposed material was tested for selectivity in the presence of interfering sucrose.

### 1. Introduction

According to World Health Organization (WHO) data, Diabetes Mellitus, commonly known as diabetes, was the ninth leading cause of death in 2019 [1]. It is a metabolic disease that causes high blood sugar, which, if untreated, can damage the nerves, eyes, kidneys, and other organs. Frequent monitoring of physiological blood glucose levels is a key factor in avoiding diabetic emergencies and introducing effective treatment.

Glucose sensors can be divided into enzymatic and non-enzymatic sensors. Enzymatic glucose biosensors based on glucose oxidase (GOD) enzyme, initially developed by Clark and Lyons in the 1960s, exhibit high sensitivity and selectivity and have been successfully used over the years [2]. However, enzymatic sensors suffer from disadvantages such as complex manufacturing, high price, and instability [3]. Due to the rising number of patients with diabetes and the subsequent increasing number of premature deaths, the development of more reliable glucose sensors is crucial.

The principle of operation of the non-enzymatic sensors is based on the glucose oxidation directly at the electrocatalyst surface. Two models are proposed to explain the electrocatalytic processes of these sensors, the Activated Chemisorption model and the Incipient Hydrous Oxide Adatom Mediator (IHOAM) model [4]. Noble metals-based (Pt or Au)

non-enzymatic sensors have been widely studied and found to exhibit promising performance for direct electrochemical glucose oxidation [5]. Disposable glucose sensors based on bimetallic NiPt nanosheet arrays electrodeposited on carbon papers were proposed by Zhou et al. [6]. Nevertheless, finding more abundant and less expensive materials for glucose sensing is an important and open subject.

Among the many materials proposed as non-enzymatic glucose sensors, transition metal oxides demonstrate favourable performance along with high accessibility [7,8]. Spinel with the formula  $\text{AB}_2\text{O}_4$  (where A and B are metal ions) are a promising group of materials to be applied in the sensor manufacturing field. Due to the vast range of elements that can occupy the crystal structure sites, spinels exhibit outstanding catalytic, electrical and magnetic properties [9]. Recently,  $\text{ZnCo}_2\text{O}_4$  spinel microrods grown on nickel foam for non-enzymatic glucose sensing were prepared by Liu et al. via a hydrothermal method and subsequent annealing process [10]. Zhang et al. proposed a graphene decorated spinel  $\text{MnCo}_2\text{O}_4$  composite nanofibres-based (GMCFs) biosensor, which exhibited excellent electrocatalytic activity towards glucose oxidation [11]. Only binary spinels seem to have been studied so far.

In this work, a series of  $\text{MnMe}_{0.1}\text{Co}_{1.9}\text{O}_4$  spinels, where the Co is partially substituted by Zn, Mg or Li, were prepared by sol-gel synthesis for the purpose of non-enzymatic glucose sensing. The structure,

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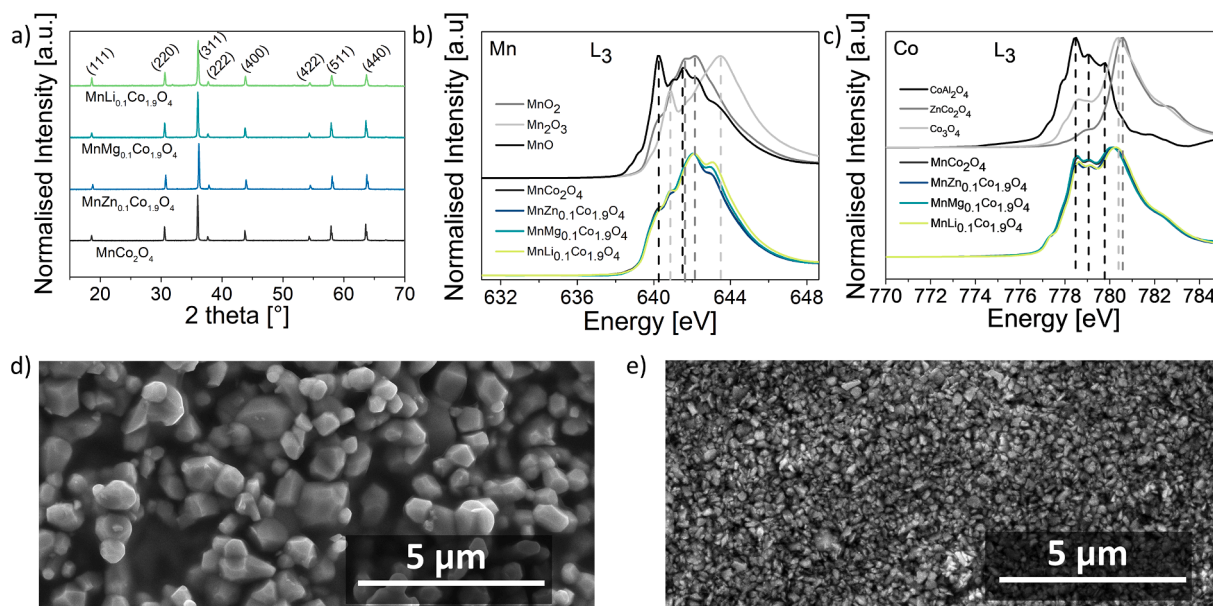


