

Materials challenges in rechargeable lithium-air batteries

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Lithium-air batteries have received extraordinary attention recently owing to their theoretical gravimetric energies being considerably higher than those of Li-ion batteries. There are, however, significant challenges to practical implementation, including low energy efficiency, cycle life, and power capability. These are due primarily to the lack of fundamental understanding of oxygen reduction and evolution reaction kinetics and parasitic reactions between oxygen redox intermediate species and nominally inactive battery components such as carbon in the oxygen electrode and electrolytes. In this article, we discuss recent advances in the mechanistic understanding of oxygen redox reactions in nonaqueous electrolytes and the search for electrolytes and electrode materials that are chemically stable in the oxygen electrode. In addition, methods to protect lithium metal against corrosion by water and dendrite formation in aqueous lithium-air batteries are discussed. Further materials innovations lie at the heart of research and development efforts that are needed to enable the development of lithium-oxygen batteries with enhanced round-trip efficiency and cycle life.

Introduction

The need to store electricity is becoming increasingly critical to link energy supply to our energy demands as we shift from the use of fossil fuels to renewable energy sources such as solar and wind. Advances in the past two decades in electrochemical energy storage technologies such as Li-ion batteries have enabled the ubiquity of mobile electronic devices in our lives. The expansion of electrified transportation to driving ranges of ~300 miles per recharge, as offered by vehicles based on internal combustion engines, and the use of intermittent solar and wind energy for stationary power applications call for storage technologies with much greater gravimetric energies than Li-ion batteries. Energy storage schemes that involve the transfer of multiple electrons during discharge such as lithium-air¹ and zinc-air batteries,² as well as Li-S batteries (see the Nazar et al. article in this issue), can provide higher gravimetric energies than Li-ion batteries that are constrained largely to one-electron intercalation.¹⁻³ Although the basic principle behind the operation of metal-air batteries (or more accurately metal-O₂ since only the O₂

drawn from the air is used; other reactive constituents [e.g., CO₂] need to be excluded to a sufficient level) is well known, there are immense challenges to overcome in order to make these technologies practical and to do so with a battery that delivers the promised step-change in energy storage. In this article, we discuss some key materials challenges and highlight recent advances in Li-O₂ battery research.

The operation of Li-O₂ batteries is based on the conversion of stored chemical energy in lithium (fuel) and oxygen into electrical energy via the formation of reaction products containing lithium ions and reduced oxygen species.⁴⁻⁶ This scheme incorporates operational elements of a fuel cell (e.g., reduction of gaseous O₂ from the environment during discharge) with that of a battery (storage of electrons and Li⁺ in the oxygen electrode), and therefore represents a departure from conventional constraints of Li-ion positive electrode development. Li-O₂ batteries differ from Li-ion batteries in that rather than intercalating lithium into a host lattice containing transition metal ions (see the Introductory article in this issue), oxygen is reduced to solid Li₂O₂, filling the pore

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spaces of the oxygen electrode in nonaqueous electrolytes and soluble LiOH in aqueous electrolytes.

The replacement of intercalation cathodes containing heavy transition metal ions that typically undergo 1 electron redox reaction with O₂ from air that undergoes 2 electron redox reactions offers the possibility of higher gravimetric energy. As the O₂ is available from the air, the cost is potentially lower than Li-ion batteries. Using nonaqueous electrolytes and lithium as the negative electrode, Li-O₂ batteries have an upper gravimetric energy limit of ~3500 Wh/kg_{Li₂O₂}^{3,7-10} (or ~3500 Wh/kg_{cell} considering the cell weight with lithium and oxygen only), where oxygen is reduced to form Li₂O₂ (2Li + O₂ ↔ Li₂O₂; 2.96 V versus Li/Li⁺). In contrast, Li-O₂ batteries that use aqueous electrolytes and lithium as the negative electrode, where LiOH is formed (2Li + 1/2O₂ + H₂O ↔ 2LiOH; 3.2 V versus Li/Li⁺), have lower gravimetric energies, with upper limits of ~700–1000 Wh/kg_{cell} (considering the cell weight with lithium, oxygen, and seven to twelve-fold excess water).^{3,11,12} If gravimetric energy densities are calculated based on lithium metal alone, then much higher numbers are obtained,^{5,13} but one cannot neglect the mass of O₂ and water.

Despite the fact that the estimated upper limits of gravimetric energy for Li-O₂ batteries vary depending on different assumptions used in the oxygen electrode¹ reported previously, they are at least ~2–3 times higher than those of state-of-the-art Li-ion batteries.¹⁻³ It is important to recall that in energy storage there is no equivalent of Moore's Law that describes a doubling of performance every 18 months in microelectronic devices (e.g., floating point operations per second or data storage per chip footprint area). Additionally, these large gravimetric energy gains offered by Li-O₂ chemistry can be fully realized only if lithium instead of conventional Li-ion negative electrode materials such as carbon is used due to the much greater gravimetric capacity of lithium (3861 mAh/g_{Li}, Li⁺ + e⁻ → Li) compared to carbon (372 mAh/g_C, Li⁺ + C₆ + e⁻ → LiC₆).¹⁴ In this article, we will consider individually the challenges and opportunities for nonaqueous and aqueous Li-O₂ batteries, with a particular focus on the current understanding of the reaction mechanisms and the materials used, which are issues that must be addressed in transforming these batteries from theory to practice.

Challenges and opportunities: Nonaqueous Li-O₂ batteries

Notable progress has been made in the development of rechargeable nonaqueous Li-O₂ batteries in the past five years. Work to date has enabled prototypical lab-scale demonstration of significant gravimetric energy density enhancements of Li-O₂ positive electrodes (Figure 1a) compared to state-of-the-art lithium-ion electrodes

such as LiCoO₂,¹⁵ LiFePO₄,¹⁶ and LiNi_{0.5}Mn_{0.5}O₂.¹⁷ Reported gravimetric energy densities of cells based on oxygen electrodes^{4,9,10} upon first discharge are ~3 times higher than those based on Li-ion positive electrodes (~600 Wh/kg_{cell}),^{17,18} as shown in Figure 1b. It is important to note that the gravimetric energies for Li-O₂ systems only include the weight of carbon, Li₂O₂, and a metallic lithium anode, which are necessary to fairly compare the potential of the oxygen electrode relative to conventional Li-ion positive electrodes. Packaged Li-O₂ cell prototypes have not been widely developed, and the true gravimetric energy advantage of practical devices is not known. It is too early in the exploration of Li-O₂ battery technology to make accurate predictions of practical energy storage. Since the nature of the electrodes or electrolytes that might be used in a practical system are unknown, their tolerance to constituents in the air other than O₂ (e.g., CO₂) and the nature of any O₂ filtration approaches that might have to be taken to operate in air are also unknown. Additionally, if Li metal is used as the anode, the excess of Li that might be required in a new generation of protected Li anodes is as yet unknown. Such issues need to be investigated before hard-and-fast evidence-based estimates of practical performance can be made.

