



FURTHER-FC



Further **U**nderstanding **R**elated to **T**ransport limitations at **H**igh current density towards future **E**lect**R**odes for **F**uel **C**ells

Discussion on MEA performance limitations Final Workshop



General considerations

CCM losses

Proton transport resistance thanks to EIS measurements

What else can we extract from EIS?

Oxygen transport resistance thanks to LCA measurements

Decoupling electrokinetic from transport limitations

Conclusion

General considerations

CCM losses

Proton transport resistance thanks to EIS measurements

What else can we extract from EIS?

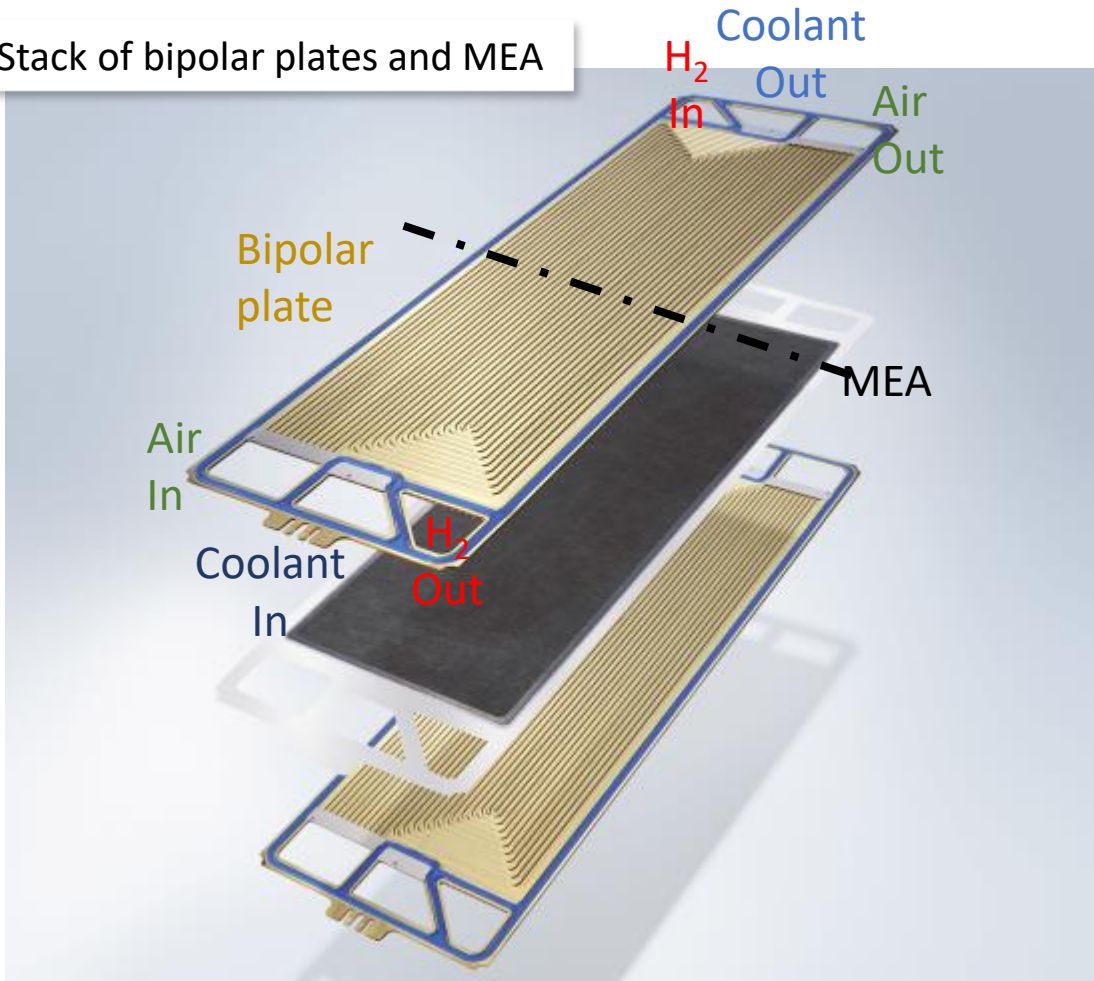
Oxygen transport resistance thanks to LCA measurements

