Solid state synthesis and X-ray diffraction characterization of Pu $3^+ (1-2x)Pu^{4+} + xCa^{2+} + xPO_4$

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To cite this version:


HAL Id: emse-00498244
https://hal-emse.ccsd.cnrs.fr/emse-00498244
Submitted on 17 Aug 2010

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SOLID STATE SYNTHESIS AND X-RAY DIFFRACTION CHARACTERIZATION OF 
Pu\(^{3+}_{(1-2x)}\)Pu\(^{4+}_x\)Ca\(^{2+}_x\)PO\(_4\)

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the framework of the 1991 French law concerning nuclear waste management, several studies have been carried out in order to elaborate crystalline matrices for specific immobilization of the radionuclides. In the case of high level and long-lived minor actinides (Np, Am and Cm), which are high level and long-lived radioactive elements, monazite, a light rare earth (Re) orthophosphate with general formula Re\(^{3+}\)PO\(_4\) (with Re = La to Gd), has been proposed as a host matrix, thanks to its high resistance to self irradiation and its low solubility. Monazite crystallizes in the monoclinic space group \(P2_1/n\). In this structure, trivalent cations (Re\(^{3+}\)) could be substituted by an equivalent amount of bivalent (\(A^{2+}\)) and tetravalent (\(B^{4+}\)) cations, allowing the simultaneous incorporation of Am\(^{3+}\), Cm\(^{3+}\) and Np\(^{4+}\). According to Podor’s work\(^1\), the limit of a tetravalent element incorporation in monazite is related to its size in the ninefold coordination (\(R^{IX}\)). Re\(^{3+}_{1-2x}A^{2+}_xB^{4+}_xPO_4\) exists in the monazite structure if 
\[1,216Å \geq R_{\text{average}} \geq 1,107Å\] and 
\[1,238 \geq R_{\text{ratio}} \geq 1\]

\[R_{\text{average}}=(1-2x)R_{\text{Re}^{3+}} + xR_{A^{2+}} + xR_{B^{4+}}\]  
\[R_{\text{ratio}}=\frac{(1-2x)R_{\text{Re}^{3+}} + xR_{A^{2+}}}{(1-2x)R_{\text{Re}^{3+}} + xR_{B^{4+}}}\]

The present work deals with the incorporation of the Pu\(^{4+}/Ca^{2+}\) couple in the monazite structure by solid state synthesis. According to the equation (1) and (2), the maximum incorporation is \(x=0.43\), with Re\(^{3+}\)=Pu\(^{3+}\), leading to a compound with the formula Pu\(^{3+}_{0.14}\)Pu\(^{4+}_{0.43}\)Ca\(^{2+}_{0.43}\)PO\(_4\).

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The monazite powders were prepared according to the following reactions:

\[\text{Exp. } A: \text{PuO}_2 + \text{NH}_4\text{H}_2\text{PO}_4 \rightarrow \text{Pu}^{3+}\text{PO}_4 + \text{NH}_3 \uparrow + 3/2\text{H}_2\text{O} \uparrow + 1/4\text{O}_2 \uparrow\]
Exp. B: $\frac{1}{2}\text{PuO}_2 + \frac{1}{2}\text{CaO} + \text{NH}_4\text{H}_2\text{PO}_4 \rightarrow \text{Pu}^{4+}_{0.5}\text{Ca}^{2+}_{0.5}\text{PO}_4 + \text{NH}_3 \uparrow + \frac{3}{2}\text{H}_2\text{O} \uparrow$  \hspace{1cm} (4)