Unfortunately, rechargeable nonaqueous Li-O₂ batteries currently suffer from low round-trip efficiency (energy delivered on discharge divided by energy consumed on charge), cycle life, and power capability,^{1,3-5,19} which limits their practical use. These performance challenges result, in part, from a lack of fundamental understanding of the mechanisms of oxygen reduction and evolution reactions in the oxygen electrode. Challenges also include the chemical instability of active and inactive components, including the dimensional stability

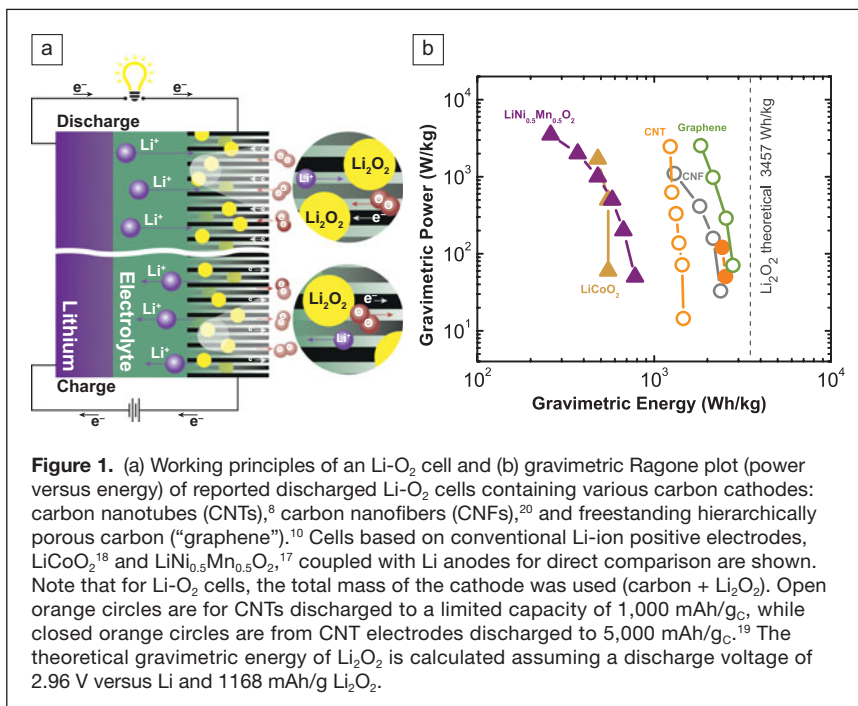


Figure 1. (a) Working principles of an Li-O₂ cell and (b) gravimetric Ragone plot (power versus energy) of reported discharged Li-O₂ cells containing various carbon cathodes: carbon nanotubes (CNTs),⁸ carbon nanofibers (CNFs),²⁰ and freestanding hierarchically porous carbon ("graphene").¹⁰ Cells based on conventional Li-ion positive electrodes, LiCoO₂¹⁸ and LiNi_{0.5}Mn_{0.5}O₂,¹⁷ coupled with Li anodes for direct comparison are shown. Note that for Li-O₂ cells, the total mass of the cathode was used (carbon + Li₂O₂). Open orange circles are for CNTs discharged to a limited capacity of 1,000 mAh/g_C, while closed orange circles are from CNT electrodes discharged to 5,000 mAh/g_C.¹⁹ The theoretical gravimetric energy of Li₂O₂ is calculated assuming a discharge voltage of 2.96 V versus Li and 1168 mAh/g Li₂O₂.

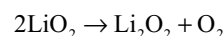
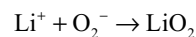
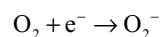
of metallic lithium during repeated oxidation and plating, the chemical stability of conventional current collector materials for the oxygen electrode (such as carbon), and nonaqueous electrolytes in the oxygen electrode. In the first part of this article, we discuss recent research findings that highlight the current understanding of oxygen reduction and evolution reactions in nonaqueous electrolytes and the state of the search for chemically stable nonaqueous electrolytes and porous cathode substrates.

Using vertically aligned carbon nanotubes (CNTs) as the oxygen electrode has provided valuable insights into the mechanism of oxygen reduction and evolution reactions, specifically Li_2O_2 growth and oxidation mechanisms and the relationship between Li_2O_2 morphology/chemistry and the voltage penalty, or overpotential, associated with Li_2O_2 growth and oxidation. Toroidal structures of Li_2O_2 (Figure 2a), with sizes of hundreds of nanometers, form upon discharge at

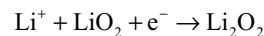
high discharge potentials (greater than $2.7 V_{\text{Li}}$). The aspect ratio of the toroids are scaled with the toroidal diameter, while small Li_2O_2 particles (Figure 2b, $<20 \text{ nm}$) are formed conformally on CNTs at discharge voltages lower than $2.7 V_{\text{Li}}$.^{10,20–22} Toroidal morphologies are characteristic of electrochemically formed Li_2O_2 , and they have been observed in a broad range of non-carbonate electrolytes (ethers and dimethyl sulfoxide [DMSO]).^{10,22,23} Mitchell et al.²³ have shown that these toroids are composed of thin plates of epitaxially oriented Li_2O_2 , $\sim 10 \text{ nm}$ in thickness with the $(001)_{\text{Li}_2\text{O}_2}$ direction normal to the plate surface (Figure 2c–d). Recent surface-sensitive x-ray absorption near edge structure (XANES) findings suggest that although Li_2O_2 is invariably formed upon battery discharge, the electronic structure of the surfaces of the toroids have oxygen-rich LiO_2 -like species (Figure 2f), while the conformally coated particles retain a more stoichiometric Li_2O_2 -related configuration. These findings are in agreement with

recent theoretical calculations that reported the thermodynamically stable $(001)_{\text{Li}_2\text{O}_2}$ surface of Li_2O_2 , which is the dominant surface termination of toroidal Li_2O_2 particles, should possess LiO_2 -like character.²⁴

The differences in the morphology and surface chemistry of Li_2O_2 particles may be explained by the following oxygen reduction elementary reaction steps²⁵ in nonaqueous electrolytes:



or



The appearance of LiO_2 as an intermediate (Figure 2e), followed by a disproportionation or a second electron transfer reaction to form Li_2O_2 , is supported in work by Peng et al.²⁵ using *in situ* surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy (SERS). At high discharge potentials (low overpotentials), the growth of toroidal Li_2O_2 particles may involve the formation of soluble reaction intermediate species such as O_2^- and LiO_2 and the growth of Li_2O_2 by chemical disproportionation of LiO_2 .^{26,27} These findings suggest that the increasing surface area associated with the increasing disc diameter during discharge promotes Li_2O_2 growth onto the disc surfaces, leading to the development of thick, toroidal particles. Lowering the discharge potential (increasing the overpotential) promotes

