Raman study of 2,7-bis(biphenyl-4-yl)-2',7'-ditertbutyl-9,9'-spirobifluorene adsorbed on oxide surfaces

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

Article history:
Received 24 June 2013
In final form 10 August 2013
Available online 17 August 2013

A B S T R A C T

We present a systematic non-resonant Raman study of the vibrational properties of the spirobifluorene derivative 2,7-bis(biphenyl-4-yl)-2',7'-di-tertbutyl-9,9'-spirobifluorene (SP6) on three different substrates: ZnO(000-1), ZnMgO(000-1), and Al2O3(11-20). This investigation of few monolayer coverages is facilitated by the high scattering cross section of this molecule. The vibrational response of SP6 is unaffected by the choice of substrate, showing that the vibrational properties of the molecules remain unchanged by adsorption. Furthermore, we can directly compare the experimental spectra to our density functional theory calculations of the Raman cross sections of SP6 in the gas phase.

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1. Introduction

Organic/inorganic semiconductor hybrid structures hold the promise to unite specific complementary properties of both material classes leading to optoelectronic and photonic devices with advanced functionalities [1]. Interface formation between these two vastly different materials is a very complex issue. Inorganic semiconductor surfaces present dangling bonds, steps, and surface defects. Binding of molecules on such sites can cause modifications of their electronic structure or even their fragmentation resulting in ill-defined interfaces. To exploit the potential of organic/inorganic hybrid structures, control over the structural and electronic properties of the heterointerface would be highly beneficial.

The high fluorescence quantum yield and absorption cross section of 2,7-bis(biphenyl-4-yl)-2',7'-di-tert-butyl-9,9'-spirobifluorene (SP6) as well as the excellent charge carrier injection and transport properties of the ZnO(000-1) and ZnMgO(000-1) make combined systems very promising candidates for hybrid light-emitting or photovoltaic devices. In previous works, it was established that both excitons and charges are transferred with high efficiency across the heterointerface of SP6 and ZnO/ZnMgO quantum structures [2]. The electronic structure of this interface was probed with photoemission spectroscopy, and no evidence of modification of the electronic structure of the molecule was found.

In this Letter, we study the vibrational properties of such organic/inorganic hybrid structures by non-resonant Raman spectroscopy. Whether or not conformational changes of adsorbed molecules should lead to changes in the Raman response compared to the ensemble of molecules in thick films is a controversially discussed issue (see, for example Refs. [3–6]). However, line shifts, and changes of Raman intensities and line widths have been observed for surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy of adsorbed molecules on surfaces [7,8]. A significant perturbation of the electronic wave functions due to interactions of the molecules with the semiconductor surface should lead to a frequency shift of the vibrational modes. Also, geometry changes with respect to the gas phase (as, for instance, the dihedral angle of the biphenyl) can have a strong influence on the Raman response of the molecules. Still (non-enhanced) Raman spectroscopy of adsorbed molecules suffers from low intensities, which is the reason for the great success of tip- and surface-enhanced experiments. We present non-resonant and non-enhanced Raman spectroscopy of SP6 on the polar ZnO(000-1) and ZnMgO(000-1) surface and compare it to spectra of similar films on Al2O3(11-20) substrates to identify potential substrate-adsorbate interactions. This study is made possible by the very high scattering cross section of the investigated molecule SP6 that leads to Raman intensities on the order of the bulk substrate signal even for monolayer coverages. We also vary the thickness of the organic layer from one monolayer up to 16.0 nm thick layers and compare the spectra with calculated vibrational modes of the isolated SP6 molecule calculated by density functional theory (DFT). Despite the fact that these calculations were performed for the gas phase, the result...
matches the experimental spectra very well, suggesting the identification of the different Raman modes in this large molecule. Experimentally, we do not find any shift of the vibrational frequencies with increasing organic layer thickness and observe a linear dependence of the Raman intensities with the number of molecules. The good agreement between experiment and calculation also confirms that the interaction of SP6 with the ZnO(000-1) and ZnMgO(000-1) surface is weak and shows that the molecules adsorb without strong electronic interactions on these semiconductor surfaces.

1.1. Details of experiment and calculation

The samples are prepared in a molecular beam epitaxy apparatus (DCA450) equipped with separate growth chambers for (Zn,Mg)O and organic molecules. The background pressure is $10^{-10}$ Torr. ZnO(000-1) and Zn$_{1-x}$Mg$_x$O ($x = 0.14$) epilayers (thickness 500 nm) are grown on a-plane sapphire substrates by radical deposition. It was established previously by atomic force microscopy that SP6 forms homogenous, amorphous thin films during growth. It was established previously by atomic force microscopy that SP6 forms homogenous, amorphous thin films on ZnO(000-1) and ZnMgO(000-1) surfaces [2].

