

# Effects of the chemical composition of coal tar pitch on dimensional changes during graphitization

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## Declaration

I, Lay Shoko (student number: 20427166), hereby declare that the work in this thesis with the title: **“Effects of the chemical composition of coal tar pitch on dimensional changes during graphitization”** is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other tertiary institution in whole or in part.

Signed at Potchefstroom on this day of \_\_\_\_ September 2013

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Lay Shoko

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## Abstract

Coal can be converted to different chemical products through processes such as destructive distillation. The destructive distillation of coal yields coke as the main product with by-products such as coal tar pitch (CTP). CTP has a wide range of applications, especially in the carbon-processing industries. Typical applications include the manufacture of anodes used in many electrochemical processes, as well as Söderberg electrodes used in different ferroalloy processes. Söderberg electrodes are made from the thermal treatment of Söderberg electrode paste. The Söderberg electrode paste is a mixture of CTP (binding material) and coke/calcined anthracite (filler). Söderberg electrodes are characterised by a baking isotherm temperature. This temperature is located in the baking zone of the Söderberg electrode system. In the baking zone, the liquid paste is transformed into a solid carbonaceous material. Knowing the baking isotherm temperature is essential as it will ensure the safe, profitable and continuous operation of submerged arc furnaces. Thermomechanical analysis (TMA) was used in this study to determine the baking isotherm temperature of CTP samples. The baking isotherm temperature for all samples was found to lie between 450 and 475 °C irrespective of the initial chemical and physical composition of the CTP. TMA was also used to measure the dimensional changes that take place in the binding material (CTP) at temperatures above the baking isotherm. The dimensional changes of 12 CTP samples when heated from room temperature up to a maximum of 1300 °C were measured. The results indicated that all CTP samples shrank by approximately 14% in the first heating and cooling cycle. The second and third heating and cooling cycles gave a small change in dimensions of approximately 2% for all samples. The significant change in dimensions observed for all CTP samples during the first TMA thermal treatment cycle was attributed to the structural rearrangement that takes place within the carbonaceous material. The structural ordering of all CTP samples thermally treated was evaluated by X-ray diffractometry (XRD). XRD is widely used in the

determination of crystallinity/amorphousness of carbonaceous materials, interlayer distance (d-spacing), as well as the degree of ordering (DOG) in a given material. For comparison of structural ordering, XRD analysis was also performed on raw (as-received) CTPs, as well as CTPs thermally treated at 475 and 1300 °C. Prebaked electrode graphite was also analysed. From the XRD results, raw CTP was found to be amorphous with no significant ordering. The interlayer spacing ( $d_{002}$ ) for all raw CTP samples averaged 3.70 Å, compared to 3.37 Å for prebaked electrode graphite. CTPs thermally treated at 1300 °C had a d-spacing of 3.51 Å. The DOG of raw samples was found to be negative which was indicative of the amorphousness of the raw CTP. The DOG increased with an increase in thermal treatment temperature, as was seen from the DOG of CTPs thermally treated at 1300 °C, which was calculated to be approximately -81% for all 12 samples. The calculated DOG for prebaked electrode graphite was 81%.

Prior to determining the baking isotherm temperature, as well as the changes in dimensions during thermal treatment, the chemical compositions of the 12 CTP samples were determined. In the chemical composition determination, fundamental properties such as softening point (SP), coking value (CV), toluene and quinoline insolubles (TI and QI, respectively) were evaluated. This was in addition to proximate and ultimate analysis. The information obtained from this diverse characterisation showed significant differences in the chemical composition of the 12 CTPs. By making use of multi-linear regression analysis (MLR), it was possible to predict or calculate less commonly determined characteristics (CV, TI and QI) from the more commonly obtained parameters (proximate and ultimate analysis parameters). It was found that MLR could be used successfully to calculate CV and TI, but less so for QI.

Additional chemical composition of CTP was determined by analytical techniques such as Fourier Transform Infra-Red spectroscopy (FT-IR) and Nuclear Magnetic Resonance spectroscopy (NMR). Results from the FT-IR analysis showed that the spectra for all 12 raw CTPs were similar, with differences only being in the FT-IR band intensities. The differences in FT-IR band intensities were supported by NMR analysis data, which gave quantitative information on the different structural parameters found in all CTPs. The structural composition of CTPs changed during thermal treatment, as was shown by the FT-IR analysis performed on raw CTPs samples, CTPs thermally treated at 475, 700, 1000 and 1300 °C, as well as prebaked electrode graphite.