Decoupling electrokinetic from transport limitations

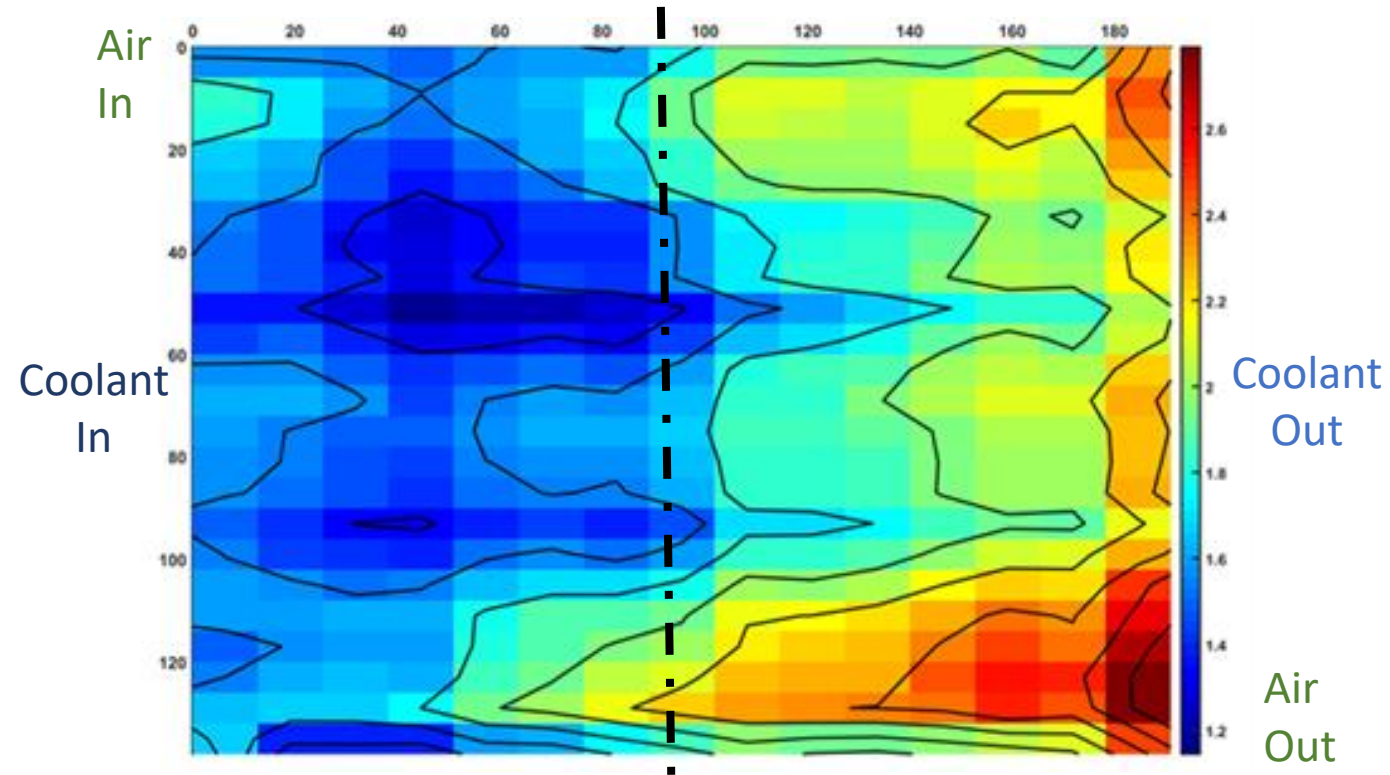
Conclusion

Heterogeneities at the cell level

Stack of bipolar plates and MEA

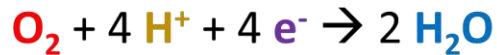


Current density distribution

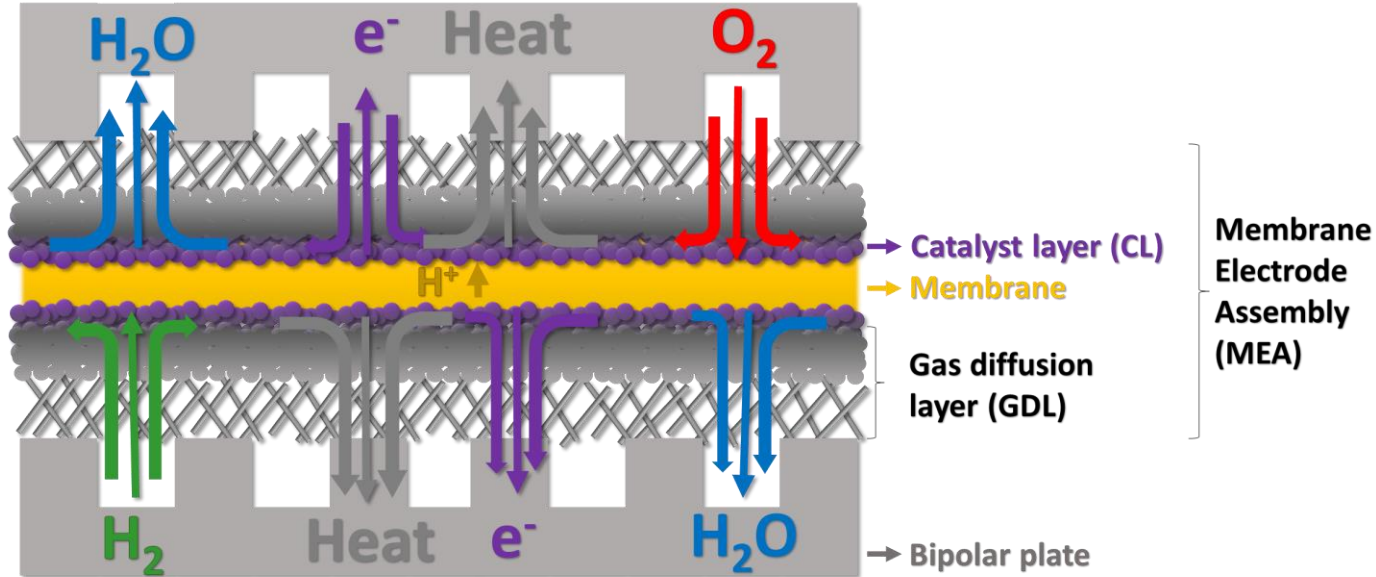


Heterogenous operation from inlet to outlet even in well designed stack (homogeneous compression) because of