



In situ electrochemical surface modification for high-voltage LiCoO₂ in lithium ion batteries



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Introducing a simple *in situ* electrochemical surface modification method.
- Electrochemical formation of MgF₂ coating layers on a LiCoO₂ surface.
- Clarifying the formation mechanism of MgF₂ coating layers from Mg(ClO₄)₂.
- Role of LiPF₆ salt and polyvinylidene fluoride binder in the formation of MgF₂.
- Suppressing Co dissolution, leading to the improved electrochemical performance.

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ABSTRACT

High-voltage LiCoO₂ has been revisited to improve the energy density of lithium ion batteries. LiCoO₂ can deliver the reversible capacity of about 200 mA h g⁻¹ when the upper cut-off voltage increases to 4.55 V (vs. Li/Li⁺). However, the high upper cut-off voltage causes the severe failures of LiCoO₂ such as structural degradation, electrolyte decomposition, and Co dissolution. Various surface-modified LiCoO₂ materials have been introduced to suppress electrolyte decomposition and Co dissolution, thereby leading to the improved electrochemical performance. Most of the coated LiCoO₂ materials are obtained through a conventional coating process such as sol-gel synthesis, which is complex and high-cost. In this paper, the *in situ* electrochemical coating method is introduced as a simple and low-cost coating process, where the electrolyte additive of Mg salts is electrochemically decomposed to form a MgF₂-based coating layer on the LiCoO₂ surface. LiCoO₂ electrochemically coated with MgF₂ suppresses Co dissolution in electrolytes, resulting in excellent electrochemical performance such as high reversible capacity of 198 mA h g⁻¹ and stable cycle performance over 100 cycles in the voltage range between 3 and 4.55 V (vs. Li/Li⁺) at 45 °C. The formation mechanism of MgF₂ is also demonstrated through *ex situ* XPS and XANES analyses.

1. Introduction

Lithium ion batteries are the most widely used energy storage devices for portable electronics such as laptops and mobile phones. However, emerging electronics consume more energy, and consequently require the higher energy density of lithium ion batteries. In this connection, there has been much effort to improve the energy density of cathode materials for lithium ion batteries [1,2]. For example, Ni-rich [3–6] and Li, Mn-rich layered oxide materials [7–11] have been investigated because of their high reversible capacities. LiCoO₂ has also been revisited to deliver the reversible capacity of about 200 mA h g⁻¹ that is enabled by increasing upper cut-off voltage to 4.55 V (vs. Li/Li⁺) [12,13]. A change in the upper cut-off voltage,

however, causes the severe degradation of LiCoO₂, resulting in poor electrochemical performance except for the high reversible capacity. For example, the irreversible phase transition is known to occur from O3 to O1 through H1-3 above 4.5 V vs. Li/Li⁺ [14,15]. The surface of LiCoO₂ is transformed into Li-deficient spinel-like phases such as Co₃O₄ [16,17] and Li_xCo₂O₄ [18] during cycling, leading to increase in a charge transfer resistance. In addition, severe anodic electrolyte decomposition occurs above 4.5 V vs. Li/Li⁺, resulting in the formation of thick passivation layer on the cathode surface [19]. This layer is called cathode electrolyte interphase (CEI). Finally, Co dissolution in electrolytes is accelerated at high voltages [20].

The structural degradation of LiCoO₂ at high voltages is known to be mitigated by the addition of various dopants such as Mg²⁺ [21,22],

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Al^{3+} [23,24], and Ti^{4+} [25], leading to improved cycle performance. Surface modification of LiCoO_2 is also efficient to suppress electrolyte decomposition [26] and Co dissolution [27]. In particular, the surface-modified LiCoO_2 with metal fluorides such as AlF_3 [28] and MgF_2 [29] showed promising electrochemical performance. Most of the metal fluoride-coated cathode materials are obtained through conventional wet coating processes including sol-gel synthesis, which require the additional coating steps after the solid state synthesis of LiCoO_2 [30–32]. This conventional coating method is relatively complex and high-cost. In this report, we introduce the *in situ* electrochemical coating method that the electrolyte additive of Mg salts is electrochemically decomposed to form the MgF_2 -based CEI layer on the LiCoO_2 surface. This *in situ* electrochemical coating method is simple and low-cost. LiCoO_2 electrochemically coated with MgF_2 suppresses Co dissolution in electrolytes, resulting in excellent electrochemical performance such as high reversible capacity of 198 mA h g^{-1} and stable cycle performance over 100 cycles in the voltage range between 3 and 4.55 V vs. Li/Li^+ at 45°C . We also clarified the formation mechanism of MgF_2 coating layers, where both LiPF_6 salt and polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF) binder are provided as a source of fluorine in MgF_2 .

