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Transitions in Ferroelectric KNbO_3 ^{*}

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Dielectric measurements of KNbO_3 by Matthias and Remeika⁽¹⁾ revealed a ferroelectric Curie point at 435°C and a further transition at 225°C . An X-ray and optical study by Wood⁽²⁾ revealed a cubic perovskite structure above the Curie point at 435°C , which transforms on cooling first to a tetragonal structure and then to an orthorhombic structure at the above two transition points. These transitions are related to the phase transitions in BaTiO_3 at 120°C and 0°C ⁽³⁾. A further transition occurs in BaTiO_3 at -80°C , in which the structure changes from orthorhombic to rhombohedral. The above investigators found no significant change in the dielectric constant of KNbO_3 between room temperature and -190°C ⁽¹⁾, and no optical change was observed between 25° and -50°C ⁽²⁾.

A preliminary dielectric study⁽⁴⁾ carried out in our laboratory on KNbO_3 single crystals, prepared without flux, did show a sharp peak in the dielectric constant at -50°C on cooling and -35°C on heating, indicating the existence of a phase transition at this point. A further study has now been carried out on the dielectric, structural and thermal properties

of this lowest phase.

KNbO_3 single crystals were prepared as described by Wood⁽²⁾, using KCO_3 as a flux and cooling down from 1000°C . The crystals were generally rectangular, transparent, light-yellow plates. Optical observation showed them to be multi-domain crystals. Dielectric tests were made on crystals 2-3 mm on edge and about 0.3 mm in thickness.

Figure 1 shows the dielectric constant vs. temperature curve measured at 10 kc/sec and a field strength of about 5v/cm. The heating and cooling rate was about $1^\circ\text{C}/\text{min}$. In agreement with previous data, this curve shows a very sharp change in dielectric constant at 220° and 420°C on heating. In addition to these, there is an abrupt change in the dielectric constant at -10°C on heating. On cooling, these three transitions occur at 410° , 200° and -55°C . A very large temperature hysteresis of about 45°C at the lowest phase change appears in the several crystals examined.

Powder photographs of KNbO_3 were taken with $\text{CuK}\alpha$ radiation in a Norelco powder camera of 11.4 cm diameter. Orthorhombic cell dimensions $a = 5.721\text{\AA}$, $b = 3.973\text{\AA}$, $c = 5.695\text{\AA}$ were obtained at room temperature, in good agreement with the previous data⁽²⁾⁽⁵⁾. The lowest-temperature phase was examined in our low temperature camera, 10 cm diam., using $\text{CuK}\alpha$ radiation. Diffraction patterns at -140°C showed pseudo-cubic lines of perovskite type, but small although definite line splittings were observed in a few high angle lines such as (422), (332) and (420). The line splittings could be explained by assuming a rhombohedral lattice and considering both line spacings and intensities. Special attention was paid to the (400) reflections, which show no multiplet except that due to the a_1, a_2 doublet;

and this excluded the possibilities of tetragonal or orthorhombic lattices.

The lattice parameters calculated from (422) and (332) line groups are

$$a = 4.016 \pm 0.002 \text{ \AA} \text{ and } \alpha = 89^\circ 50' \pm 1'.$$

Since $\alpha < 90^\circ$, this rhombohedral lattice is derived from an ideal cubic lattice by an elongation along [111]. This corresponds to the same lattice as that of the lowest phase in BaTiO_3 . Polarizing microscope observations also showed the three phase transitions, at temperatures of the dielectric anomalies; and extinction positions are in accordance with the X-ray-determined symmetry of each phase. If we reduce the three transition temperatures by dividing by the Curie temperature, they are 1, 0.69, 0.49 and 1, 0.71, 0.38 for BaTiO_3 and KNbO_3 respectively. KNbO_3 is the only one perovskite-type ferroelectric which has been found to show three transitions similar to those of BaTiO_3 .

To further compare the transitions in these two crystals, a study was made of the specific heat anomaly at the three transitions in KNbO_3 . Ceramic KNbO_3 was prepared by firing a mixture of K_2CO_3 and Nb_2O_5 at 1050°C . An adiabatic calorimeter of the Nernst type⁽⁶⁾, holding about 50 grams of KNbO_3 powder, was used for the lower temperature measurements. Another adiabatic calorimeter of Nagasaki-Takagi⁽⁷⁾ type, containing about 15 grams of KNbO_3 powder, was used at high temperatures. The measurements were carried out by heating the specimens continuously at a rate of 0.5 to $1^\circ\text{C}/\text{min}$. Sharp peaks in the specific heats appeared at the three transition temperatures.

The values of the transition energies integrated from the curves are shown in Table I, together with data on BaTiO_3 . The larger transition energies in KNbO_3 could be explained in terms of the larger lattice distortions in KNbO_3 as compared with the corresponding transitions in BaTiO_3 . It may be interesting to point out that the relative ratio of the three entropy

changes are nearly the same in these two crystals; and, moreover, the entropy changes at the Curie points of these two crystals are approximately proportional to their $(\frac{Q}{a}-1)$ values in the tetragonal phase.

To permit a more detailed comparison of these two crystals, and especially to apply the Devonshire's theory⁽⁸⁾ of BaTiO₃ to KNbO₃, we must know the values of the Curie constant and the spontaneous polarization at the Curie point. Unfortunately, reliable values of these quantities in KNbO₃ are difficult to obtain, because of the relatively high conductivity near the Curie point at 430°C.

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Table I. Transition Energy ΔE (cal/mole) and Entropy Change ΔS (cal/mole degree) at the Three Transitions in BaTiO_3 and KNbO_3

		Cubic	Tetragonal	Orthorhombic	Rhombohedral
BaTiO_3	ΔE	47 ~ 50 ^{a,b,c}	16 ~ 26 ^{a,b,c,d}	8 ~ 14 ^{b,c,d}	
	ΔS	0.12 ~ 0.13	0.06 ~ 0.09	0.04 ~ 0.07	
KNbO_3	ΔE	190 \pm 15	85 \pm 10	32 \pm 5	
	ΔS	0.28	0.17	0.12	

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Figure 1
Dielectric Constant of KNbO_3