evolution of concentration of reactants and product and temperature

3D schematic of bipolar plate and MEA cross-section in the stack active area



CATHODE



ANODE



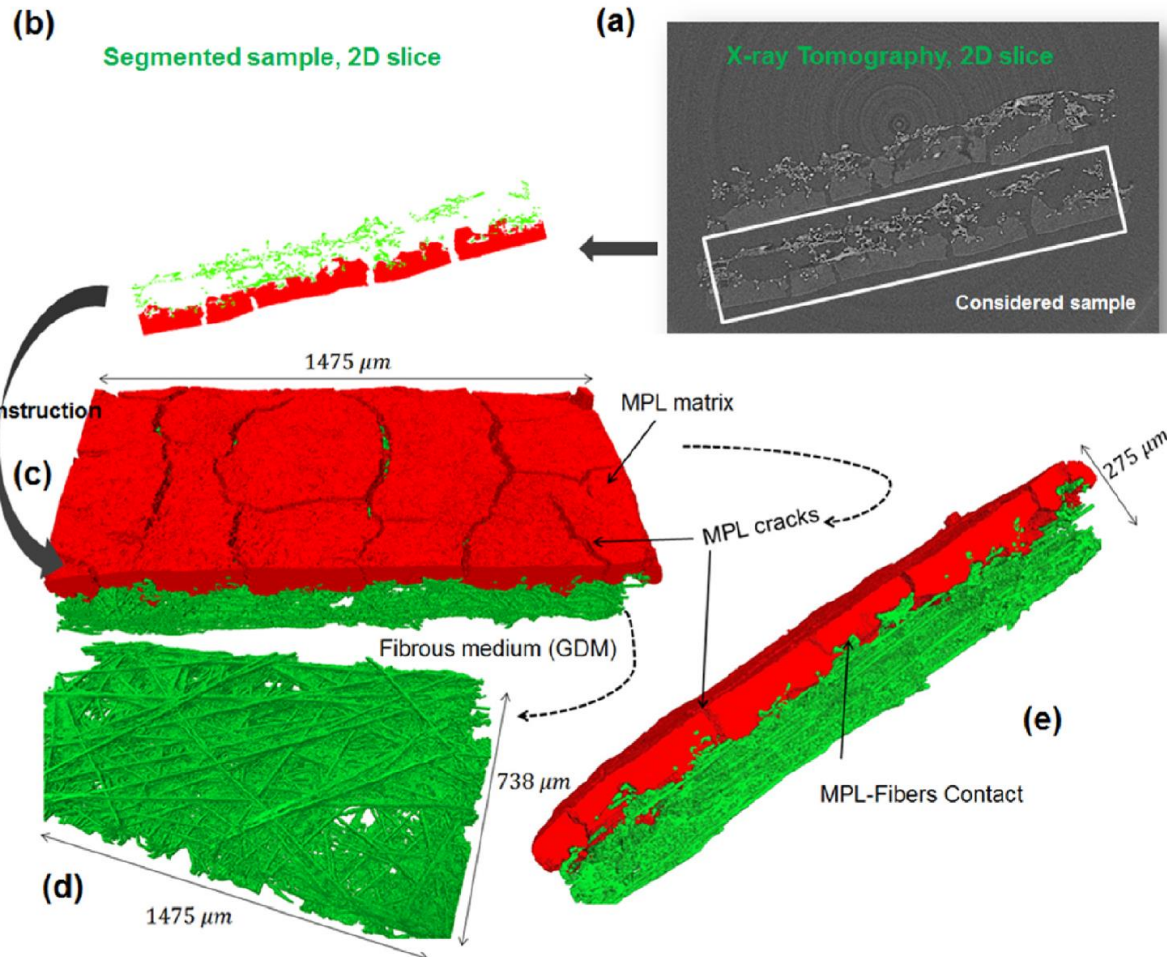
Homogeneous operation between each land/channel repeat unit in a well designed stack (homogeneous distribution of products and evacuation of water in all the channel & homogeneous compression)

