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OPTICALLY ACTIVE NANOMATERIALS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDICATION

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Abstract

In recent years optically active nanomaterials have opened up a number of frontiers, especially in life science and environmental protection. Novel hybrid nanomaterials based on wide band gap oxides (TiO₂) and Ln³⁺ doped rare earth compounds (down- and up-conversion luminescence materials) obtained through innovative processing will be presented from the viewpoint of their potential application for light harvesting and photocatalysis.

Keywords: luminescence, up-conversion, core-shell, charge-transfer complex, photocatalysis.

INTRODUCTION

The field of nanoscience has made exciting progress in recent decades, particularly regarding the synthesis of optically active nanoparticles that might be able to solve some of the aroused energy and environmental problems. One of the key points in achieving a sustainable low carbon society is development of innovative synthesis routes which could ensure processing of nanomaterials in a controlled manner. The synthesis from solution, such as spray pyrolysis and hydro/solvo-thermal processing, offers many advantages over conventional solid-state synthesis: design of nanomaterials at the molecular level, tuning of their crystallinity, control of morphology and homogeneous doping. While spray pyrolysis comprises formation and decomposition of aerosol in a high temperature tubular flow reactor, hydro/solvothermal processing refers to any homogeneous or heterogeneous reaction in the presence of aqueous or organic solvents at elevated pressure and temperature in a closed vessel. Both methods are successfully developed in the scope of research activities in the Institute of Technical Sciences of SASA [1,2]. The examples from some wide band gap oxides and down- and up-conversion luminescence materials processed using these, will be presented and discussed from the viewpoint of their potential use for environmental remediation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

YAG:Ce, Y_{1-x}Gd_xO₃:Eu, Y₂O₃:Yb and NaY_{1-x}Gd_xF₄:Yb co-doped with Er, Tm or Ho, YF₃:Yb,Er, hybrid TiO₂ and TiO₂-based nanoparticles, as well as, Y₂O₃:Eu@Ag and

$\text{NaYF}_4:\text{Yb,Tm}@\text{TiO}_2\text{-Acac}$ core-shell structures, were synthesised in accordance to the previously published procedures [1–10].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 presents typical morphologies of nanoparticles obtained through spray pyrolysis in function of precursor type. The diverse levels of structural, morphological and functional complexity are achieved by appropriate setting of processing parameters, i.e. temperature (which controls volume/surface precipitation in droplets and phase composition) and precursor concentration (which affects particle size and agglomeration degree).

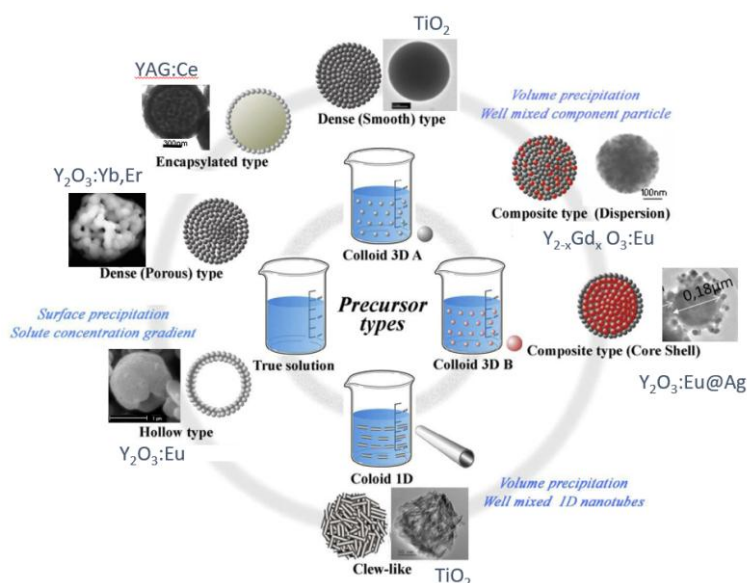


Figure 1 Morphologies of nanoparticles obtained through spray pyrolysis

Figure 2 presents typical morphologies of nanoparticles obtained through hydro/solvothermal processing. Their structural properties are defined by the main processing parameters, i.e., temperature, pressure, time, pH and precursor/solvent type, while their surface chemistry is tailored by the addition of surfactants (EDTA, PEG, PVP, PLGA, Chitosan).

Both methods belong to the bottom-up building blocks synthesis approach, which enables enhancing a specific functionality through the synergy of properties associated with different structural levels and interactions at their interfaces. As a result, such particles could be used in displays, lighting, photovoltaics and photocatalysis. For lighting application in small devices, besides being used as white emission mercury-free sources, nanophosphors need to have broad range tunability of a multi-colour emission by single wavelength excitation which could be achieved through co-doping. Tuneable absorption in the infrared spectrum and ability to convert a low-energy infrared radiation into high-energy emission, make them attractive for infrared-driven photocatalysis and light harvesting improvement in the state-of-the-art solar cells. This is because the spectral distribution of sunlight at air mass 1.5 Global includes photons with a wide range of wavelengths, ranging from 280 to 2500 nm (0.5–4.4 eV), while

the current generation of photocatalysts and solar cells utilize only a small fraction of the incident photons which energy match their energy bandgap.

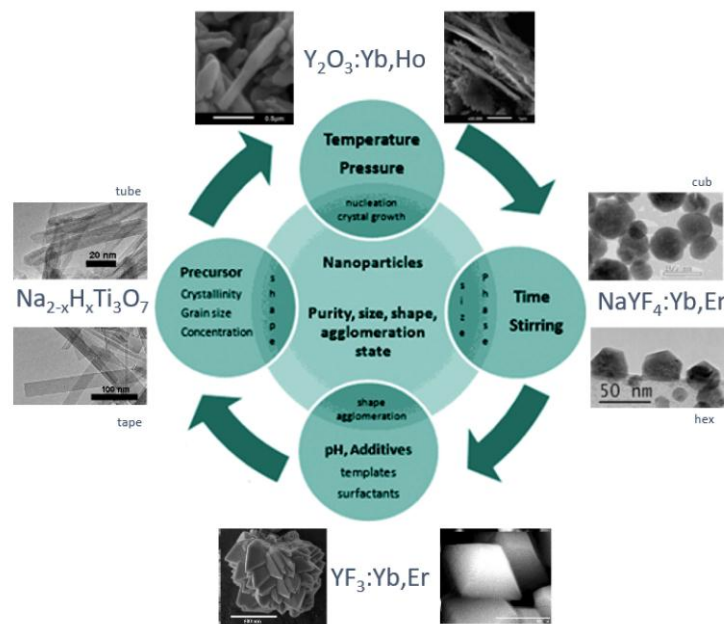


Figure 2 Morphologies of nanoparticles obtained through hydro/solvo-thermal processing

Recently we shown that efficiency of the novel hybrid core-shell structure, in which up-converting core $\text{NaYF}_4:\text{Yb},\text{Er}$ acts as a medium for converting NIR to visible light via multiphoton up-conversion processes while TiO_2 -Acetylacetonate shell absorbs the visible light through direct injection of excited electrons from the highest-occupied-molecular-orbital (HOMO) of Acetylacetonate into the TiO_2 conduction band (CB), toward tetracycline degradation is twofold better than that of TiO_2 -Acetylacetonate solely.

CONCLUSION

The essential principles for rational design of efficient optically active materials were highlighted. Particular emphasis is placed on synthesis methods developed in the Institute of Technical Sciences of Serbia, as well as on hybrid structure materials for future development of infrared-driven photocatalysts and photovoltaics.

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