2. Experimental section

2.1. Synthesis and material characterization

Li_2CO_3 and CoCO_3 (0.515 : 1 as a molar ratio) were mixed by wet-milling with ethanol at 300 rpm for 1 h. The mixed precursors were heated at 900°C for 10 h. X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns of LiCoO_2 were collected using a D2 phaser (bruker) with $\text{Cu-K}\alpha$ radiation ($\lambda = 1.5418 \text{ \AA}$). Field emission scanning electron microscopy (FE-SEM) and high-resolution transmission electron microscopy (HR-TEM) with energy dispersive spectroscopy (EDS) were carried out using a JSM-6700F (JEOL) and JEM-2100F (JEOL), respectively. The cross sectional TEM images were obtained using an ion slicer (EM-09100 IS, JEOL). X-ray Absorption Near-Edge Structure (XANES) spectra were obtained on the PLS-II 6D beamline at the Pohang Accelerator Laboratory (PAL). X-ray Photoelectron Spectroscopy (XPS, K-alpha, Thermo scientific) analyses were performed after etching for 50 s to remove surface contaminations. The amount of Co dissolution in electrolytes was measured using inductively coupled plasma – mass spectroscopy (ICP-MS, Agilent 7900). After charging LiCoO_2 to 4.55 V (vs. Li/Li^+), cells were disassembled and LiCoO_2 electrodes were recovered. Then, charged electrodes were stored in 5 ml of 1.3 M LiPF_6 dissolved in ethylene carbonate (EC)/ethyl-methyl carbonate (EMC)/dimethyl carbonate (DMC) solution (3/4/3, v/v/v) at 85°C for 15 days. Time of flight secondary ion mass spectroscopy (TOF-SIMS, Ion-TOF) was carried out using the LiCoO_2 electrode cycled with 1.3 M LiPF_6 in EC/EMC/DMC containing LiClO_4 and $\text{Mg}(\text{ClO}_4)_2$.

2.2. Electrochemical characterization

Electrodes were prepared by mixing active materials (LiCoO_2), carbon black (Super P), and PVDF binder in a weight ratio of 8:1:1. The slurries were casted on aluminum current collectors. Activated carbon (AC) electrodes were prepared in a form of free-standing films composed of AC, carbon Super P, polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) binder in a weight ratio of 8:1:1.

Electrochemical performance of LiCoO_2 was evaluated using half cells (2032-type coin cells) comprising LiCoO_2 , Li metal, 1.3 M of LiPF_6 dissolved in EC/EMC/DMC solution (3/4/3, v/v/v) containing various amounts of $\text{Mg}(\text{ClO}_4)_2$. Pre-cycling was conducted in the voltage range of 3–4.4 V (vs. Li/Li^+) at 15 mA g^{-1} (0.1C) and 30°C for 5 cycles. After pre-cycling, galvanostatic cycling was performed in the voltage ranges of 3–4.4 and 3–4.55 V (vs. Li/Li^+) at 45 and 60°C . The current density was 150 mA g^{-1} (1C). In addition, the electrochemical performance of

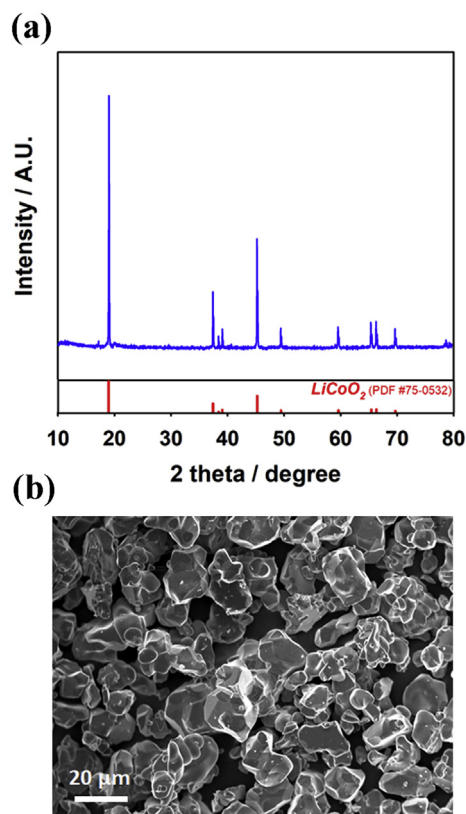


Fig. 1. (a) XRD pattern and (b) FE-SEM image of LiCoO_2 .

full cells comprising LiCoO_2 cathode and graphite anode was examined to investigate the Mg deposition on the graphite surface. The N/P ratio of full cells was 1.15. Full cells were cycled in the voltage range of 2.9–4.3 V.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. *In situ* surface modification of LiCoO_2