For Raman spectroscopy, we use a continuous wave laser at 532 nm, which is focused using a 50 times objective lens. The samples are sublimed from Knudson-type effusion cells. The thickness of the deposited layer is monitored by a quartz microbalance. The deposition rate was 0.1 nm/min and the substrate was kept at room temperature during growth. It was established previously by atomic force microscopy that SP6 forms homogenous, amorphous thin films on ZnO(000-1) and ZnMgO(000-1) surfaces [2].

2. Results

Figure 1 depicts a series of non-resonant [12] Raman spectra for different coverages of SP6 on sapphire between 800 and 1700 cm$^{-1}$ [13]. The spectra are dominated by a strong mode at 1603 cm$^{-1}$ and exhibit several features above 800 cm$^{-1}$, including a broad band around 1300 cm$^{-1}$. In Table 1 we compare these spectral signatures to the literature dealing with related molecules, such as oligophenyls [14,15], octyfluorene oligomers [16], and 9,9-spirobifluorene [17]. This comparison suggests that the modes around 1600 cm$^{-1}$ result from ring stretching modes, that the band around 1300 cm$^{-1}$ is dominated by CC stretching, and that numerous CH and CCC bending modes are present below 1200 cm$^{-1}$. These assignments will be compared with the results of our calculations and discussed in more detail below.

The data in Figure 1 clearly scales with the number of molecules available for scattering. As an example, the inset depicts the dependence of the Raman intensity of the 1603 cm$^{-1}$ mode on the SP6 coverage. It shows that the scattering intensity scales linearly with the number of scatterers and therefore excludes non-linear effects. Remarkably, even the 1.0 nm film, which corresponds roughly to monolayer coverage, still exhibits an SP6 signal that is on the order of 1.0 cm$^{-1}$.
of the 418 cm\(^{-1}\) mode of the sapphire (bulk) substrate, suggesting a high scattering efficiency of the SP6 molecules. Assuming a detection probability of 1\% of scattered photons, we estimate a considerable (non-resonant) scattering cross section of 2.2 \times 10^{-25} \text{ cm}^2/\text{s} for SP6.

The absence of a shift in the vibrational frequencies with coverage suggests relatively weak substrate-adsorbate and inter-molecule interactions [18]. Therefore, in order to identify the origin of the observed modes, we performed DFT calculations of the isolated molecule. The results are shown in Figure 2 (bottom) and compared to the experimental Raman spectrum of an 8.0 nm film of SP6 on a sapphire substrate (top). As demonstrated in a previous publication [2], the film corresponds to a few amorphous monolayers of SP6 molecules. Overall, experiment and calculation are seen to agree very well. However, despite the scaling of the calculated results (see above), the calculations still exhibit a blue shift of approximately 10 cm\(^{-1}\) with respect to experiment. We attribute this shift in part to missing effects of anharmonicity, the neglect of the quantum nature of the nuclei and the limited basis set. More important, though, is the possibility that in the thin film the molecules adopt a slightly different geometric structure than in the gas phase [19].

Table 1 lists all the significant calculated and experimentally observed modes of this letter and compares them with selected literature values of related molecules. In agreement with the previous studies, the dominant peak above 1600 cm\(^{-1}\) is assigned to the symmetric stretching mode of the rings. The corresponding mode of the SP6 molecule is illustrated in the right inset of Figure 2. The weak modes at low frequencies, below 1270 cm\(^{-1}\), arise primarily from in-plane CH and CCC bending modes and ring stretching modes in the different parts of the SP6 molecule. In particular, there is a perfect match of the breathing mode and CH bend of the biphenyl groups, which was also identified in Ref. [15]. Naturally, we did not find a literature value for the wagging mode (1370 cm\(^{-1}\)) of the bonds between the biphenyl and tert-butyl groups with the spirobifluorene.

The CH and CCC bending modes of the fluorene groups of the SP6 at slightly higher frequency correspond nicely to the same modes of the isolated spirobifluorene molecule [17]. Also in agreement with the literature [15-17], the band around 1300 cm\(^{-1}\) arises from various CC stretch vibrations within the SP6. The left inset of Figure 2, for example, depicts the inter-ring stretching of the biphenyl groups, which was also identified in Ref. [15]. Naturally, we did not find a literature value for the wagging mode (1370 cm\(^{-1}\)) of the bonds between the biphenyl and tert-butyl groups with the spirobifluorene.

