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01 Jan 1973

## Possible Applications of Surface Electromagnetic Waves to Measure Absorption Coefficients

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R. W. Alexander et al., "Possible Applications of Surface Electromagnetic Waves to Measure Absorption Coefficients," *The Journal of Chemical Physics*, pp. 3492 - 3494, American Institute of Physics, Jan 1973. The definitive version is available at <https://doi.org/10.1063/1.1680508>

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Cite as: J. Chem. Phys. **59**, 3492 (1973); <https://doi.org/10.1063/1.1680508>  
Submitted: 14 June 1973 • Published Online: 04 September 2003

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## Possible applications of surface electromagnetic waves to measure absorption coefficients\*

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(Received 14 June 1973)

We show that surface electromagnetic waves can probably be used to measure the absorption coefficients of materials overlaying metals. The proposed experimental method is illustrated in the infrared frequency range using water, Teflon, and polyethylene as sample materials.

## I. INTRODUCTION

We suggest an application of surface electromagnetic (SEM) waves<sup>1-3</sup> to measure the optical constants of materials which *cannot* propagate SEM waves themselves. The sample need only be a thin layer upon a gold or other metal surface. To measure the optical properties of the sample, the propagation distances of the SEM waves are measured, and using the results of Bell *et al.*,<sup>4</sup> the optical constants of the sample can be determined. The method promises to be quite sensitive and may be particularly useful even for samples of monolayer thickness. In what follows, we present details of the method and the necessary theoretical results and then give some illustrative calculations.

## II. THE METHOD

The propagation distance,  $L_x$ , of SEM waves is measured in a rather direct fashion using two prisms as illustrated in Fig. 1. The first prism serves to launch an SEM wave (surface plasmon here) in the metal substrate upon which the sample has been placed as a layer. The second prism couples the energy out of the surface wave. By measuring the energy coupled out as a function of prism separation,  $D$ , the  $1/e$  propagation distance of the SEM wave may be determined.<sup>5</sup>

We assume the SEM wave is propagating in the  $+x$  direction, the  $z$  direction is normal to the sample-metal interface, the complex dielectric constant of the sample is  $\eta \equiv \eta_1 + i\eta_2$ , and the dielectric constant of the metal substrate is  $\epsilon \equiv \epsilon_1 + i\epsilon_2$ . We shall assume  $\epsilon_1 < -\eta_1$  in the frequency region of interest so that surface plasmons exist at the sample-metal interface. The prism will be assumed to be nonabsorbing and to have an index of refraction  $n_p$ .

The condition for exciting surface plasmons with

radiation of wavenumber  $\sigma$  incident upon the prism base with an angle  $\theta$  is<sup>4</sup>

$$n_p \sin \theta = \text{Re} \left\{ \epsilon(\sigma) \eta(\sigma) / [\epsilon(\sigma) + \eta(\sigma)] \right\}^{1/2}. \quad (1)$$

For surface plasmons this reduces to

$$n_p \sin \theta \approx [\eta_1(\sigma)]^{1/2} \quad (2)$$

as long as  $\sigma$  is not too close to the surface plasmon frequency, since  $|\epsilon_1(\sigma)| \gg \eta_1(\sigma)$ . This means excitation of the surface plasmon requires  $\theta$  equal to the critical angle. The imaginary part of the  $x$ -component of the wave vector (i. e.,  $k_{2x}$ ) determines the propagation distance  $L_x \equiv 1/k_{2x}$ . The general expression<sup>4</sup> for  $L_x$  is rather complicated; so, we give here an approximation, namely

$$L_x \approx [1/(2\pi\sigma)] [\eta_1^{1/2} \epsilon_1^2 / (\eta_2 \epsilon_1^2 + \epsilon_2 \eta_1^2)]. \quad (3)$$

This approximation is valid for  $|\epsilon_1| \gg \eta_1$ . If the sample has a reasonable absorption, then  $\epsilon_2 \eta_1^2$  usually can be neglected compared to  $\eta_2 \epsilon_1^2$ , and we find the simple relation

$$L_x \approx 1/\alpha, \quad (4)$$

where  $\alpha$  is the absorption coefficient of the over-layer sample.

Figure 2 shows  $L_x$  for surface plasmons on gold.<sup>6</sup> Below  $5000 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $L_x$  is large enough (greater than 1 mm) to be useful for this method. Also shown on the same figure is  $L_x$  for a gold substrate with a

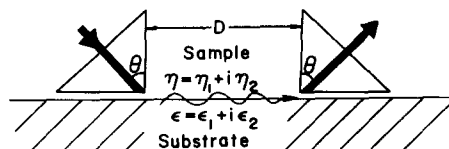


FIG. 1. Schematic diagram of method to measure  $L_x$ .