LiCoO_2 powders were synthesized through a conventional solid state method. Negligible impurities were observed in the XRD pattern of LiCoO_2 powders (Fig. 1a). LiCoO_2 powders are a few tens of micrometers in size, as shown in the SEM image of LiCoO_2 powders (Fig. 1b). After assembling a half cell comprising LiCoO_2 , Li metal, and 1.3 M LiPF_6 dissolved in EC/EMC/DMC solution (3/4/3, v/v/v) with and without $0.03 \text{ M Mg}(\text{ClO}_4)_2$, we performed a galvanostatic cycling in the voltage range of 3–4.4 V (vs. Li/Li^+) at 15 mA g^{-1} (0.1C) and 30°C for 5 cycles. The cells were disassembled after cycling, and then we carried out *ex situ* TEM and XPS analyses for cycled LiCoO_2 electrodes to observe changes in the LiCoO_2 surface after cycling. Fig. 2a and b shows the cross sectional TEM image and corresponding EDS mapping image of LiCoO_2 after 5 cycles. Mg was uniformly concentrated on the LiCoO_2 surface, and the thickness of Mg-containing layer was a few tens of nanometers. Fig. 2c–f shows the XPS spectra of Mg 1s and F 1s for the LiCoO_2 cycled with bare and $\text{Mg}(\text{ClO}_4)_2$ -containing electrolytes. When $0.03 \text{ M Mg}(\text{ClO}_4)_2$ was added in the electrolyte, a peak appeared at 1305.8 eV in the XPS spectrum of Mg 1s (Fig. 2c). This peak corresponds to MgF_2 [33], which indicates that $\text{Mg}(\text{ClO}_4)_2$ was decomposed to form MgF_2 on the LiCoO_2 surface. Regardless of the addition of $\text{Mg}(\text{ClO}_4)_2$, we also observed three peaks at 685.5 eV , 686.6 eV , and 688.0 eV in the XPS spectra of F 1s, corresponding to metal fluorides, $\text{Li}_x\text{PF}_y\text{O}_z$ and PVDF binder, respectively (Fig. 2d, f) [10,34,35]. PF_6^- is known to be decomposed into F^- and PF_5 at high voltages, which is followed by the reaction between Li^+ and F^- to form LiF [36]. This

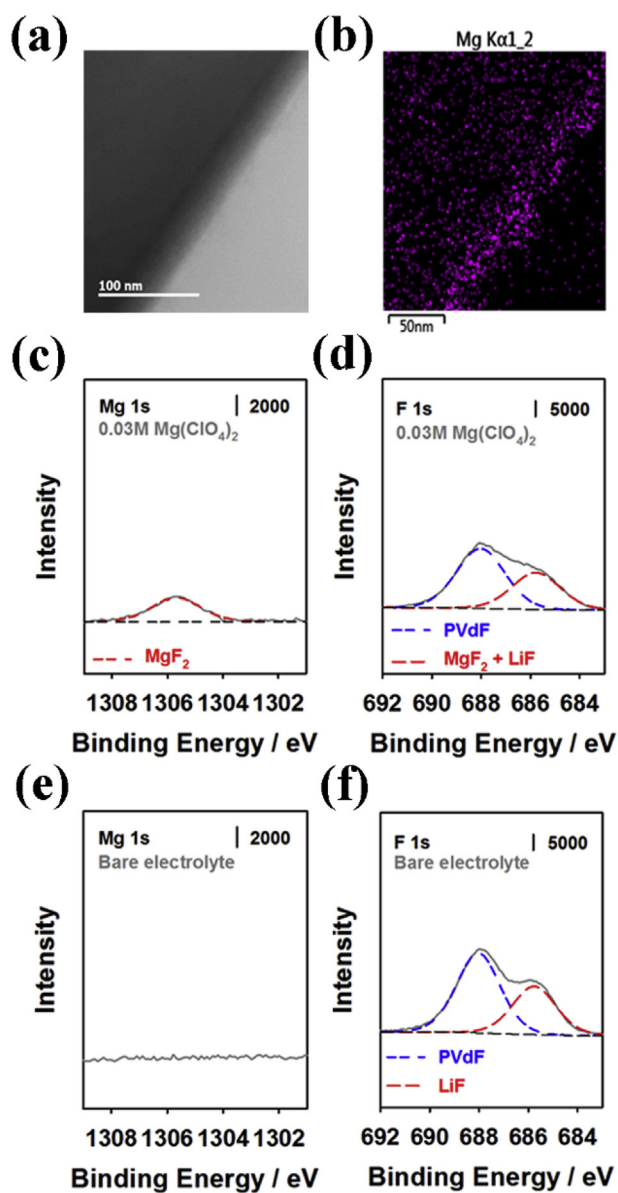


Fig. 2. (a) Cross-sectional TEM image and (b) corresponding EDS mapping image of the LiCoO₂ cycled with Mg(ClO₄)₂ for 5 cycles. XPS spectra of (c) Mg 1s and (d) F 1s for the LiCoO₂ cycled with Mg(ClO₄)₂-containing electrolytes. XPS spectra of (e) Mg 1s and (f) F 1s for the LiCoO₂ cycled with bare electrolytes.

suggests that the peak at 685.7 eV for the bare electrolyte is due to the formation of LiF from LiPF₆. The binding energies of F 1s in LiF and MgF₂ are very close, such as 685.5 eV for LiF [37] and 685.52 eV for MgF₂ [38]. Therefore, the peak at 685.7 eV for the Mg(ClO₄)₂-containing electrolyte should be considered to be attributed to both LiF and MgF₂ derived from LiPF₆ and Mg(ClO₄)₂ [36–39]. Wagner et al. reported that the formation of MgF₂ is thermodynamically more favorable than that of LiF when PF₆⁻ is decomposed in the electrolyte containing both Mg²⁺ and Li⁺ ions [39]. This supports that the CEI layer of LiCoO₂ contains both LiF and MgF₂ when LiPF₆ and Mg(ClO₄)₂ are dissolved in the electrolyte.