Fig. 1. (a) pXRD patterns of t-MCO powders, XANES spectra of (b) Mn, and (c) Co  $L_3$ -edge, SEM image (x10,000) of (d) as-synthesised and (e) ball-milled  $MnCo_2O_4$  powder.

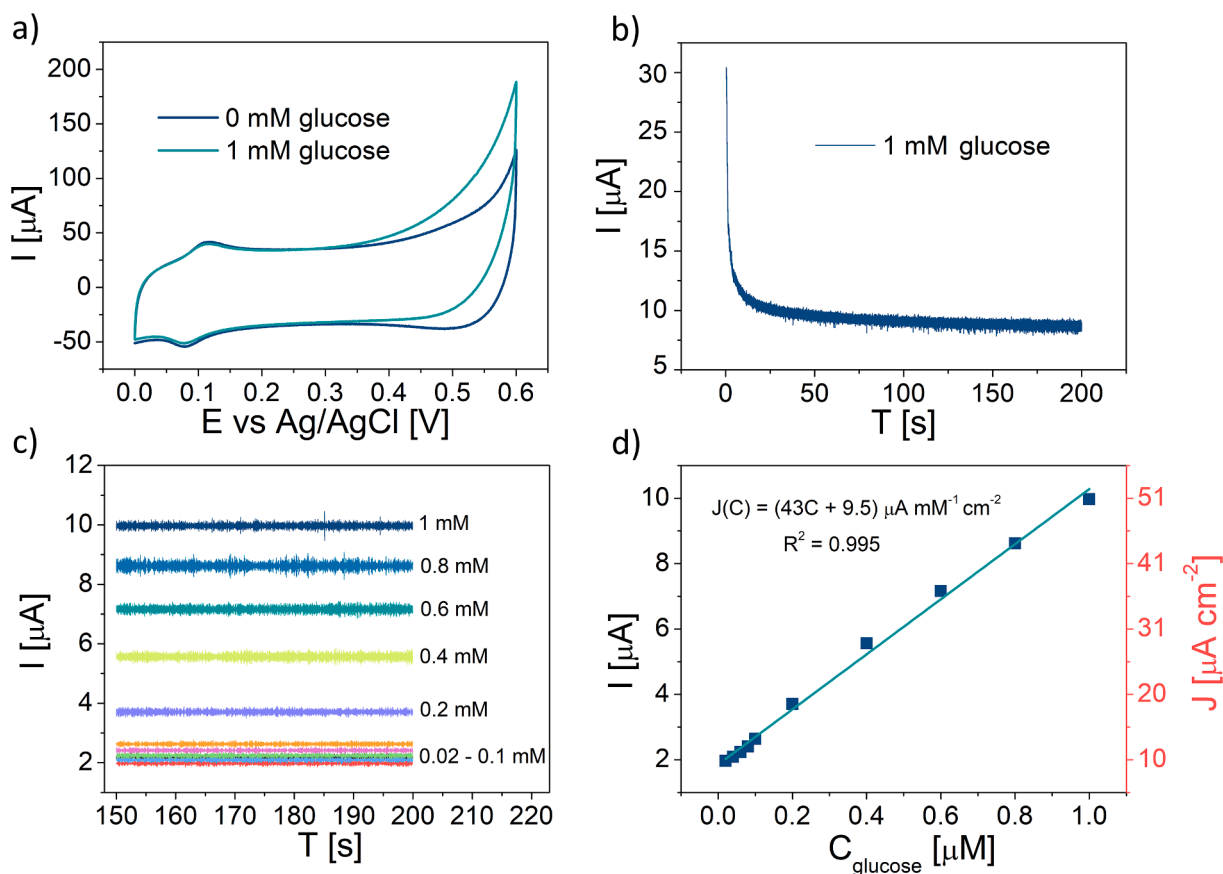
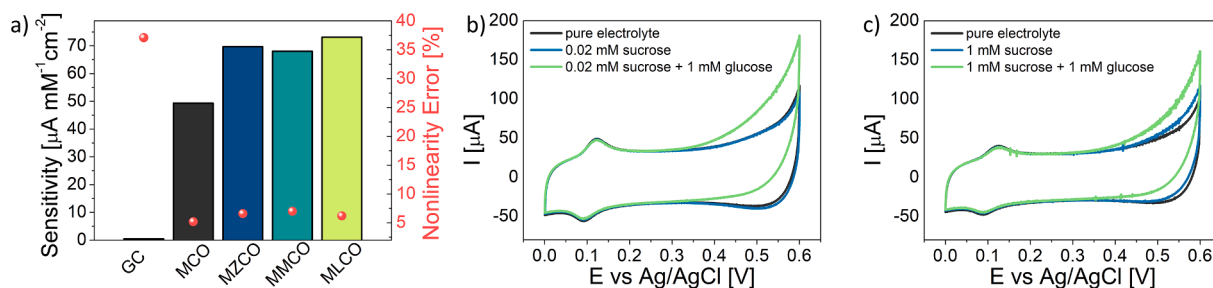