Heterogeneous operation at the land/channel scale because of GDL transport limitations

Heat transport limitation in GDL
 → T gradient between membrane and bipolar plate
 Several °C at high current density
 → Lower RH in the CCM than in the BP

A multiscale approach combining two imagery techniques

From GDL structure to transport properties



MPL structure from FIB-SEM

+ GDM structure from X-Ray CT

→ Computation of O_2 effective diffusion tensor (MPL)

→ Through plane effective diffusion coefficient

→ Integration in the 2D cell model : through-plane + along channel (land/channel averaged)

- Knudsen diffusion is important in the MPL matrix.
- The MPL has a quite significant impact on the GDM-MPL diffusion property compared to the GDM alone.
- The MPL-GDM overlap region has a quite noticeable impact on the diffusion resistance of the assembly.
- MPL cracks have a relatively weak impact on the GDM-MPL assembly diffusive resistance, with a reduction by about 10%.

Demanding and must be done for each GDL

Next step: include the two phase flow



OUTLINE



General considerations

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What else can we extract from EIS?

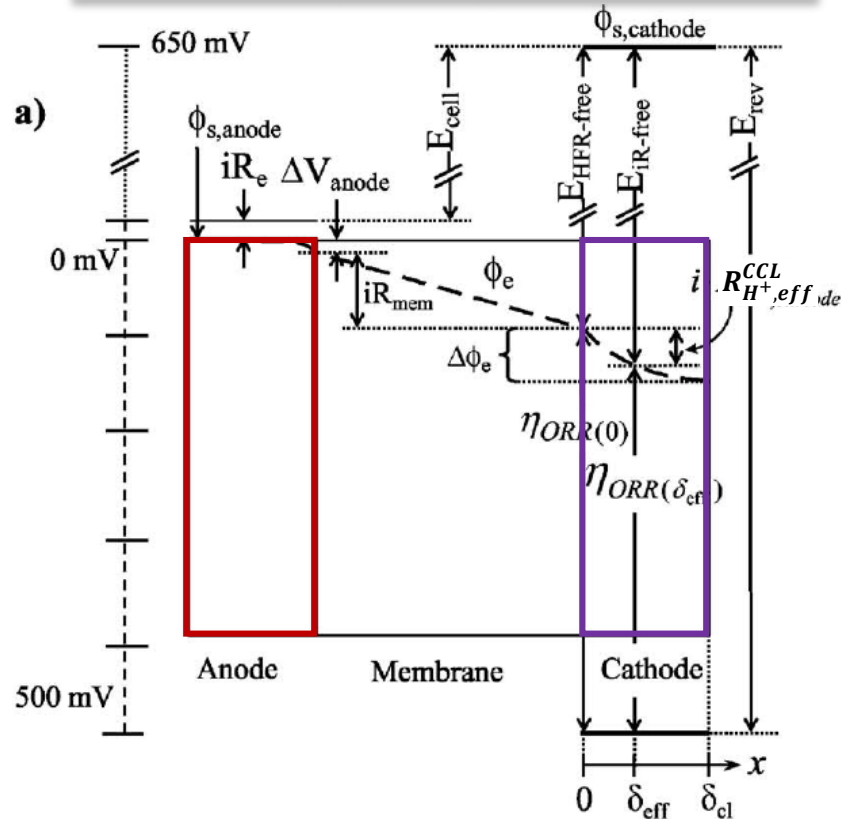
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CCM performance limitations