We performed additional *ex situ* XPS analysis to demonstrate the formation mechanism of MgF₂ on the LiCoO₂ surface. Fig. 3 compares the XPS spectra of Mg 1s, F 1s, and Cl 2p for the LiCoO₂ electrodes prepared with PVDF and polyacrylic acid (PAA) binders after 5 cycles, where the electrolyte was 1.0 M LiClO₄ and 0.03 M Mg(ClO₄)₂ dissolved in EC/EMC/DMC solution. Note that there was no fluorine source in the

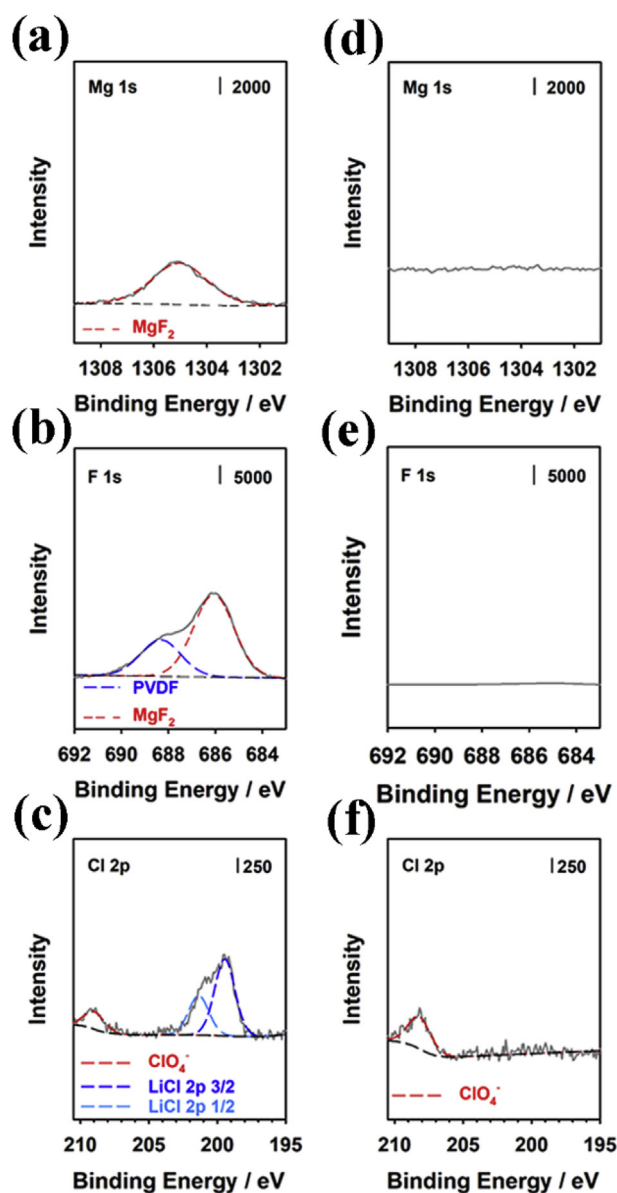


Fig. 3. XPS spectra of (a) Mg 1s, (b) F 1s, and (c) Cl 2p for the LiCoO₂ electrodes prepared with a PVDF binder after 5 cycles. XPS spectra of (d) Mg 1s, (e) F 1s, and (f) Cl 2p for the LiCoO₂ electrodes prepared with a PAA binder after 5 cycles. The electrolyte was 1.0 M LiClO₄ and 0.03 M Mg(ClO₄)₂ dissolved in EC/EMC/DMC solution.

electrolyte for this case because LiClO₄ was used instead of LiPF₆ as a Li salt. As expected, no MgF₂ was formed on the LiCoO₂ surface, when PAA was used as a binder. However, interestingly, MgF₂ was formed on the LiCoO₂ surface when PVDF was used as a binder, despite the fact that there was no fluorine source in the electrolyte. This indicates that PVDF was decomposed and reacted with Mg²⁺ in the electrolyte, leading to the formation of MgF₂, although PVDF are chemically very stable. Moreover, we performed *ex situ* TOF-SIMS analysis to support the formation of MgF₂ on the LiCoO₂ surface (Supplementary Information, Fig. S1). Fig. S1 shows the TOF-SIMS spectrum of the LiCoO₂ electrode cycled with 1.0 M LiClO₄ in EC/EMC/DMC (3/4/3) containing 0.03 M Mg(ClO₄)₂ and PVDF binder. We observed the peak of MgF⁻ at *m/z* 43 in the TOF-SIMS spectrum in the negative ion mode. The fragment of MgF⁻ was obtained from MgF₂, revealing that MgF₂ was formed on the LiCoO₂ surface. This is consistent with the *ex situ* XPS analysis (Fig. 3).

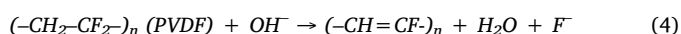
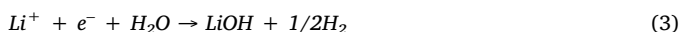
PVDF is known to react with strong bases such as organic bases,

LiOH, and LiO₂ through chemical dehydrofluorination [40,41], resulting in the release of F⁻. In this connection, we propose the formation mechanism of MgF₂ derived from PVDF as follows. H₂O reacts with Li⁺ and e⁻ in the electrolyte, leading to the formation of LiOH and H₂ [42]. Then, OH⁻ abstracts the proton from the PVDF, followed by release of F⁻ to form a conjugated double bond [41]. Finally, F⁻ reacts with Mg²⁺ to form MgF₂. Therefore, we suggest two possible ways of forming MgF₂ on the LiCoO₂ surface when LiPF₆ and PVDF are used as Li salt and binder, respectively. One is due to the decomposition of LiPF₆ [43]. The other is attributed to the decomposition of PVDF through dehydrofluorination [44–46]. These decompositions release F⁻, followed by the reaction with Mg²⁺ to form MgF₂.