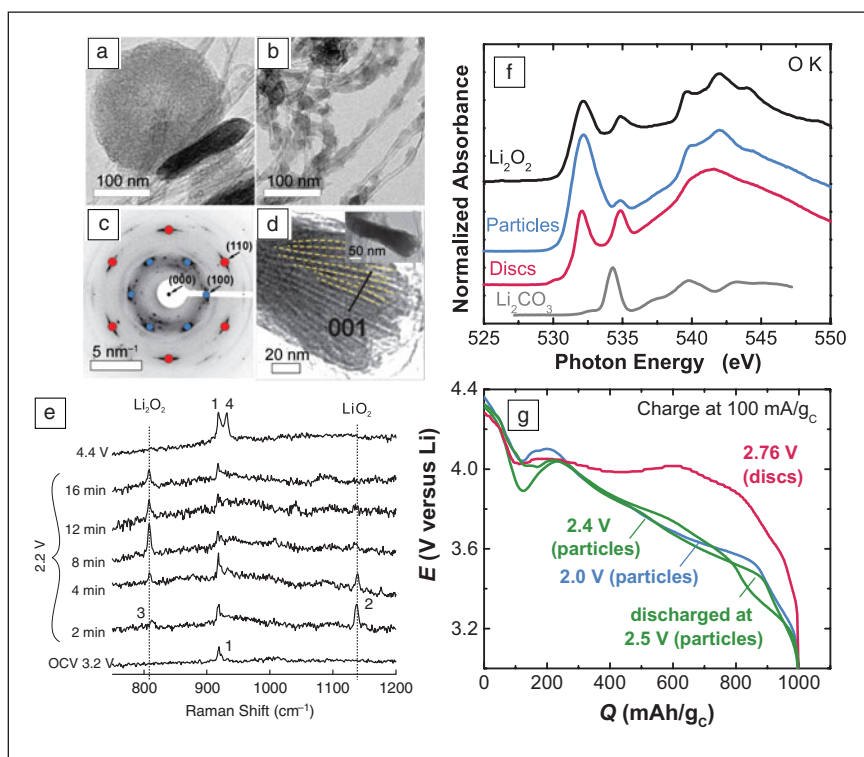


Figure 2. Transmission electron microscopy (TEM) images of carbon nanotube (CNT) electrodes discharged at (a) 10 mA/g to 4000 mAh g⁻¹ showing Li_2O_2 toroids, (b) 2.4 V to 5,000 mAh g⁻¹, (c) electron diffraction patterns of toroidal Li_2O_2 , and (d) high-resolution TEM imaging of [001]-oriented Li_2O_2 plates, with lower magnification in inset. Reproduced with permission from References 19 and 23. © 2013 American Chemical Society. (e) *In situ* surface-enhanced Raman spectra during oxygen reduction reaction (ORR) and oxygen evolution reaction (OER) on an Au electrode in O_2 -saturated electrolyte. The peaks are assigned as follows: (1) C–C stretch of CH_3CN at 918 cm^{-1} , (2) O–O stretch of LiO_2 at 1137 cm^{-1} , (3) O–O stretch of Li_2O_2 at 808 cm^{-1} , and (4) Cl–O stretch of ClO_4 at 931 cm^{-1} . Adapted with permission from Reference 25. (f) Surface-sensitive x-ray absorption near-edge structure O–K edge data of toroids formed at 10 mA/g to 4,000 mAh g⁻¹ and particles formed at 2.4 V to 5,000 mAh g⁻¹ showing that particles closely resemble stoichiometric Li_2O_2 , while toroids exhibit LiO_2 -like features. (g) Constant-current charging of Li_2O_2 discharged at 2.0, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.76 V versus Li/Li^+ at 100 mA/g_c, showing the evolution of charge potential (E) with charge capacity (Q), with particle charging occurring at a lower average voltage penalty than toroid oxidation. Reprinted with permission from References 19 and 23. © 2013 American Chemical Society.

the kinetics of the second electron transfer step such that soluble reaction intermediates are reduced to form Li_2O_2 conformally coated on CNTs before they diffuse.

Differences in the morphology and surface chemistry of Li_2O_2 toroids and conformally coated particles on CNTs appear to influence Li_2O_2 oxidation kinetics.¹⁹ Upon charging at low rates, the oxidation of conformally coated Li_2O_2 particles on CNTs exhibit a solid-solution-like voltage profile, while oxidation of Li_2O_2 toroids yields two-phase oxidation with a higher voltage penalty (Figure 2g). Although the physical origin of this observed difference is not fully understood, it is hypothesized¹⁹ that the oxidation kinetics of Li_2O_2 are dependent on surface termination. Thus, the oxidation of Li_2O_2 particles coated on CNTs with multiple facets can occur at different voltages, giving rise to the sloping voltage in contrast to toroidal particles with predominantly (001) _{Li_2O_2} surface terminations. This work highlights the need to understand how the surface chemistry and microstructure of discharged Li_2O_2 influence oxygen evolution reaction (OER) kinetics and opens up potential opportunities to explore nucleation and growth mechanisms of Li_2O_2 particles for high-energy and/or high-power Li-O₂ batteries.

More interestingly, electron rather than lithium-ion transport limits the electrochemical oxidation kinetics of Li_2O_2 when the oxidation current is not limited by charge transfer kinetics under large overpotentials. This was shown in recent *in situ* transmission electron microscopy (TEM) imaging experiments with solid-state microbatteries²⁸ consisting of Si nanowires (NWs) coated with Li-ion-conducting solid electrolyte contacting Li_2O_2 particles. In particular, as shown in Figure 3, the oxidation of toroidal Li_2O_2 particles at very high overpotentials is initiated preferentially at the CNT/ Li_2O_2 interface, as evidenced by the development of a light-contrast stripe beginning along the CNT axes (highlighted by the dashed red lines) of the CNT bundle contacting the Li_2O_2 particle. The formation of the light-contrast stripe in TEM can be explained by the thinning of Li_2O_2 particles at the Li_2O_2 /CNT interface associated with electrochemical oxidation of Li_2O_2 ($\text{Li}_2\text{O}_2 \rightarrow 2\text{Li}^+ + \text{O}_2 + 2\text{e}^-$) and the concurrent release of O_2 , while lithium ions migrate through the solid electrolyte coating the Si NW, and electrons flow through CNTs to the Au substrate.