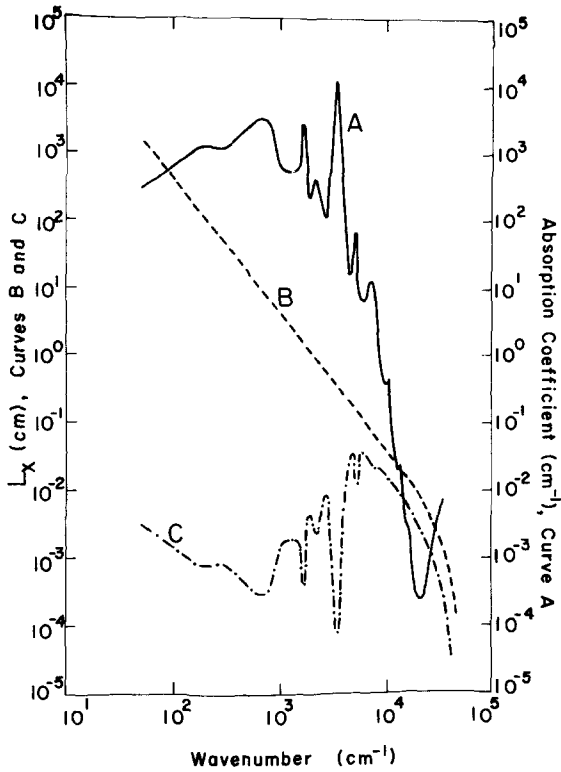


FIG. 2. Curve A shows the absorption coefficient for water; curve B shows  $L_x$  for surface plasmons on gold with a vacuum overlayer; curve C shows  $L_x$  for surface plasmons on gold with a water overlayer.

water overlayer. Note that below  $5000\text{ cm}^{-1}$ , the relation  $L_x = 1/\alpha$  holds to within one percent. Above this frequency  $\epsilon_2\eta_1^2$  can no longer be neglected and Eq. (3) must be used.

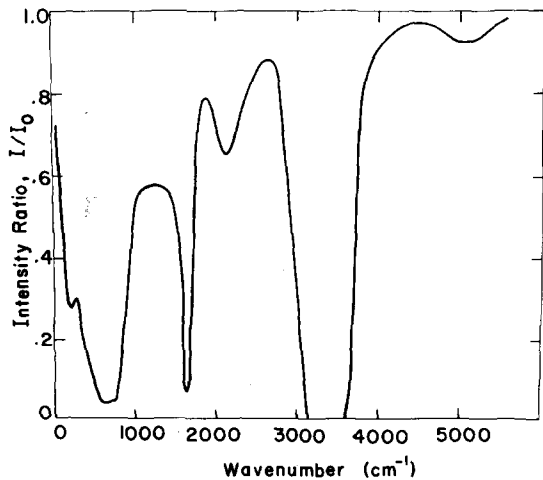


FIG. 3. Calculated transmission ratio for surface plasmons on gold with a water overlayer as a function of frequency. Prism separation is  $10\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ .

III. SOME EXAMPLES

As a sample calculation, we have chosen water and used the data for the optical constants of water from the compilation of Hale and Query.<sup>7</sup> We shall consider a thick layer of water and a monolayer of water, both upon a gold substrate. We first discuss the "thick" water overlayer.

For water on a gold substrate, the inequality  $\epsilon_2\eta_1^2 \ll \eta_2\epsilon_1^2$  holds (to one percent) for frequencies below  $5000\text{ cm}^{-1}$ . Figure 3 shows the ratio ("transmission ratio") of the intensity received at the second prism with the water overlayer ( $I$ ) to the intensity received when there is a vacuum overlayer ( $I_0$ ). The prism separation is  $10\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ . This ratio is identical to the transmission through a  $10\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  thickness of water showing that  $L_x = 1/\alpha$  as it should.