Both compounds were prepared on a few milligrams scale. Starting materials were homogenized by manual grinding in an agate mortar and then fired in a platinum crucible at $1400^\circ\text{C}$ for 2h under air atmosphere in an alumina tubular furnace. The whole process was repeated in order to obtain homogeneous materials. Powders were characterized by X-ray diffraction at room temperature using a high-resolution Siemens D5000 X-ray diffractometer with a curved quartz monochromator and copper radiation from a conventional tube source.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Structure analysis
X-ray diffraction patterns of the two resulting materials are shown on Figure 1. For both, it was found that the plutonium phosphate crystallizes in the monazite structure as expected. For the experiment A, a secondary phase was identified as a tetravalent plutonium phosphate $\text{Pu}^{4+}\text{P}_2\text{O}_7$. This suggests that under air atmosphere, the $\text{Pu}^{4+}$ is not completely reduced into $\text{Pu}^{3+}$. This result is in agreement with those of Bamberger who showed that the apparent stability of $\text{PuP}_2\text{O}_7$ in air is due to its very slow rate of decomposition into $\text{PuPO}_4$. On the other hand, the result of the experiment B is single phased.

![Figure 1](image_url)

3.2 Determination of the chemical composition
Recently, Terra showed that for $\text{La}^{3+}_{1-2x}\text{Th}^{4+}_x\text{Ca}^{2+}_x\text{PO}_4$ and $\text{Ca}^{2+}_{0.5}\text{Th}^{4+}_{0.5}\text{U}^{4+}_y\text{PO}_4$ solid-solutions, the variation of the cell parameters versus $x$ and $y$ is linear from 0 to 0.5. If we assume a similar evolution with the $\text{Ca}^{2+}_{0.5}\text{Np}^{4+}_{0.5}\text{Pu}^{4+}_x\text{PO}_4$ solid solution, the cell
parameters of Ca$^{2+}$$_{0.5}$Pu$^{4+}$$_{0.5}$PO$_4$ (round points on Figure 2) can be extrapolated from the parameters of the two compositions of the Ca$^{2+}$$_{0.5}$Np$^{4+}$$_{0.5-y}$Pu$^{4+}$$_y$PO$_4$ solid-solution reported by Tabuteau$^4$ (Table 2). The Pu$^{4+}$ incorporation rate in the monazite structure can thus be deduced from the cell parameters (square points on Figure 2) of the monazite B powder. Results show that the monazite B chemical composition (Pu$^{3+}$$_{0.4}$Pu$^{4+}$$_{0.3}$Ca$^{2+}$$_{0.3}$PO$_4$) is less than expected. According to our recent work on the incorporation of Ce$^{4+}$ in the monazite structure$^5$, residual Ca$^{2+}$ should be incorporated in a secondary phase Ca$_2$P$_2$O$_7$. This compound was not observed by X-ray diffraction most likely because of the unfavourable signal to noise ratio.

Table 2  Lattice parameters of Ca$^{2+}$$_{0.5}$Np$^{4+}_{0.5-y}$Pu$^{4+}$$_y$PO$_4$ solid solution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a (nm)</th>
<th>b (nm)</th>
<th>c (nm)</th>
<th>β (°)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ca$<em>{0.5}$Np$</em>{0.5}$PO$_4$</td>
<td>0.6666</td>
<td>0.6854</td>
<td>0.6370</td>
<td>104.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ca$<em>{0.5}$Np$</em>{0.35}$Pu$_{0.15}$PO$_4$</td>
<td>0.6649</td>
<td>0.6840</td>
<td>0.6351</td>
<td>104.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2  Lattice parameters of Ca$^{2+}$$_{0.5}$Np$^{4+}_{1-y}$Pu$^{4+}$$_y$PO$_4$ and Pu$^{3+}_{1-2x}$Pu$^{4+}_{x}$Ca$^{2+}$$_x$PO$_4$ solid solution versus y and x

4 CONCLUSION
The solid state synthesis of Pu$^{3+}$($1-2x$)Pu$^{4+}_x$Ca$^{2+}_x$PO$_4$ under air was carried out. Pu$^{3+}$PO$_4$ was not obtained as a single phase and the maximum incorporation of Pu$^{4+}$ in the monazite structure was found to be around x = 0.3. To complete the present work, the same experiments will be carried out under inert atmosphere.

References