(i) When LiPF₆ was used as a Li salt in the electrolyte,



(ii) When PVDF was used as a binder,



Moreover, we performed *ex situ* XANES analysis to clarify the possibility of Mg doping into LiCoO₂. LiCoO₂ was charged to 4.4 V (vs. Li/Li⁺) using a Li half-cell comprising LiCoO₂ working electrode, Li metal counter electrode, and LiPF₆ dissolved in EC/EMC/DMC (3/4/3, v/v/v), resulting in the formation of Li-deficient Li_{1-x}CoO₂. The charging profile is presented in Fig. 4a. After charging, the cell was disassembled and the Li-deficient Li_{1-x}CoO₂ electrode was recovered. Then, we re-assembled a Mg half-cell comprising Li_{1-x}CoO₂ working electrode, activated carbon (AC) counter electrode, and 0.3 M Mg(ClO₄)₂ dissolved in EC/EMC/DMC (3/4/3, v/v/v). The Mg half-cell of Li_{1-x}CoO₂ was discharged to -1.3 V (vs. AC). The potential of the AC electrode in the Mg half-cell was calibrated using the ferrocene/ferrocenium (Fc/Fc⁺) redox couple [47]. The potential of -1.3 V (vs. AC) in a Mg half-cell corresponds to approximately 2 V (vs. Li/Li⁺) in a Li half-cell. Considering the sluggish kinetics of Mg²⁺ intercalation, a very small current density of 1.5 mA g⁻¹ (0.01C) was applied during discharge. Fig. 4b shows the discharge profile of Li_{1-x}CoO₂ using the Mg half-cell. Li_{1-x}CoO₂ delivered negligible discharge capacity as much as approximately 6 mA h g⁻¹. This indicates that a negligible amount of Mg²⁺ was intercalated into Li_{1-x}CoO₂. This is supported by *ex situ* XANES analysis. Fig. 4c shows the normalized Co K-edge XANES spectra of pristine LiCoO₂ (black line), Li_{1-x}CoO₂ that is charged to 4.4 V (vs. Li/Li⁺) using a Li half-cell (red line), and [Li_{1-x}Mg_y]CoO₂ that is discharged to -1.3 V (vs. AC) using a Mg half-cell (blue line). After charging, the main edge shifted to higher energy, indicating that the oxidation state of Co increased during charge. However, no shift was observed in the main edge after discharge, implying that there was no change in the oxidation state of Co during discharge. This supports that Mg²⁺ was not intercalated into Li_{1-x}CoO₂. Therefore, the additive of Mg(ClO₄)₂ does not contribute to the structural modification of LiCoO₂ through the electrochemical intercalation of Mg²⁺ but plays a role in the surface medication of LiCoO₂ by the formation of MgF₂-based CEI layer.

3.2. Role of Mg(ClO₄)₂ in electrochemical performance

Fig. 5 shows the cycle performance of LiCoO₂ with various amounts of Mg(ClO₄)₂ in the voltage ranges of 3–4.4 V and 3–4.55 V (vs. Li/Li⁺) at 150 mA g⁻¹ (1C) and 45 °C. The corresponding voltage profiles were