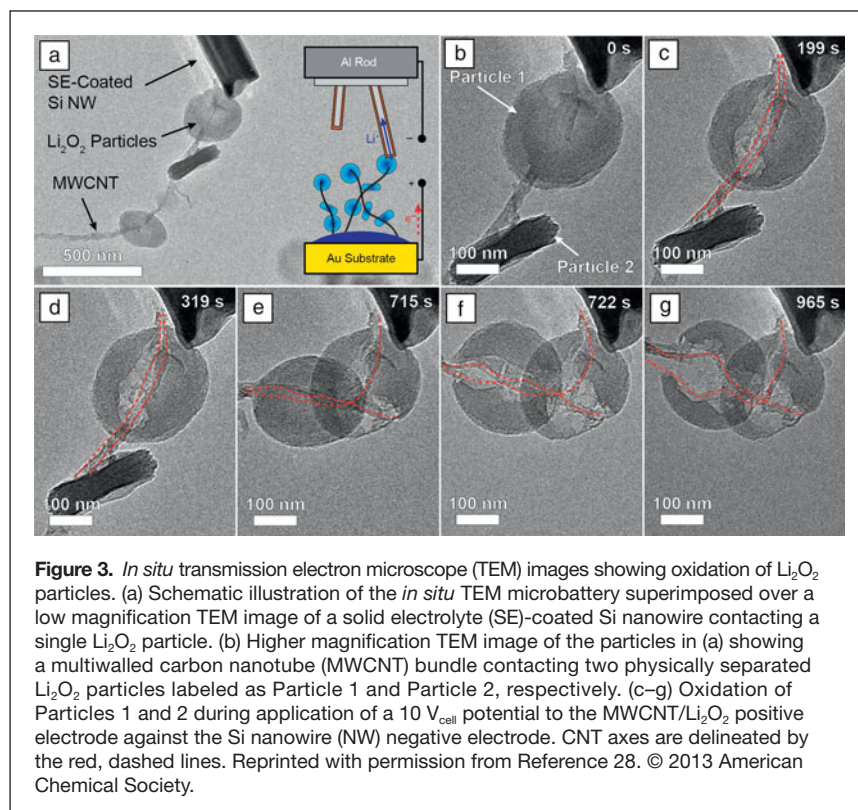
The preferential oxidation at the MWCNT (multiwalled CNT)/ Li_2O_2 interface, but not at the interface between Li_2O_2 /solid electrolyte/Si, suggests that electrochemical oxidation kinetics of Li_2O_2 is electron-transport-limited instead of lithium-ion-transport-limited at very high overpotentials. These findings suggest that electrodes with large specific surface area to maximize the Li_2O_2 /electrode interfacial area

and high electronic conductivity to provide facile electron transport to reaction sites are desirable for the design of high rate rechargeable Li-O₂ batteries.

Stability of inactive components in the oxygen electrode

Understanding the stability of inactive electrode components in Li-O₂ batteries is an intensive area of research since their stability is a major factor determining rechargeability and cycle life.^{29–35} Differential electrochemical mass spectrometry (DEMS) experiments on isotopically labeled ¹³C cathodes have suggested that after discharge, a thin layer of Li_2CO_3 is present between Li_2O_2 and carbon.²⁹ This hypothesis is supported by XANES studies⁸ on discharged CNTs in Li-O₂ batteries, which show that Li_2CO_3 is present at the interface between Li_2O_2 and the CNT walls on first discharge, and suggest that carbon is not chemically stable during the oxygen reduction reaction (ORR) and is potentially reactive against Li_2O_2 and ORR intermediates such as O_2^- and LiO_2 .

Recent *in situ* ambient pressure x-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) measurements further demonstrate the instability of carbon during ORR³⁰ at the interface between graphene and a solid-state lithium ion conductor (with no nonaqueous electrolyte present). The formation of epoxy groups on the carbon surface and their conversion to carbonates in the presence of LiO_2 was observed and provides direct evidence for carbon instability during battery discharge. Interestingly, studies by Thotiyl et al.³² using acid treatment



and Fenton's reagent, which quantify the amounts of side-reaction products formed from decomposition of the electrolyte and the carbon electrode respectively, revealed that on discharge, it is the decomposition of the electrolyte not the carbon electrode that dominates, forming Li_2CO_3 and carboxylate species. The degree of electrolyte decomposition depends on the type of carbon used. This finding was further confirmed in a recent study by McCloskey et al.³¹ In addition to significant electrolyte decomposition during ORR, they also showed that the degree of parasitic reactions is sensitive to discharge rate (Figure 4b).³¹ Further studies are required to elucidate the reaction mechanism responsible for electrolyte decomposition with and without carbon as a function of discharge rate, carbon chemistry, and electrolyte solvent and salt.

Turning to charging, DEMS experiments with isotopic carbon labeling show that carbon is unstable during Li_2O_2 oxidation above 3.5 V versus Li/Li^+ : CO_2 is evolved, with the carbon originating from the carbon support in the oxygen electrode (Figure 5a–b).²⁹ The analysis of ^{13}C labeled cathodes at different states of charge with acid and Fenton's reagent has revealed that the process is complex. First, while the electrolyte continues to decompose, carbon electrode decomposition to form Li_2CO_3 becomes significant and grows to dominate at higher states of charge. The fact that carbon decomposition commences at 3.5 V, where Li_2O_2 starts to oxidize significantly, and not at 4 V, where carbon oxidation is expected, indicates that the process of carbon decomposition involves Li_2O_2 or its intermediates of oxidation. *In situ* DEMS shows that Li_2CO_3 simultaneously forms by decomposition of both the carbon cathode and the electrolyte and decomposes on charging. As a result, the amount of O_2 evolved on charge is not necessarily expected to be equal to that predicted by the amount of Li_2O_2 present at the

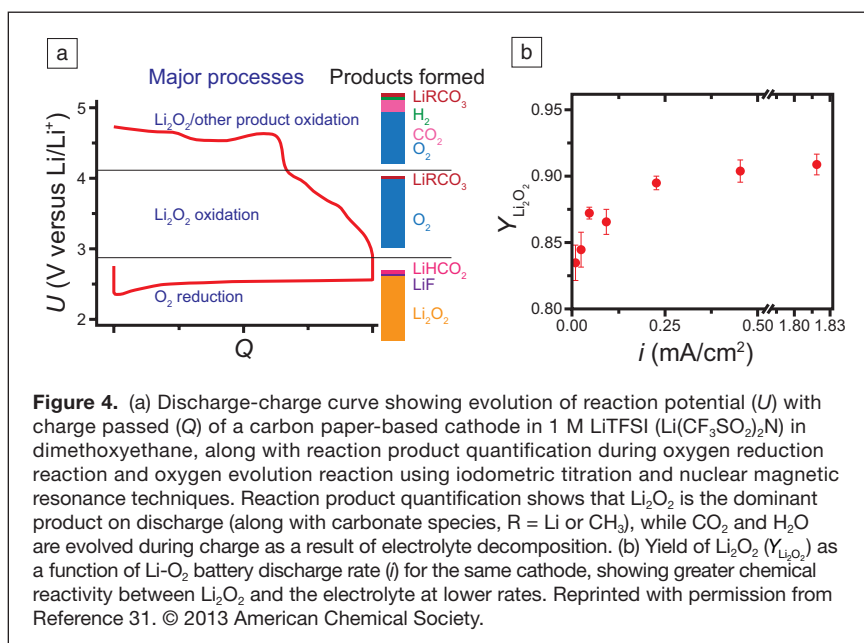
end of discharge. An iodometric titration method has been developed to quantify the amount of Li_2O_2 present in the oxygen electrode and has confirmed this picture. When applied at different stages of discharge and charge³¹ and combined with DEMS measurements of O_2 evolution and consumption, it has been shown the Li_2O_2 yield during charge is considerably less than 100%. This finding shows that not all Li_2O_2 present upon discharge evolves O_2 on charge (i.e., it partially participates in decomposition reactions), and confirms that carbon is relatively more unstable during charge than discharge.