Fig. 2. (a) CVs of the  $MnCo_2O_4$ -coated electrodes in the absence and presence of 1 mM glucose at a scan rate of  $100 \text{ mV s}^{-1}$ , (b) exemplary amperometric response of the  $MnCo_2O_4$  in the presence of glucose at 0.5 V vs Ag/AgCl, (c) steady-state amperometric responses to the increasing glucose concentration, and (d) corresponding calibration curve. All tests were performed in 0.2 M KOH.

morphology and electrochemical glucose sensing performance were studied.

## 2. Experimental

Tetrahedrally substituted manganese cobaltite spinel oxides were prepared by the sol-gel EDTA-Citric Acid method described in the



**Fig. 3.** (a) Comparison of sensitivity and characteristics of nonlinearity towards glucose sensing obtained for t-MCO catalysts, interference test CVs of the  $\text{MnLi}_{0.1}\text{Co}_{1.9}\text{O}_4$  performed in the presence of (b) 0.02 mM and (c) 1 mM sucrose. All tests were performed in 0.2 M KOH.

### Supplementary Information.

### 3. Results and discussion

The pXRD patterns collected for all of the synthesised t-MCO powders are pictured in Fig. 1(a). The peaks indicate a well crystallised spinel cubic structure (space group  $\text{Fd}\bar{3}m$ , No. 227). The measured peak positions:  $18.6^\circ$ ,  $30.6^\circ$ ,  $36^\circ$ ,  $37.7^\circ$ ,  $43.8^\circ$ ,  $54.4^\circ$ ,  $58^\circ$ ,  $63.7^\circ$ , fit with standard  $\text{MnCo}_2\text{O}_4$  (PDF #00–023–1237). In Fig. 1 (b), the Mn  $L_{3}$ -edge XANES spectra of  $\text{MnCo}_2\text{O}_4$  doped with Zn, Mg or Li in tetrahedral positions are presented.

The substitution with  $\text{Zn}^{2+}$  has a negligible influence on the Mn valence in the spinel crystal, since the  $\text{MnZn}_{0.1}\text{Co}_{1.9}\text{O}_4$  spectrum overlaps with one of  $\text{MnCo}_2\text{O}_4$ . A growing shoulder at 643.5 eV indicates the incorporation of  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  and, even more so,  $\text{Li}^{1+}$ , forces more Mn cations into the +4 oxidation state. The Co  $L_{3}$ -edge spectra presented in Fig. 1 (c) showed minor changes for samples doped with Zn and Li, revealing the higher ratio of  $\text{Co}^{3+}/\text{Co}^{2+}$ . The obtained results show that even a small addition of elements in the tetrahedrally coordinated sites may have a strong influence on the valence of other constituent elements, making it possible to tune the material's physicochemical properties.