Schematic of the voltage losses across the CCM



Neyerlin *et al.* 2007 *J. Electrochem. Soc.* 154 B279

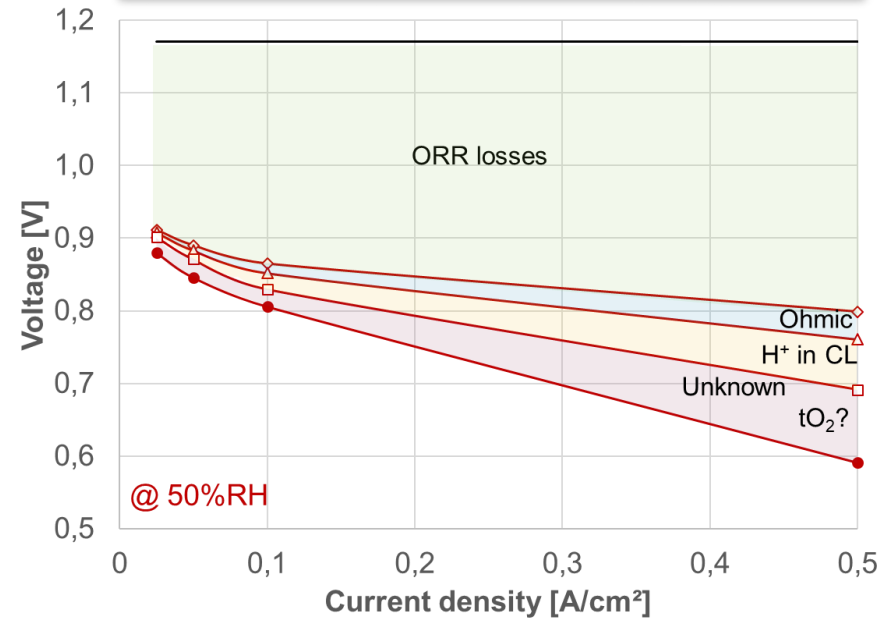
$$U_{cell} = U_{rev} - R_{Ohm} \cdot I - \eta_{HOR} - R_{H^+,eff}^{ACL} \cdot I - \eta_{ORR} - R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot I - \eta_{transport(gas)}$$

Neglect losses at the anode (kinetic and transport)

$$U_{cell} = U_{rev} - \eta_{ORR} - R_{Ohm} \cdot I - R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot I - \eta_{transport(gas)}$$