In situ ambient pressure XPS measurements have shown highly reversible Li_2O_2 formation on a $\text{Li}_x\text{V}_2\text{O}_5$ surface in a solid-state cell,³³ thus highlighting the importance of the design of oxygen electrodes that are stable for $\text{Li}-\text{O}_2$ batteries to allow for long cycle life. In light of the observed instability of carbon, replacing it with a nanoporous gold electrode was found to provide stable cycling of $\text{Li}-\text{O}_2$ batteries.⁷ As Au is heavy and expensive, TiC, TiN, Fe/N/C, N-doped carbon, and stainless steel have all been investigated as alternative materials to replace carbon.³⁴ Titration of each candidate cathode after each discharge/charge with acid and Fenton's reagent revealed the amount of inorganic carbonates such as Li_2CO_3 and organic carboxylate species, respectively, that were formed (Figure 5c–d). In comparison to carbon, TiC showed encouraging performance and stability, which is attributed to a layer of TiOC formed on its surface.³⁴

Searching for stable electrolytes

Early studies of $\text{Li}-\text{O}_2$ battery reactions employed carbonate-based electrolytes, where significant amounts of Li_2CO_3 and other organic side products were formed upon discharge.^{35,36} Since then, a number of experimental¹³ and computational³⁷ studies have shown that carbonates are highly susceptible to attack by the nucleophilic superoxide-related species (such as O_2^- and LiO_2) formed during discharge. This highlights the importance of predisposition to superoxide attack as a key design criterion in selecting stable electrolyte solvents.^{13,25,35,38–40}

Unlike carbonates, there are several classes of electrolytes that support formation of Li_2O_2 as the majority species during battery discharge (Figure 4a),^{7,25,41–51} albeit with varying degrees of side reactivity, as discussed later. This emphasizes the difficulty in finding electrolytes stable toward the strong nucleophiles $\text{O}_2^-/\text{LiO}_2$ that are intermediates in Li_2O_2 formation, as well as toward Li_2O_2 itself.³⁷ In the search for stable electrolytes, several experimental and theoretical approaches are being pursued: (1) Modeling of the reactions between $\text{O}_2^-/\text{LiO}_2$ and the solvent (e.g., by density functional theory),³⁷ (2) chemical screening using KO_2 ,^{21,52} (3) electrochemical measurements



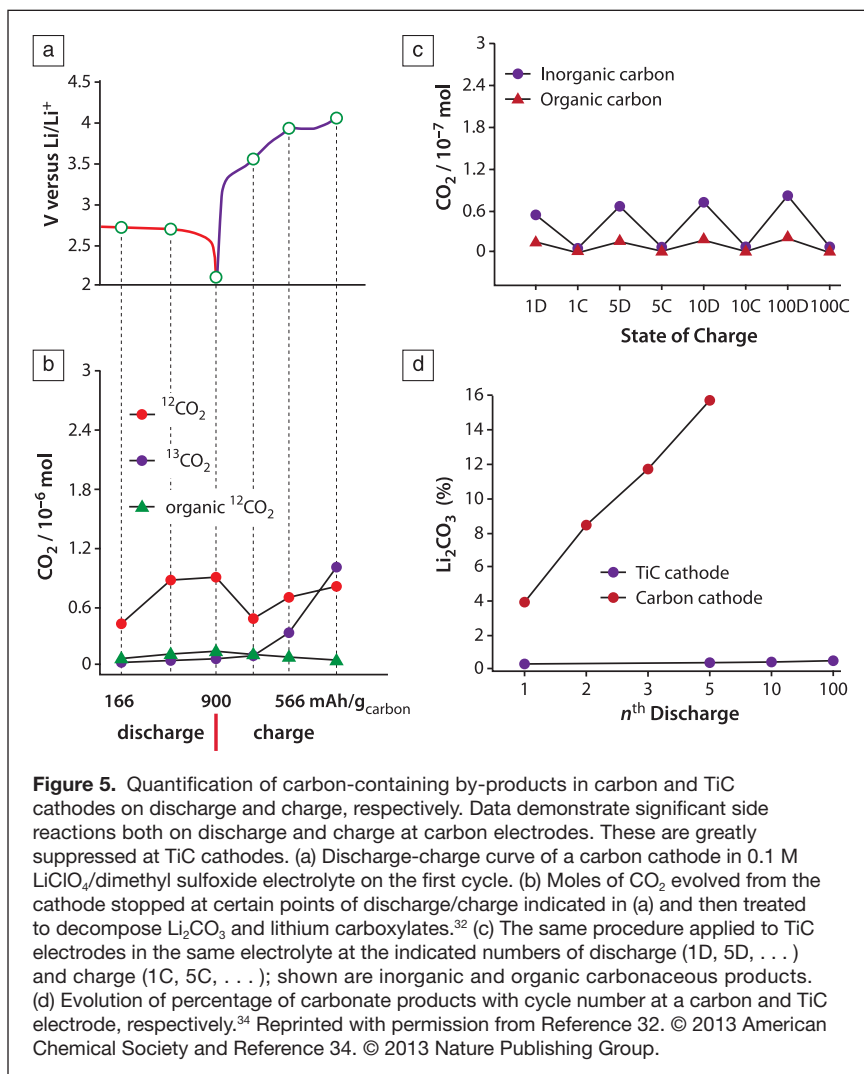


Figure 5. Quantification of carbon-containing by-products in carbon and TiC cathodes on discharge and charge, respectively. Data demonstrate significant side reactions both on discharge and charge at carbon electrodes. These are greatly suppressed at TiC cathodes. (a) Discharge-charge cycle curve of a carbon cathode in 0.1 M LiClO₄/dimethyl sulfoxide electrolyte on the first cycle. (b) Moles of CO₂ evolved from the cathode stopped at certain points of discharge/charge indicated in (a) and then treated to decompose Li₂CO₃ and lithium carboxylates.³² (c) The same procedure applied to TiC electrodes in the same electrolyte at the indicated numbers of discharge (1D, 5D, . . .) and charge (1C, 5C, . . .); shown are inorganic and organic carbonaceous products. (d) Evolution of percentage of carbonate products with cycle number at a carbon and TiC electrode, respectively.³⁴ Reprinted with permission from Reference 32. © 2013 American Chemical Society and Reference 34. © 2013 Nature Publishing Group.