We now turn to the analysis of the substrate influence on the Raman spectra of SP6. For this purpose, we first compare the data of the 6.4 nm SP6 film on sapphire to the Raman response of the

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\(^a\) ip = in plane, sym = symmetric, asym = antisymmetric, str = stretch, ir = inter ring, def = deformation, term = terminal, TB = tert-butyl, F1 = SP6 fluorene between the biphienyls, F2 = SP6 fluorene with tert-butyl groups.

\(^b\) Spirobifluorene (SBF) modes from Ref. [17].

\(^c\) Biphenyl (BP) and fluorene (F) modes from Ref. [15].

\(^d\) Octylfluorene (F8) oligomer modes from Ref. [16].

\(^e\) \(p\)-oligophenyl (p-P) modes from Ref. [14].
bare substrate. (two bottom spectra of Figure 3). In agreement with the literature, we do not find any significant Raman-active optical phonon modes of the sapphire substrate above 800 cm⁻¹. For reference, we show the highest substrate signal measured (below 500 cm⁻¹, intensities unscaled). The SP6 molecules are obviously extremely good Raman scatterers. The molecules’ vibrational response exceeds the bulk sapphire signal, even in this case with coverage of just few monolayers.

Figure 3 also depicts the spectra of similar SP6 layers on the polar ZnO(000-1) and ZnMgO(000-1) surfaces to check for any substrate-induced changes of the SP6 response. We do not anticipate any additional response from the ZnMgO(000-1) sample in the range of interest (>800 cm⁻¹). For the ZnO(000-1) substrate, we expect to observe a broad band between 1000 and 1200 cm⁻¹ [20–22]. On first inspection, all spectra in Figure 3 are dominated by the high frequency ring stretch and the band of CC stretching modes around 1300 cm⁻¹. None of the observed modes is frequency shifted with respect to the data of SP6 on the other substrates.

We test the absence of substrate influences on the Raman spectrum in Figure 4: The topmost curve displays the Raman signal of a 1.0 nm SP6 layer on ZnO. If the Raman response of the SP6 is unchanged by adsorption on ZnO, subtraction of the 1.0 nm SP6/Al₂O₃(11-20) trace nicely after subtraction of the ZnO(000-1) signal and scaling by a factor of 8 (orange curve). (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)
investigated surfaces. Without any significant electronic perturbation on all of the response of the molecule. We therefore conclude that SP6 adsorbs that adsorption of SP6 has no meaningful impact on the vibrational for monolayer coverages. This comparison unambiguously showed comparison of Raman spectra of SP6 on different substrates even man intensities on the order of the substrate signal, enabled the the number of molecules, and simple background subtraction. The all Raman spectra, the linear dependence of the peak intensities on vibration in the different parts of the molecule.

The high quality of the samples is indicated by the similarity of all Raman spectra, the linear dependence of the peak intensities on the number of molecules, and simple background subtraction. The large scattering cross section of the SP6 molecule, which offers Raman intensities on the order of the substrate signal, enabled the comparison of Raman spectra of SP6 on different substrates even for monolayer coverages. This comparison unambiguously showed that adsorption of SP6 has no meaningful impact on the vibrational response of the molecule. We therefore conclude that SP6 adsorbs without any significant electronic perturbation on all of the investigated surfaces.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Katrin F. Domke and Martin Wolf for helpful comments and discussions. This Letter was partially funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG) through Sfb 951. J.S. acknowledges support from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Raman spectroscopy measurements at Columbia University were supported by the Center for Re-Defining Photovoltaic Efficiency through Molecular-Scale Control, an Energy Frontier Research Center funded by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Office of Science, Office of Basic Energy Sciences under Award DE-SC0001085.

References

[12] Optical absorption of SP6 sets in above 3.2 eV (387 nm, see Ref. [2]).
[13] This is the relevant spectral window. At lower frequencies (200–800 cm⁻¹), we find a few substrate-induced modes, the highest is shown in Fig. 1; no signal is observed at higher frequencies (1700–2000 cm⁻¹) (not shown).
[18] Small line shifts on the order of the line width might be hidden due to line-broadening effects.
[19] Biphenyl, for instance, exhibits a dihedral angle of ca. 44° in the gas phase but close to 0° in the crystal. Pressure dependent studies on biphenyl showed that the planarization can induce a significant shift in the biphenyl-stretch modes. At the same time, the planarization also led to a significant increase of the Raman intensity of the molecule. See M. Zhou, K. Wang, Z. Men, S. Gao, Z. Liang, C. Sun, Spectrochim. Acta A 97 (2012) 526.