Fig. 1 (d) presents the morphology of the as-synthesised pure  $\text{MnCo}_2\text{O}_4$  powder, characterised by micrometre-sized particles. The ball-milling process was applied to reduce the sample's particles size and thus increase the specific surface area. As is shown in Fig. 1 (e) and Fig. S1, the agglomerated particles were crushed, which provided more available surface active sites for electrocatalysis.

Fig. 2 (a) presents the cyclic voltammetry (CV) curves recorded for the pure  $\text{MnCo}_2\text{O}_4$ -coated electrode without and with the addition of glucose. The electrocatalytic current response increases in the presence of glucose. Fig. 2 (b) shows the amperometric response at 0.5 V vs  $\text{Ag}/\text{AgCl}$  in electrolyte with a 1 mM glucose concentration. The visible current changes are due to the applied polarisation (from OCV to 0.5 V). The steady-state response is reached at around 200 s. For the purpose of a calibration curve, the series of amperometric response measurements were performed with increasing glucose concentration from 0.02 to 1 mM and analysed after 150 s (Fig. 3 (b)). The obtained calibration curve presented in Fig. 2 (d) indicates a linear glucose oxidation response with a nonlinearity error of 5.2% and sensitivity of  $43 \mu\text{A mM}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-2}$  (average sensitivity for 3 electrodes is  $49 \mu\text{A mM}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-2}$ ) two orders of magnitude higher than for uncoated Glassy Carbon (GC) electrode (Fig. S2).

To further improve the glucose-sensing ability, the additional elements were incorporated into the tetrahedrally coordinated sites of the spinel structure. As is depicted in Fig. 3 (a), the introduction of small amounts of  $\text{Zn}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  or  $\text{Li}^{1+}$  cations into the crystal structure resulted in increased sensitivity with preserved low calibration curve nonlinearity error. Among the studied materials, the best results are seen for  $\text{MnLi}_{0.1}\text{Co}_{1.9}\text{O}_4$  with a sensitivity of  $73.1 \mu\text{A mM}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-2}$ . The detection of glucose is achieved through electron transfer by oxidation of glucose. As revealed by XANES studies, the sample with incorporated  $\text{Li}^{1+}$  cations is characterised by a higher ratio of  $\text{Mn}^{4+}/(\text{Mn}^{3+} \text{ and } \text{Mn}^{2+})$  and

$\text{Co}^{3+}/\text{Co}^{2+}$  synergistically influencing the adsorption of reaction species, charge transfer and oxidation of glucose [12,13].

The applicability of this new material was then tested with a selectivity test. The CVs were recorded in electrolytes with concentrations of interfering sucrose of 0.02 mM and 1 mM. As is depicted in Fig. 3(b), the smaller sucrose content had a negligible impact on the glucose sensing ability. The higher sucrose concentration produced a visible current at oxidising potentials (Fig. 3 (c)), however, glucose oxidation-related current was still pronounced. The extended selectivity behaviour test, including the influence of ascorbic acid, fructose, urea is presented in Fig. S3. These tests show good selectivity of the spinels towards glucose, which possibly can be further increased by materials tailoring.

### 4. Conclusions

To summarise, a series of tetrahedrally modified  $\text{MnMe}_{0.1}\text{Co}_{1.9}\text{O}_4$  spinels was prepared by the sol-gel synthesis method and subsequent ball-milling process. The obtained powders were tested as electrocatalysts for the non-enzymatic glucose sensor application. Among the prepared samples, the one with cobalt partially substituted for lithium exhibited the highest sensitivity with preserved low nonlinearity error of the calibration curve. Moreover, the proposed  $\text{MnLi}_{0.1}\text{Co}_{1.9}\text{O}_4$  preserved the glucose-sensing ability with the presence of an interfering agent, i.e. sucrose. These results demonstrate that the spinels can be tailored via chemical modifications and the proposed catalyst could be used to prepare a promising non-enzymatic glucose sensor based of abundant elements.

#### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Krystian Lankauf:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Validation, Writing – original draft. **Katarzyna Ostrowska:** Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis. **Karolina Górnicka:** Investigation, Validation. **Jakub Karczewski:** Investigation, Validation. **Piotr Jasiński:** Methodology, Supervision, Resources. **Sebastian Molin:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing, Resources, Funding acquisition.

#### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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#### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.matlet.2022.132574>.

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