(e.g., cyclic voltammetry or rotating electrodes),^{41,53–56} and (4) analysis of the reactions occurring at the cathode in a Li–O₂ cell using a combination of spectroscopic methods (e.g., Fourier transform infrared [FTIR], powder x-ray diffraction, nuclear magnetic resonance, SERS, XPS, mass spectrometry, and Li₂O₂ titration).^{7,42–44,57–59}

Ether electrolytes

Recent extensive investigation of nonaqueous electrolytes for Li–O₂ cells, based on ethers, amides, ionic liquids (ILs), and DMSO, have shown that they all predominantly support the formation of Li₂O₂ upon first discharge and its removal on recharge.^{32,44–46} Ethers are attractive for the Li–O₂ battery because they are safe, cheap, compatible with lithium metal anodes, more stable toward reduced O₂ species compared with organic carbonates, and have relatively high oxidation windows (up to 4 V versus Li/Li⁺), and low volatilities (for longer-chain ethers). However, there is growing experimental and theoretical evidence that ether-based electrolytes are not suitable for Li–O₂ cells.^{13,29,31,44,60–62} Ethers are known to form

peroxides under ambient conditions by auto oxidation reactions.⁶³ This instability toward auto oxidation has been identified as a possible pathway of initial attack of the solvent that gives rise to further decomposition reactions (Figure 6b).⁶¹

Amide electrolytes

Amides are a major class of solvent that are known to be highly stable against bases and nucleophilic attack and have been extensively used for O₂ reduction studies.^{64,65} Theoretical calculations and KO₂ screening studies suggest high-energy barriers against nucleophilic substitution at the carbons due to unfavorable stability of the reaction products.⁶¹ Calculations also show that amides are much more stable against auto oxidation than ethers; amides require a high activation energy for proton abstraction by O₂.³⁷ Dimethylformamide (DMF) and dimethylacetamide (DMA) have been investigated as the basis of electrolytes for Li–O₂ batteries.^{42,47} DMF shows greater stability than ethers, but some parasitic reactions occur, and significant capacity fading is observed.⁴⁷ Cells with DMA electrolyte demonstrate better performance, up to 80 cycles with a reproducible voltage profile.⁴²

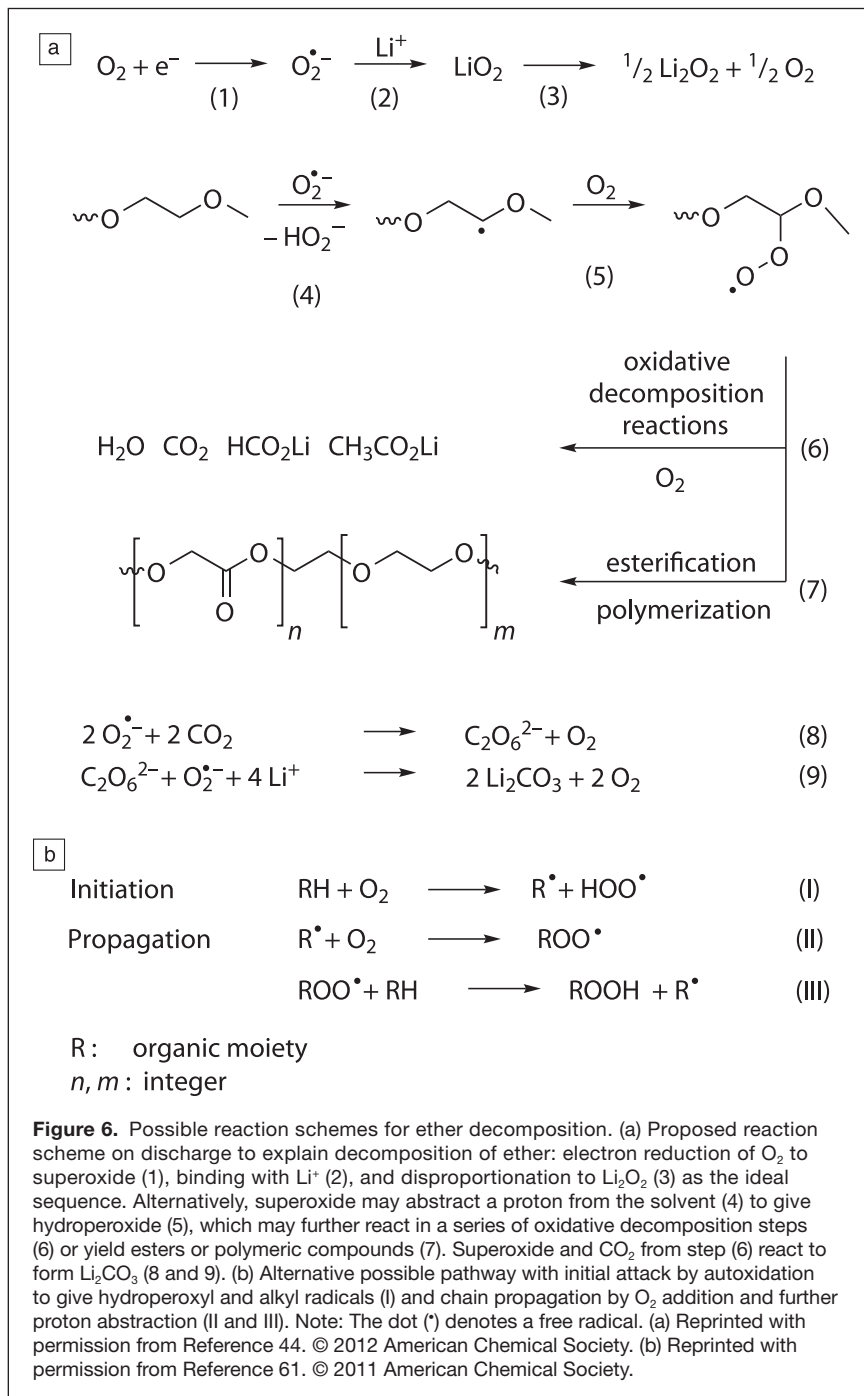
Ionic liquids and DMSO

Chemical screening by KO₂ and voltammetric methods suggest that the stability of IL electrolytes is much greater than organic carbonate solvents.^{41,48–51} However, due to the difficulty of purifying ILs, the impurities that remain

may be the reason for the observed parasitic reactions that compromised cycleability.