**Key words:** Graphitization, Söderberg electrodes, thermochemical analysis, coal tar pitch, baking isotherm temperature, dimensional changes

## Table of contents

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Declaration.....   | i    |
| Acknowledgements.....  | ii   |
| Abstract.....  | iii  |
| Table of contents.....   | vi   |
| List of abbreviations.....   | x    |
| List of figures.....   | xiii |
| List of tables.....  | xvi  |
| Chapter 1.....   | 1    |
| Introduction.....  | 1    |
| 1.1 Background.....  | 1    |
| 1.2 Motivation of the study.....   | 2    |
| 1.3 Objectives of the study.....   | 2    |
| 1.4 Chapter layout.....  | 4    |
| Chapter 2.....   | 6    |
| Literature review.....   | 6    |
| 2.1 Introduction.....  | 6    |
| 2.2 Coal tar (CT).....   | 7    |
| 2.2.1 Classification of CT.....  | 8    |
| 2.3 Coal tar pitch (CTP).....  | 13   |
| 2.3.1 Reaction pathway during thermal treatment of CTP.....              | 14   |
| 2.4 Graphite.....  | 15   |
| 2.4.1 Occurrence.....  | 15   |
| 2.4.2 Manufacture of synthetic of graphite.....                          | 17   |
| 2.4.3 Properties of graphite.....  | 18   |
| 2.4.4 Industrial applications of graphite.....                           | 20   |
| 2.5 Graphite electrodes.....   | 21   |
| 2.5.1 Synthesis of graphite electrodes.....                              | 21   |
| 2.5.2 Types of graphite electrodes.....                                  | 23   |
| 2.5.3 Essential properties of graphite electrodes.....                   | 28   |
| 2.5.4 Söderberg electrode breakages.....                                 | 31   |
| 2.6 Analytical techniques used to characterise CT, CTP and graphite..... | 33   |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 2.6.1 Proximate analysis .....  | 34 |
| 2.6.2 Ultimate/elemental analysis .....   | 34 |
| 2.6.3 C and H - Nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy.....                  | 34 |
| 2.6.4 FT-IR spectroscopy .....  | 35 |
| 2.6.5 Thermo mechanical analysis (TMA).....   | 37 |
| 2.6.6 XRD analysis .....  | 37 |
| 2.7 Conclusion.....   | 39 |
| Chapter 3.....  | 40 |
| Experimental procedures .....   | 40 |
| 3.1 Materials.....  | 40 |
| 3.2 Analysis of the fundamental properties of CTP .....                             | 40 |
| 3.2.1 Softening point (SP) .....  | 40 |
| 3.2.2 Coking value (CV).....  | 41 |
| 3.2.3 Quinoline insoluble content (QI).....   | 41 |
| 3.2.4 Toluene insoluble content (TI) .....  | 42 |
| 3.3 Proximate and ultimate analysis.....  | 44 |
| 3.4 Additional chemical compositional determinations of CTP .....                   | 44 |
| 3.4.1 Nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy (NMR).....                            | 45 |
| 3.4.2 Fourier transform infra-red spectroscopy (FT-IR) .....                        | 46 |
| 3.5.2 Thermo mechanical analysis (TMA).....   | 49 |
| 3.6 Characterisation of graphite intermediates.....                                 | 51 |
| 3.6.1 X-ray diffraction (XRD).....  | 51 |
| 3.7 Statistical analysis of results .....   | 54 |
| 3.7.1 Multi-linear regression analysis.....   | 54 |
| Chapter 4.....  | 56 |
| Results and discussion .....  | 56 |
| Coal tar pitch characterisation and mathematical prediction of characteristics..... | 56 |
| 4.1 CTP characterisation .....  | 56 |
| 4.1.1 Fundamental properties of CTP.....  | 56 |
| 4.1.2 Proximate analysis of CTP .....   | 58 |
| 4.1.3 Ultimate analysis of CTP.....   | 59 |
| 4.2. Additional chemical composition determination of CTP.....                      | 60 |
| 4.2.1 NMR analysis of CTP.....  | 61 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 4.2.2 FT-IR analysis .....  | 65  |
| 4.2.3 XRD analysis of raw CTP samples .....   | 68  |
| 4.3 Predicting/calculating less commonly conducted CTP characteristics .....                      | 70  |
| 4.3.1 Multi-linear regression to calculate/predict CV .....                                       | 70  |
| 4.3.2 Multi-linear regression to calculate/predict TI .....                                       | 72  |
| 4.3.3 Multi-linear regression to calculate/predict QI.....  | 74  |
| 4.4 Conclusions .....   | 76  |
| Chapter 5.....  | 78  |
| Results and discussion .....  | 78  |
| Determining the Söderberg electrode baking isotherm temperature .....                             | 78  |
| 5.1 Determination of the TMA behaviour of pitch thermally pre-treated at 450°C.....               | 78  |
| 5. 2 Determination of the TMA behaviour of pitch thermally pre-treated at 475 and 500 °C<br>..... | 80  |
| 5.3 FT-IR analysis of CTPs thermally treated at 475°C .....                                       | 84  |
| 5.4 Conclusions .....   | 88  |
| Chapter 6.....  | 89  |
| Results and discussion .....  | 89  |
| Structural changes in the Söderberg electrode beyond the baking isotherm .....                    | 89  |
| 6.1 Introduction .....  | 89  |
| 6.1 Measurement of dimensional changes during three TMA thermal cycles up to 1300°C<br>.....      | 89  |
| 6.2 Structural changes of the CTP on heat treatment.....  | 93  |
| 6.2.1 FT-IR analysis of CTP samples thermally treated at 700 and 1000°C.....                      | 94  |
| 6.2.2 FT-IR analysis of CTP thermally treated at 1300°C and prebaked electrode<br>graphite .....  | 96  |
| 6.3 XRD analysis of thermally treated samples .....   | 99  |
| 6.3.1 XRD analysis of thermally treated CTP .....   | 99  |
| 6.4 Conclusions .....   | 106 |
| Chapter 7.....  | 108 |
| Project conclusions and recommendations .....   | 108 |
| 7.1 Project evaluations based on objectives .....   | 108 |
| 7.2 Future perspectives.....  | 112 |
| References.....   | 113 |
| Appendix A.....   | 123 |