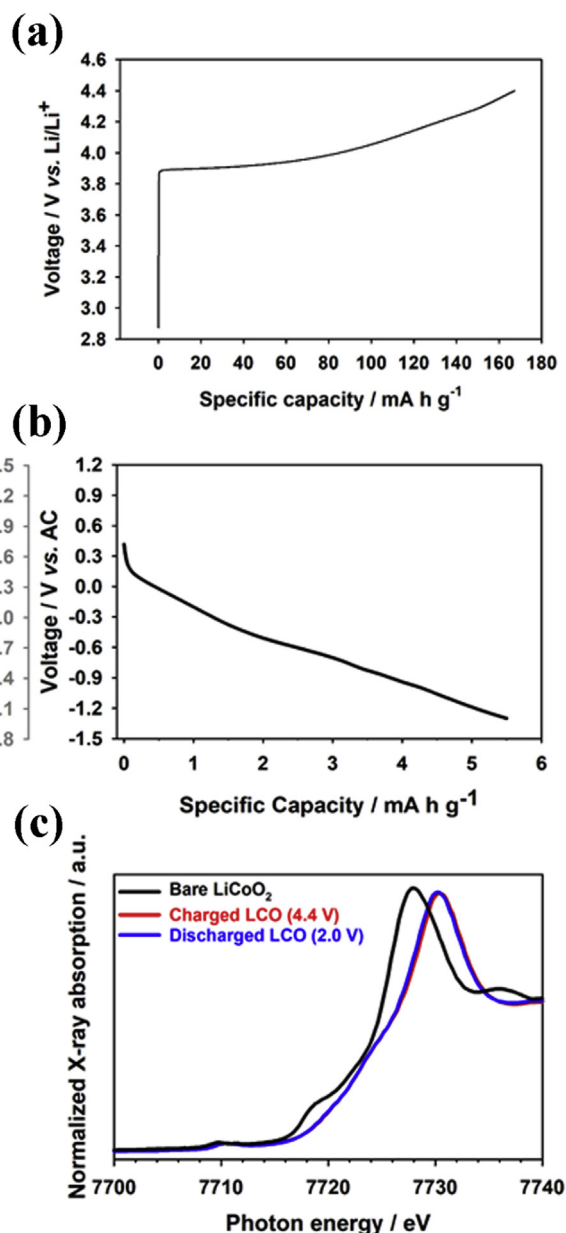


Fig. 4. (a) Charge profile of LiCoO₂ using a Li half-cell. (b) Discharge profile of delithiated Li_{1-x}CoO₂ using an Mg half-cell. (c) Normalized Co K-edge XANES spectra of LiCoO₂.

displayed in Fig. 6. As the amount of Mg(ClO₄)₂ increased from 0 to 0.03 M, LiCoO₂ exhibited less increase in charge and discharge polarization with increasing cycle number, resulting in more stable cycle performance. When Mg(ClO₄)₂ was not added in the electrolyte, bare LiCoO₂ showed the poor capacity retentions of ca. 72.4 and 59.6% in the voltage ranges of 3–4.4 V and 3–4.55 V (vs. Li/Li⁺) after 100 cycles, respectively. However, 0.03 M Mg(ClO₄)₂ remarkably improved the cycle performance of LiCoO₂ such as the capacity retentions of ca. 86.7 and 73% in the voltage ranges of 3–4.4 V and 3–4.55 V (vs. Li/Li⁺) after 100 cycles, respectively. Moreover, Mg(ClO₄)₂ improved the cycle performance of LiCoO₂ even at 60 °C, as shown in Fig. 7.

In order to elucidate the role of Mg(ClO₄)₂ in the improved cycle performance of LiCoO₂, we measured the amounts of Co dissolution after storing charged LiCoO₂ in the electrolyte at 85 °C for 15 days. One of the failure mechanisms of LiCoO₂ at high voltages is known to be Co dissolution in electrolytes during cycling. LiPF₆ reacts with H₂O, leading to the formation of highly corrosive HF [43,48]. Then, HF

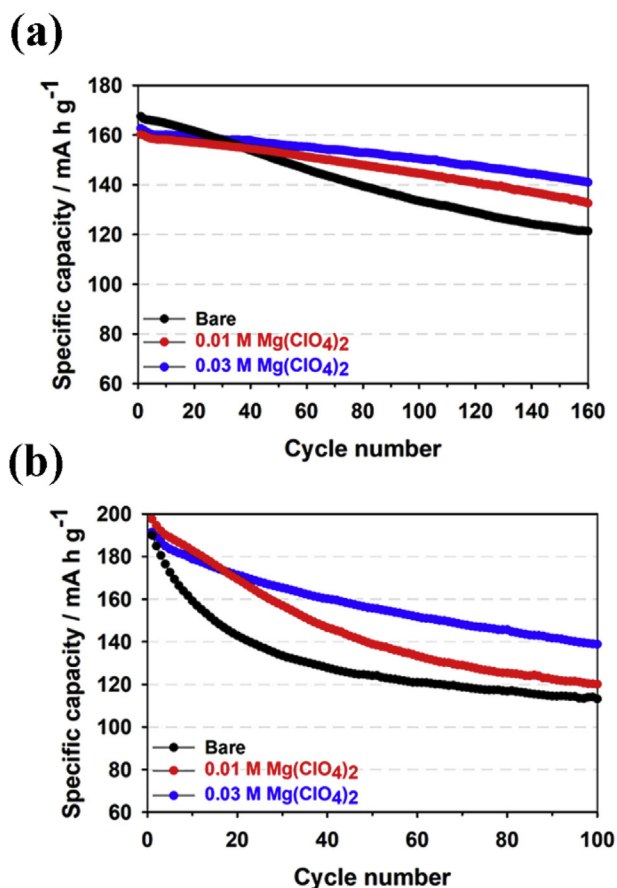


Fig. 5. Cycle performance of LiCoO₂ cycled with bare, 0.01 M Mg(ClO₄)₂-containing, and 0.03 M Mg(ClO₄)₂-containing electrolytes in the voltage ranges of (a) 3–4.4 and (b) 3–4.55 V (vs. Li/Li⁺) at 150 mA g⁻¹ (1C) and 45 °C.

dissolves Co from LiCoO₂. As shown in Fig. 8, Mg(ClO₄)₂ substantially suppressed Co dissolution of LiCoO₂ in electrolytes. This is attributed to that MgF₂-based CEI layer derived from Mg(ClO₄)₂ protects LiCoO₂ surface from HF attacks. As a result, Mg(ClO₄)₂ improved the cycle performance of LiCoO₂.