Cells based on DMSO, which have been used to study O₂ reduction in nonaqueous media in the past,⁶⁶ have shown sustained cycling, with the reversible formation/decomposition of Li₂O₂ at the cathode.^{7,34} FTIR analysis of the discharge product in a carbon cathode in 1M LiClO₄ in DMSO confirms dominant formation of Li₂O₂, along with some Li₂CO₃ and HCOOLi.^{7,31,34,62}

Further research on the stability of nonaqueous electrolytes and electrode materials in rechargeable Li–O₂ batteries is much needed. Reactions do not proceed without side reactions; therefore, the question is not whether side reactions occur but what degree of stability is required. In this respect, two effects need to be considered: First, the extent of the side reactions, decomposition of solvent, salt, electrode, or binder to form solid, gaseous, or dissolved side products, which deplete the particular component and will lead to failure once a threshold of consumption is exceeded; and second, the nature of the side reaction products and their effects on the reversible electrochemistry. In this regard, the products of the



parasitic reactions should not passivate the electrode significantly (e.g., the by-products should diffuse away from the surface). If they cannot, they have to be able to decompose easily on charge without introducing a significant overpotential; otherwise, a relatively small degree of decomposition can have a disproportionately large detrimental effect on the electrochemistry. This is what happens with carbon electrodes and many electrolytes, which form solid insulating Li_2CO_3 on the electrode surface, leading to severe polarization and premature cell death. It may be that the combination of DMSO with a nanoporous Au cathode

produces side products other than Li_2CO_3 , thus avoiding large polarization.

Challenges and opportunities: Aqueous lithium-oxygen batteries

In the second part of this article, we will discuss recent efforts in protected lithium metal as the negative electrode in aqueous Li-O_2 batteries. Aqueous batteries have received significantly less attention than nonaqueous Li-O_2 batteries due to the practical challenges involved with preventing a violent reaction between lithium and water. Developing lithium metal as the negative electrode that can cycle safely and stably has been a challenge for 40 years, owing to the dendrites that form on repeated lithium dissolution and lithium deposition. Dendrites can be fatal to battery performance since they pose the risk of growing into the cathode and causing a short circuit and battery failure. There are still no rechargeable lithium anode-based batteries on the market; all rechargeable Li-ion batteries have thus far contained the lithium inside another material such as aluminum (LiAl),^{67,68} carbon (LiC_6),^{15,16,69} and, more recently, tin^{15,70,71} and silicon.⁷²

Zhang et al.⁷⁰ have reported lithium dendrite formation in a typical nonaqueous electrolyte containing polyethylene glycol dimethyl ether (PEGDME, Mw. 250) with $\text{Li}(\text{CF}_3\text{SO}_2)_2\text{N}$ (LiTFSI) for lithium-air rechargeable Li-O_2 batteries. The $\text{Li/PEGDME-LiTFSI/Li}$ cell showed short circuits after 21.4 h of polarization at 0.2 mA cm^{-2} and 4.0 h of polarization at 1.0 mA cm^{-2} . A lithium metal alloy with aluminum solved the dendrite issue,⁷¹ but alloy electrodes survive only a limited number of cycles owing to extreme changes in volume during operation.

To reduce lithium dendrite formation, solid electrolytes have been developed for electric vehicle applications.⁷² Theoretical calculations suggest that a homogenous solid-state electrolyte with a modulus of 6 GPa would drastically reduce dendrite formation.⁷³ As the moduli of ceramic

materials are generally higher than 6 GPa, little or no lithium dendrite formation between a ceramic lithium-ion conductor and lithium metal is expected. Visco et al.⁶⁹ and Stevens et al.⁷⁴ first reported experimental evidence of the feasibility of protected lithium metal electrodes, with $\text{Li/Li}_3\text{N/Li}_{1-x}\text{Al}_x\text{Ti}_{2-x}(\text{PO}_4)_3$ (LATP) and $\text{Li/Li}_{3-x}\text{PO}_{4-x}\text{N}_y/\text{LATP}$, respectively. Li_3N and $\text{Li}_{3-x}\text{PO}_{4-x}\text{N}_y$ are used to prevent direct contact of lithium metal with LATP, since LATP is electrochemically unstable at the potential of metallic lithium.^{11,12,75} Aqueous Li-O_2 batteries assembled with these lithium electrodes could be cycled

at 1 mA cm⁻² and room temperature without degradation of the cell performance for a short period of 10 min.^{69,73} Subsequently, other protected lithium anodes based on garnet-type solid electrolytes⁷⁶ and polymer-ceramic composite membranes⁷⁷ have been reported.

While ceramic conductors are stiff enough to prevent lithium dendrite growth, they do not easily make low-resistance contacts with other solid components and thus have high charge transfer resistance. Recent research efforts have been focused on using polymer-ceramic composite electrolytes to form a conformal interface and reduce interfacial resistance. Rosso et al. investigated the mechanism of lithium dendrite growth in Li/PEO-based-electrolyte/Li (PEO = polyethylene oxide),^{78,79} where the onset of dendrite formation and the time to reach short-circuit times can be studied by direct *in situ* observation and simultaneous cell voltage monitoring. **Table I** summarizes the dendrite onset and short-circuit time for different compositions of PEO-based electrolytes. No dendrite formation was observed in a Li/PEO₂₀LiTFSI/Li cell at a low current density of 0.03 mA cm⁻² for 100 h at 80°C, while at a high current density of 0.7 mA cm⁻², dendrites were observed after less than 1 h of deposition.⁷⁹ Such lithium dendrite formation onset times at high current density are too short to be used in practical applications. The use of ceramic or IL additives in polymer electrolytes comprises another strategy to suppress dendrite formation. The addition of nano-SiO₂ and/or IL of *N*-methyl-*N*-propylpiperidinium TFSI (PP13TFSI)^{80,81} to polymer electrolytes has been shown to increase the onset time of dendrite formation from 10 h for Li/PEO₁₈TFSI/Li to 21 h at 1.0 mA cm⁻² at 60°C. **Figure 7a** shows the cycling performance of the lithium deposition and dissolution process

in a Li/PEO₁₈LiTFSI-SiO₂-PP13TFSI/Li cell at 60°C, where the cell voltage showed no significant change during cycling, and no dendrite formation was detected at a current density of 0.3 mA cm⁻² for 30 h.⁸¹

Based on these positive results, this composite polymer electrolyte of PEO₁₈LiTFSI-SiO₂-PP13TFSI was also assessed as the protected lithium-metal anode for rechargeable lithium-air batteries. **Figure 7b** shows reversible cycling of a Li/PEO₁₈LiTFSI-PP13TFSI/LATP/aqueous 1 M LiCl-0.004 M LiOH/Pt, air cell at 0.3 mA cm⁻² and 60°C,⁸² with LATP as the solid electrolyte. The inclusion of PP13TFSI IL is effective in reducing interfacial resistance between lithium and the electrolyte and facilitating highly reversible Li-O₂ cycling.