|                   |     |
|-------------------|-----|
| Appendix B .....  | 146 |
| Publications..... | 146 |

## List of abbreviations

| <b>Abbreviation</b> | <b>Description</b>                       |
|---------------------|--|
| %                   | Percentage                               |
| % A                 | Percentage Absorbance                    |
| % T                 | Percentage Transmittance                 |
| °                   | Degrees                                  |
| AAS                 | Atomic Absorption Spectrophotometer      |
| ASTM                | American Society for Testing Materials   |
| ATR                 | Attenuated Total Reflectance             |
| CP MAS              | Cross Polarisation Magic Angle Spinning  |
| CT                  | Coal Tar                                 |
| CTP                 | Coal Tar Pitch                           |
| CV                  | Coking Value                             |
| DD                  | Dipolar Decoupling                       |
| DMA                 | Dynamic Mechanical Analysis              |
| DMF                 | Dimethylformamide                        |
| DSC                 | Differential Scanning Calorimetry        |
| FC                  | Fixed Carbon                             |
| FIR                 | Far Infrared                             |
| FTIR                | Fourier Transform Infra-Red spectroscopy |
| GC                  | Gas Chromatography                       |

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| GC-MS  | Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectroscopy    |
| HMB    | Hexamethyl Benzene                      |
| HPLC   | High Performance Liquid Chromatography  |
| ICP    | Inductively Coupled Plasma              |
| IR     | Infrared                                |
| kN     | Kilo Newton                             |
| amu    | Atomic mass unit                        |
| L      | Litre                                   |
| MAS    | Magic Angle Spinning                    |
| MATLAB | Matrix Laboratory                       |
| MIR    | Mid Infrared                            |
| MLR    | Multi Linear Regression                 |
| N      | Newton                                  |
| NIR    | Near Infrared                           |
| NMR    | Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy |
| PAHs   | Poly Aromatic Hydrocarbons              |
| ppm    | Parts Per Million                       |
| QI     | Quinoline Insolubles                    |
| SANS   | South African National Standards        |
| SP     | Softening Point                         |
| TGA    | Thermo Gravimetric Analysis             |
| TI     | Toluene Insoluble                       |