Moreover, we have examined the full cell comprising LiCoO₂ cathode and graphite anode to investigate Mg deposition on the graphite surface during cycling. The N/P ratio of full cells was 1.15. The electrochemical performance of full cells was examined with two kinds of electrolytes, such as 1.3 M LiPF₆ in EC/EMC/DMC containing 0.03 M Mg(ClO₄)₂ (denoted as baseline) and 1.3 M LiPF₆ in EC/EMC/DMC containing 0.03 M Mg(ClO₄)₂ and 2 wt% vinylene carbonate (VC) (denoted as baseline + VC). After 5 cycles, full cells were disassembled and electrodes were washed with DMC solvent. The surfaces of LiCoO₂ cathode and graphite anode were then analyzed using SEM with EDS. As shown in the EDS spectra of the full cell with the baseline electrolyte (Supplementary Information, Figs. S2 and S3), a very small peak of Mg was observed on the graphite surface. However, the Mg peak of the LiCoO₂ surface was much more intense than that of the graphite surface. This implies that MgClO₄ was decomposed mostly on the LiCoO₂ surface, forming MgF₂-based CEI layer, whereas a small amount of Mg was deposited on the graphite surface. In addition, a negligible amount of Mg was observed on the graphite surface when VC additive was added in the electrolyte (Supplementary Information, Figs. S4 and S5). This indicates that the VC additive formed a stable SEI layer on the graphite anode surface and the SEI layer suppressed the deposition of Mg in the full cell during cycling. As a result, the full cell with VC showed better cycle performance than the full cell without VC (Supplementary Information, Fig. S6).

4. Conclusion

We introduced the *in situ* electrochemical coating method that the electrolyte additive of Mg salts is electrochemically decomposed to form a MgF₂-based coating layer on the LiCoO₂ surface. We clarified the formation mechanism of MgF₂ through *ex situ* XPS and XANES analyses. When Mg(ClO₄)₂ was added in the electrolyte containing LiPF₆, PF₆⁻

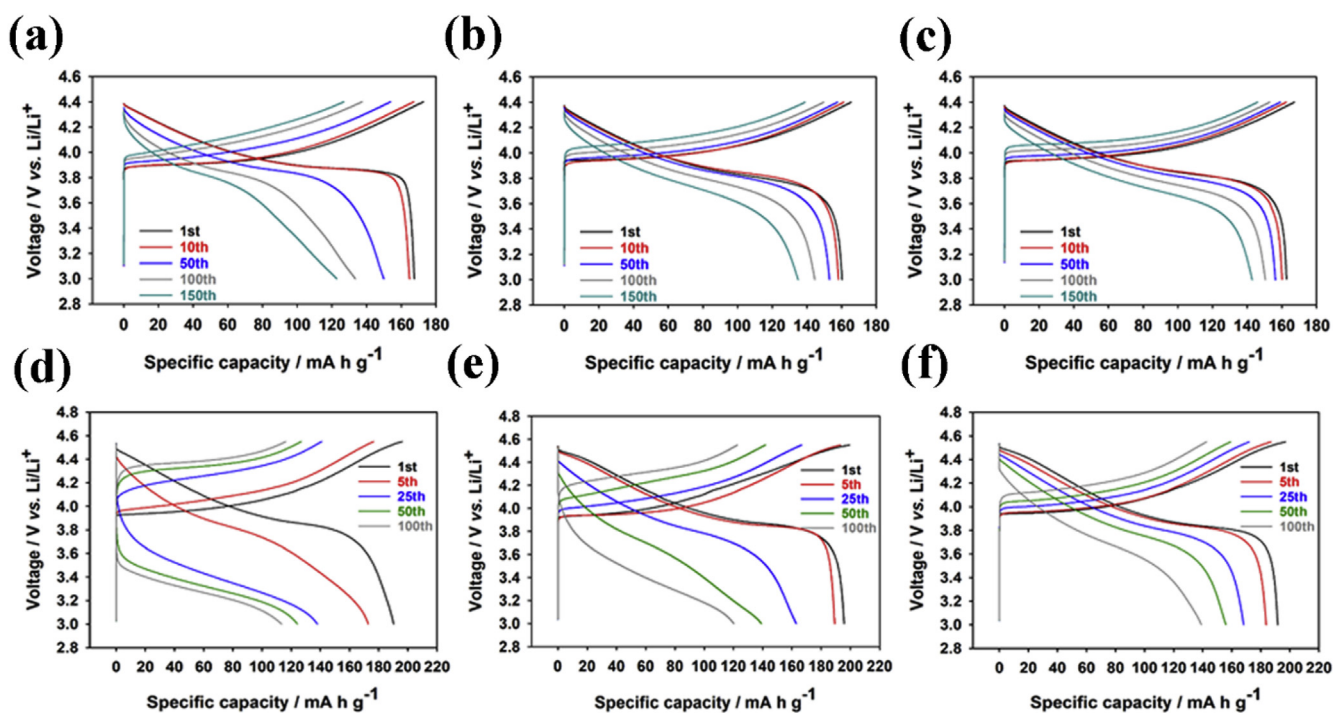


Fig. 6. Voltage profiles in the voltage range of 3–4.4 V (vs. Li/Li⁺) at 45 °C: (a) bare, (b) 0.01 M Mg(ClO₄)₂, and (c) 0.03 M Mg(ClO₄)₂. Voltage profiles in the voltage range of 3–4.55 V (vs. Li/Li⁺) at 45 °C: (d) bare, (e) 0.01 M Mg(ClO₄)₂, and (f) 0.03 M Mg(ClO₄)₂.