While the early onset of lithium dendrite formation and low output power remain yet to be completely solved, recent research has shown that these challenges are closely related to the physical properties of the solid electrolyte used. Further materials development for the protection layer of lithium is therefore essential to achieve high power density at several mA cm⁻² and extended deep cycling of the lithium electrode for Li-O₂ batteries.

Summary

The need for storage technologies with much greater gravimetric energy than Li-ion batteries makes Li-O₂ batteries an attractive energy storage option for applications that require high-energy density such as electric vehicles. Although notable progress has been made in the development of rechargeable, lab-scale non-aqueous Li-O₂ cells, further investigation of the oxygen reduction reaction (ORR) and oxygen evolution reaction (OER) in nonaqueous electrolytes, and parasitic reaction mechanisms involving inactive components in the oxygen electrode is required in order to aid the rational design and development of kinetically facile and chemically stable electrode and electrolyte configurations.

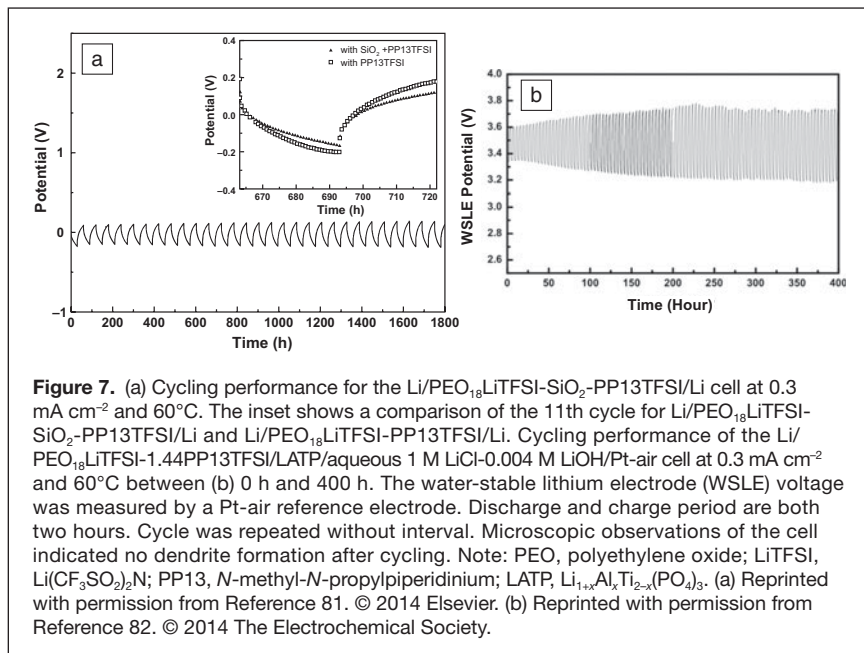
As detailed in this review, researchers have just begun to connect the physical properties (morphology and surface versus bulk chemistry) of Li₂O₂ with the corresponding kinetics of Li₂O₂ formation and oxidation. Important topics warranting further investigation in this area include the detailed reaction and growth mechanisms of Li₂O₂ at high and low overpotentials; the electronic nature (surface and bulk) of electrochemically formed Li₂O₂; intrinsic Li₂O₂ oxidation pathways; and the influence of non-carbonate solvents on the nucleation and growth of Li₂O₂ and its oxidation.

As carbon is not stable in the oxygen electrode, improved morphological, chemical, and kinetic understanding of Li-O₂ reactions in non-carbon electrodes will become increasingly relevant for

Table I. Dependence of lithium dendrite formation onset time (t_0) and short-circuit time (t_s) on electrolyte formulation, temperature, and current density.

Electrolyte	Temperature (°C)	Current density (mAcm ⁻²)	Onset time (hour)	Short circuit time (hour)	Ref.
PEGDME-LiTFSI (Li/O = 1/20)	room temperature	0.2		21	⁷⁰
		1.0		4	
PEGDME-LiTFSI (Li/O = 1/20)- 20 wt% SiO ₂	room temperature	0.2		110	⁷⁰
		1.0		20	
PVdF-HFP-SiO ₂ -EC-PC-LiTFSI	room temperature	0.6		14	⁸³
PEO-LiTFSI (Li/O = 1/20)	80	0.05	38	110	⁷⁸
PEO ₁₈ LiTFSI-1.44PP13TFSI	60	0.1	125	235	⁸⁰
		1.0	10	15	
PEO ₁₈ LiTFSI-1.44PP13TFSI- 10 wt% SiO ₂	60	0.1	460	672	⁸⁴
		1.0	21	37	

Note: PVdF, polyvinylidene fluoride; HFP, hexafluorophosphate; EC, ethylene carbonate; PC, propylene carbonate; PEO, polyethylene oxide; LiTFSI, Li(CF₃SO₂)₂N; PEGDME, polyethylene glycol dimethyl ether; PP13, *N*-methyl-*N*-propylpiperidinium.



combine high rate capability with high round-trip efficiency and long cycle life.

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the development of rechargeable Li-O₂ batteries. The search for electrolytes that are chemically stable against the oxygen electrode is another major focus of research. The discovery that reduced oxygen species produced during ORR are also highly reactive against a broad range of electrolyte solvents has spurred detailed spectroscopic, spectrometric, and titration studies examining the interplay between electrolyte formulation and discharge reaction product. Combining these experimental approaches with theoretical calculations evaluating electrolyte susceptibility to attack by Li₂O₂ and/or ORR intermediates will be crucial to finding an electrolyte that is moderately stable during ORR, but also possesses a favorable synergy with the chosen electrode material such that parasitic reactions during OER are minimized.

Significant progress has been made toward finding materials that suppress lithium dendrite formation and also adequately protect the lithium metal anode from contact with reactive gases and water in both nonaqueous and aqueous Li-O₂ battery environments. Representing a compromise between the favorable transport properties of liquid and the high mechanical stability of solid electrolytes, the use of polymers has emerged as a particularly promising strategy to protect lithium metal anodes. Further research into the possibility of incorporating nanostructured additives to improve power capabilities while maintaining chemical stability against lithium metal in full Li-O₂ cells is a promising direction for future efforts in this field. The need for fundamentally understanding the relationship between electrode reaction mechanisms and parasitic processes occurring in rechargeable Li-O₂ batteries presents an opportunity to combine cutting edge experimental and computational techniques with materials innovation in the areas outlined previously to enable the development of practical rechargeable Li-O₂ batteries, which

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