TMA

Thermo Mechanical Analysis

XRD

X-Ray Diffraction spectroscopy

## List of figures

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 2.1 Typical coal pyrolysis reactions.....  | 8  |
| Figure 2.2 PAHs found in CT and CTP.....  | 12 |
| Figure 2.3 Structural transformations and reactions that take place during carbonisation of CTP.....                                      | 16 |
| Figure 2.4 Hexagonal or layered structure of graphite.....  | 17 |
| Figure 2.5 Material flows in the carbon .....   | 11 |
| Figure 2.6 Processes involved in the manufacture of graphite artifacts.....   | 23 |
| Figure 2.7 Electrode paste cylinders.....   | 25 |
| Figure 2.8 Structure of a Söderberg electrode .....   | 27 |
| Figure 2.9 Characteristic electrode breaks and their main causes .....  | 33 |
| Figure 2.10 Parameters that can be determined by XRD in graphitic materials .....   | 37 |
| Figure 3.1 TI extraction apparatus.....   | 43 |
| Figure 3.2 Tube furnace used in the thermal pre-treatment CTP samples.....  | 47 |
| Figure 3.3 Tensile test machine used in pressing CTP pellets.....   | 49 |
| Figure 3.4 TMA used in the measurement of CTP pellets' dimensional changes.....   | 50 |
| Figure 3.5 Typical heating and cooling cycles, with associated dimensional changes, during TMA analysis of a thermal pre-treated CTP..... | 51 |
| Figure 3.6 XRD sample preparation kit.....  | 52 |
| Figure 3.7 XRD samples ready for analysis .....   | 53 |
| Figure 4.1 Typical CP MAS spectra of a CTP sample .....   | 64 |
| Figure 4.2 FT-IR spectra of raw (as-received) CTP 1, 2 3 .....  | 67 |
| Figure 4.3 XRD diffractograms of raw (as-received) CTP.....   | 69 |
| Figure 4.4 RMSE as a function of optimum combination of parameters used in the multi-linear regression calculation/prediction of CV ..... | 71 |
| Figure 4.5 Comparison of CV values determined experimentally and those calculated utilising multi-linear regression .....                 | 72 |
| Figure 4.6 RMSE as a function of optimum combination of parameters used in the multi-linear regression calculation/ prediction of TI..... | 73 |
| Figure 4.7 Comparison of TI values determined experimentally and those calculated utilising multi-linear regression .....                 | 74 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Figure 4.8 RMSE as a function of optimum combination of parameters used in the multi-linear regression calculation/ prediction of QI.....              | 75  |
| Figure 4.9 Comparison of QI values determined experimentally and those calculated utilising multi-linear regression .....                              | 76  |
| Figure 5.1 Dimensional change patterns of CTP samples pre-treated at 450°C.....  | 79  |
| Figure 5.2 An example of a CTP pellet that had melted in the TMA.....  | 80  |
| Figure 5.3 An example of a pellet prepared for CTP pre-treated at 475 °C that did not indicate softening during TMA analysis.....                      | 81  |
| Figure 5.4 Dimensional changes for CTP samples thermally treated at 475 °C.....  | 82  |
| Figure 5.5 Dimensional change of CTP samples thermally pre-treated at 500 °C .....   | 83  |
| Figure 5.6 FT-IR spectra of CTP thermally pre-treated at 475 °C .....  | 85  |
| Figure 5.7 Comparison of FT-IR spectra of raw and thermally pre-treated (at 475 °C) CTP for CTP samples 2 and 3.....                                   | 87  |
| Figure 6.1 TMA behaviour of CTP 1 during three thermal cycles .....  | 90  |
| Figure 6.2 TMA behaviour of CTP 4 during three thermal cycles .....  | 91  |
| Figure 6.3 TMA behaviour of CTP 9 during three thermal cycles .....  | 92  |
| Figure 6.4 FT-IR spectra of CTP thermally treated at 700 °C.....   | 95  |
| Figure 6.5 FT-IR spectra of CTP thermally treated at 1000 °C.....  | 95  |
| Figure 6.6 FT-IR spectra of CTP thermally treated at 1300 °C.....  | 96  |
| Figure 6.7 FT-IR spectra of CTP samples thermally treated at 1300 °C and prebaked electrode graphite.....  | 97  |
| Figure 6.9 XRD diffractograms of CTP thermally treated at 475°C .....  | 100 |
| Figure 6.10 XRD diffractograms of CTP thermally treated at 1300°C .....  | 101 |
| Figure 6.11 XRD diffractogram of prebaked electrode graphite.....  | 102 |
| Figure 6. 12 (b) XRD diffractograms of raw pitch, pitch thermally treated at 475 and 1300 °C, as well as prebaked electrode graphite (magnified) ..... | 105 |
| Figure A2.1 Typical CP MAS spectra of as-received CTP samples .....  | 127 |
| Figure A2.2 Typical CP MAS spectra of as-received CTP samples .....  | 128 |
| Figure A2.3 FT-IR spectra of raw (as-received) CTP .....   | 129 |
| Figure A2.4 FT-IR spectra of raw (as-received) CTP .....   | 130 |
| Figure A2.5 XRD diffractograms of raw (as-received) CTP.....   | 131 |
| Figure A2.6 XRD diffractograms of raw (as-received) CTP .....  | 132 |
| Figure A3.1 Dimensional change patterns of CTP samples pre-treated at 450 °C.....  | 133 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Figure A3.2 TMA behaviour of CTP 2 during three thermal cycles .....    | 134 |
| Figure A3.3 TMA behaviour of CTP 3 during three thermal cycles .....    | 135 |
| Figure A3.4 TMA behaviour of CTP 5 during three thermal cycles.....     | 136 |
| Figure A3.5 TMA behaviour of CTP 6 during three thermal cycles .....    | 137 |
| Figure A3.6 TMA behaviour of CTP 8 during three thermal cycles .....    | 138 |
| Figure A3.7 TMA behaviour of CTP 10 during three thermal cycles .....   | 139 |
| Figure A4.1 FT-IR spectra of CTP thermally pre-treated at 475 °C.....   | 140 |
| Figure A4.2 FT-IR spectra of CTP thermally treated at 700 °C .....      | 141 |
| Figure A4.3 FT-IR spectra of CTP thermally treated at 1000 °C .....     | 142 |
| Figure A4.4 FT-IR spectra of CTP thermally treated at 1300 °C .....     | 143 |
| Figure A4.5 XRD diffractograms of CTP thermally treated at 475 °C.....  | 144 |
| Figure A4.6 XRD diffractograms of CTP thermally treated at 1300 °C..... | 145 |