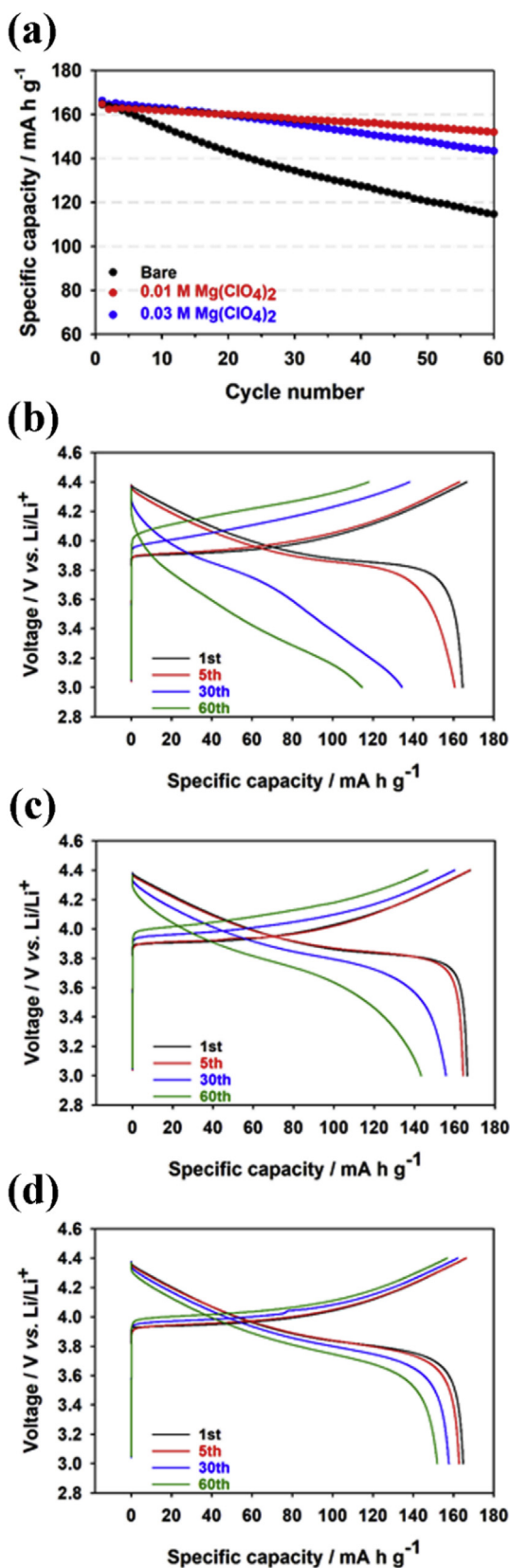


Fig. 7. (a) Cycle performance of LiCoO₂ cycled with bare, 0.01 M Mg(ClO₄)₂-containing, and 0.03 M Mg(ClO₄)₂-containing electrolytes in the voltage range of 3–4.4 V (vs. Li/Li⁺) at 60 °C. Corresponding voltage profiles: (b) bare, (c) 0.01 M Mg(ClO₄)₂, and (d) 0.03 M Mg(ClO₄)₂.

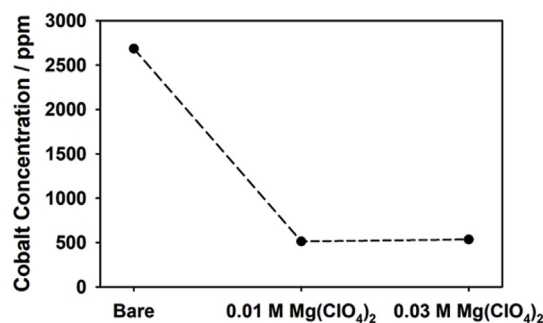


Fig. 8. The amounts of Co dissolution after storing charged LiCoO₂ electrodes in various electrolytes at 85 °C for 15 days. The electrodes were charged to 4.55 V (vs. Li/Li⁺).

was decomposed into F⁻ and PF₅ at high voltages, which is followed by the reaction between Mg²⁺ and F⁻ to form MgF₂ on the LiCoO₂ surface. Moreover, PVDF binder was decomposed through chemical dehydrofluorination. The released F⁻ reacted with Mg²⁺ to form MgF₂ on the LiCoO₂ surface. The thickness of MgF₂-based coating layer was a few tens of nanometers.

LiCoO₂ electrochemically coated with MgF₂ suppressed Co dissolution in electrolytes. As a result, MgF₂-coated LiCoO₂ showed excellent electrochemical performance including the high reversible capacity of 198 mA h g⁻¹ and stable cycle performance over 100 cycles in the voltage range of 3–4.55 V (vs. Li/Li⁺) at 45 °C. We believe that this simple electrochemical coating method can be extended to various metal fluorides-coated cathode materials.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpowsour.2019.04.011>.

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