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Atomistic Insights into Electrolyte - Sodium Metal Interface

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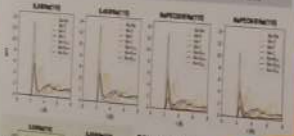


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Sodium metal batteries are gaining growing attention as promising alternatives to lithium-based energy storage technologies due to their high energy density and low cost of sodium. The practical implementation of Na metal anodes is critically limited by interfacial instability with the electrolyte leading to uncontrolled solid electrolyte interphase (SEI) formation and rapid performance degradation [1,2]. Achieving an atomistic-level understanding of the SEI formation mechanisms is essential for the rational design of stable electrolyte systems. In this work, we present a comparative atomistic study of SEI formation at the metal interface in two representative electrolyte systems: an ionic-liquid electrolyte (IL: NaFSI/PyFSI) [3] and a polymer-based electrolyte (PEO:Na) [4]. To overcome the limitations of first-principles simulations in accessing realistic system sizes and time scales, we employ machine-learning interatomic potential (MLIP) within the MACE framework [5].

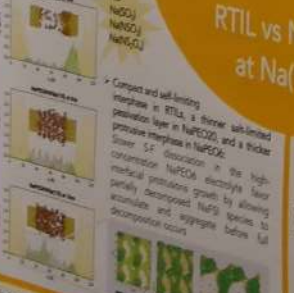
ML-IP Molecular Dynamics of Electrolyte/Na Anode Interfaces

Dataset: 3,300 configurations
Pre-tuning of MACE mp-Q2 Model
NaFSI/NaIL110 Dissociation energy: -6.48 eV (MLIP) vs -6.51 eV (DFT)



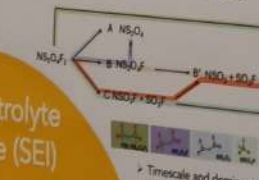
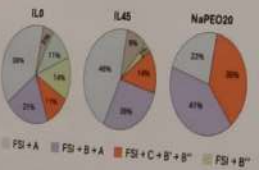
FSI completely dissociated: S-F bond cleavage

FSI-derived SEI morphology



Compact and self-limiting interphase in RTILs, a thinner, self-limited protective layer in NaPEO20, and a thicker, slower S-F dissociation in NaPEO20. In the high-potential NaPEO20 electrolyte, the partially decomposed NaFSI species to accumulate and aggregate before full decomposition occurs.

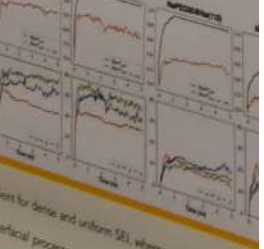
FSI-Decomposition Mechanism at Electrolytes



Timescale and dominant breaking events depend on environment: RTIL environments favor fluoride-released products, polymer matrix stabilizes multistep decomposition.



NaF - dominant inorganic, mechanically robust & electrochemical. All investigated electrolytes promote NaF-rich interphases; the electrolyte dictates whether NaF emerges as part of a thicker and dynamic protective interphase (NaPEO20).



Solid Electrolyte Interphase (SEI)

RTIL vs NaPEO at Na(110)

Take home messages:
 - FSI and spatially confined conversion of FSI into NaF-rich products is a key ingredient for dense and uniform SEI, whereas slower multistep decomposition in NaPEO20 leads to a porous, non-protective interphase growth and morphological heterogeneity.
 - ML-IP as powerful approach to access chemically complex, nanoscale-scale interfacial processes and to provide an effective atomistic-level understanding of the design of next-generation electrolytes for sodium-metal batteries.































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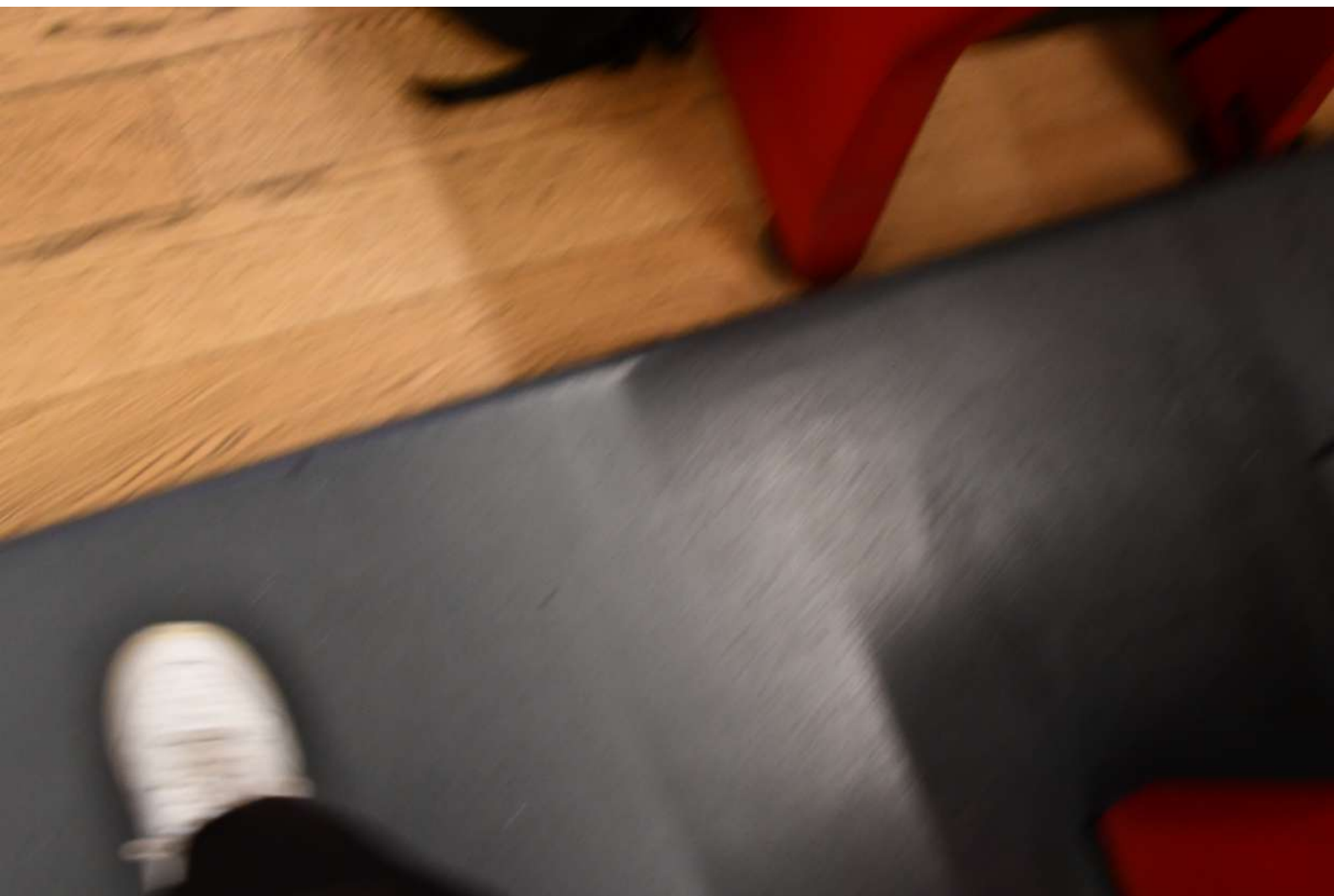












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