## List of tables

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Table 2.1 Different compounds found in CT .....   | 10  |
| Table 2.2 Typical specifications of thermally treated graphite and baked carbon. ....                 | 19  |
| Table 3. 1 NMR instrument operating parameters.....   | 45  |
| Table 3. 2 XRD instrument set-up parameters.....  | 53  |
| Table 4. 1 Fundamental properties of CTP samples. ....  | 57  |
| Table 4. 2 Proximate analysis of CTPs on an air-dried basis .....                                     | 59  |
| Table 4. 3 Ultimate analysis of CTP samples on a dry ash-free basis .....                             | 60  |
| Table 4. 4 Calculated structural NMR parameters for the 12 CTP samples.....                           | 62  |
| Table 4. 5 NMR chemical shift description .....   | 65  |
| Table 4. 6 FT-IR functional groups identification .....   | 66  |
| Table 6. 1 Dimensional change (%) for each TMA thermal cycle.....                                     | 93  |
| Table 6. 2 XRD d-spacing of raw, thermally-treated CTP as well as prebaked graphite<br>electrode..... | 103 |
| Table 6. 3 XRD lattice parameters for thermally treated CTP and prebaked electrode graphite<br>.....  | 106 |
| Table A1. 1 Determination of SP.....  | 123 |
| Table A1. 2 Determination of coking value (CV) .....  | 124 |
| Table A1. 3 Determination of quinoline insoluble (QI) .....   | 125 |
| Table A1. 4 Determination of toluene insolubles (TI).....   | 126 |