This technique is of more importance when the surface itself is of interest. As a simple example, we consider a monolayer of water on a gold substrate. Experimental results<sup>8</sup> indicate that monolayer coverage is about  $9 \times 10^{14}$  molecules per  $\text{cm}^2$ . Assuming this value, we have calculated the "transmission ratio" for a 10-cm prism separation for a monolayer of water. To do this we set  $\eta_1 = 1$  and assumed  $\eta_2$  proportional to the concentration and used  $9 \times 10^{14}\text{ cm}^{-3}$  as the effective concentration for the monolayer. The calculated "transmission ratio" is shown in Fig. 4. The frequency region over which this method can be used is limited by the attenuation in the gold. Above  $1000\text{ cm}^{-1}$ , a 10-cm path difference is no longer feasible because of the absorption in the gold substrate. The intensity  $I_0$  at  $1000\text{ cm}^{-1}$  is 7% of that at  $50\text{ cm}^{-1}$  due to the attenuation in the gold substrate. The

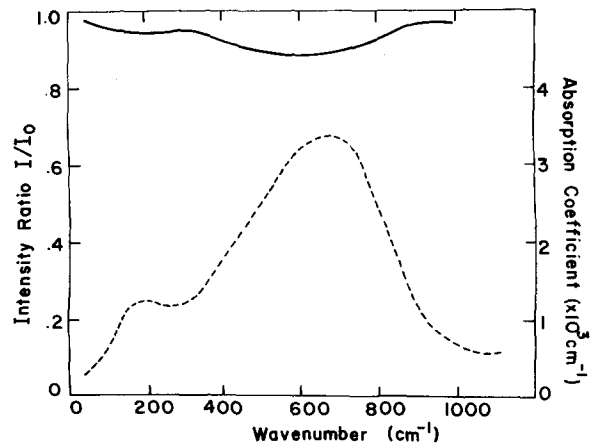


FIG. 4. Calculated transmission ratio for surface plasmons on gold with a monolayer of water as a function of frequency (solid curve). Prism separation is  $10\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ . Absorption coefficient of water (dashed curve).

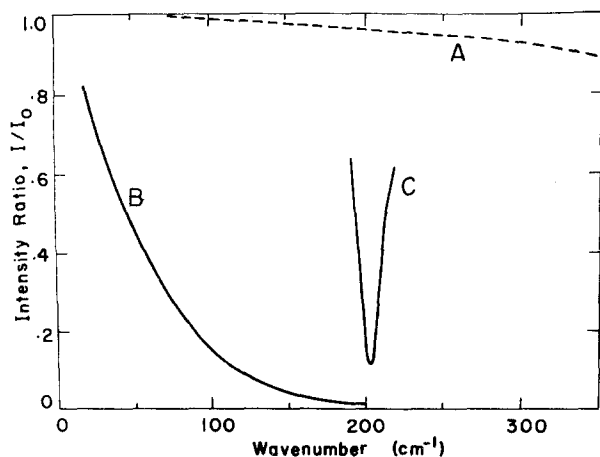


FIG. 5. Calculated transmission ratio for surface plasmons on copper with: A, polyethylene overlayer and prism separation of 1 cm; B, black polyethylene overlayer and prism separation of 0.1 cm; C, teflon overlayer and prism separation of 0.01 cm.

value of  $L_x$ , due to the increase in the electron mean-free-path, increases approximately as  $1/T$  as the temperature is lowered. Thus, for low temperatures, even greater experimental sensitivity using larger effective prism separation is contemplated. Also, it should be pointed out that the absorption coefficient for an adsorbed mono-layer of water may not resemble that of bulk water too closely and this experiment would be interesting to perform.

Although the mean-free-path of surface plasmons on copper<sup>4,6</sup> is less than the mean-free-path on gold, copper is also a suitable substrate. Figure 5 shows the rather weak absorption in Teflon<sup>9</sup> at  $200\text{ cm}^{-1}$ . The Teflon is coated on a copper substrate and the path length is 0.1 mm. Also shown is the transmission ratio for polyethylene<sup>10</sup> (1-cm path length) and black polyethylene (0.1-cm path length).

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Surface plasmons on a metal-sample interface can be used to measure the absorption coefficient

of the sample. The method is particularly useful for very thin or dilute samples. It is sensitive enough that it may be useful for the study of sorbed atoms on metal surfaces.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank Dr. H. Queisser, Dr. W. F. Parks, Mr. G. Kovener, Mr. L. Teng, Mr. K. Bhasin, and Mr. R. Thompson for their help with this problem. We want to acknowledge the strong encouragement of this work by the personal interests of Dr. A. C. Jones of the Shell Oil Company and Dr. Gary Achenbach of the Continental Oil Company.

\*Work partially supported by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR-F-44620-69-C-0122), the National Science Foundation (GH-34551), the Max Planck Society, and the Research Corporation. Graduate Center for Materials Research Contribution No. 191.

†Work begun while on sabbatical leave at the Max Planck Institut für Festkörperforschung, Stuttgart, Germany.

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