ACL: Anode Catalyst Layer
CCL: Cathode Catalyst Layer

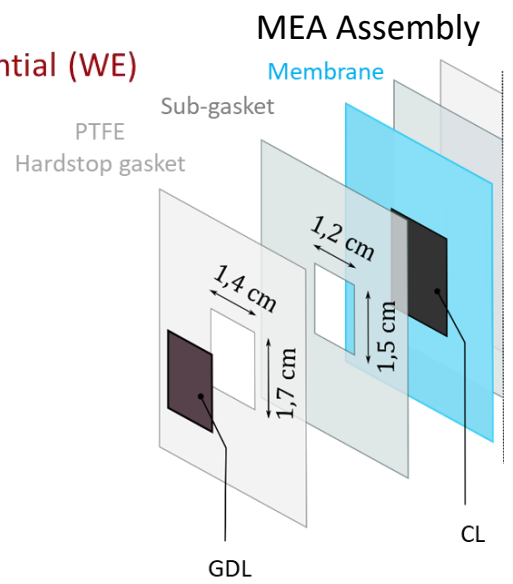
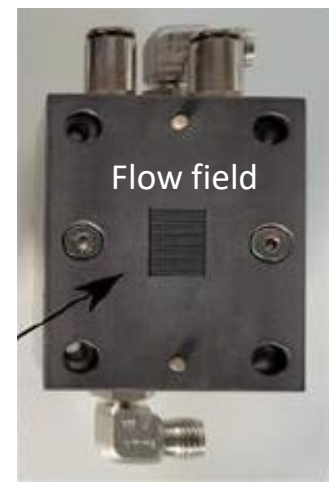
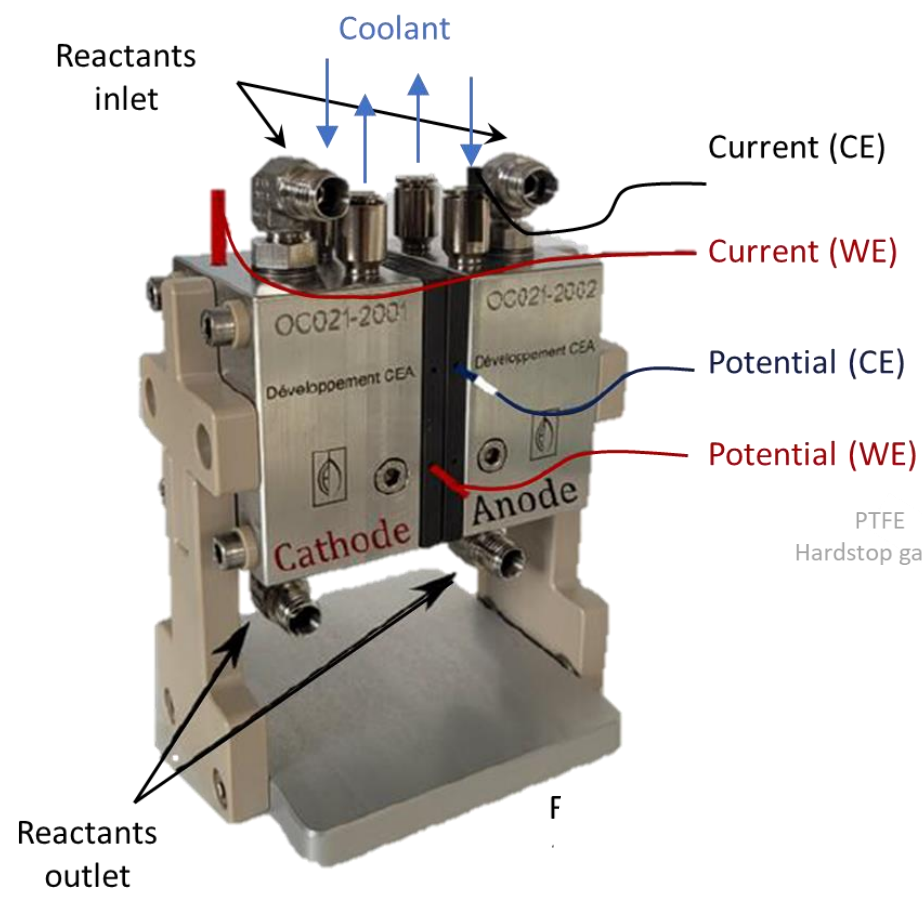
Polarisation curve loss breakdown



Hyp. : Decoupling between electrokinetic and transport losses

Best possible control of conditions across the active area

Differential cell



- **High reactant stoichiometry** ($> 30 @ 3A/cm^2$)
→ Minized inlet to outlet « heterogeneity »
- **Small land & channel** ($250 \mu m$)
→ reduced land/channel « heterogeneity »
- **In-plane operation as homogeneous as possible**
- Gas velocity in channel similar to that in stack
→ **Representative of part of the active area of a stack**

Control of T, RH, PH_2 , PO_2 , P_{tot}

General considerations

CCM losses

Proton transport resistance thanks to EIS measurements

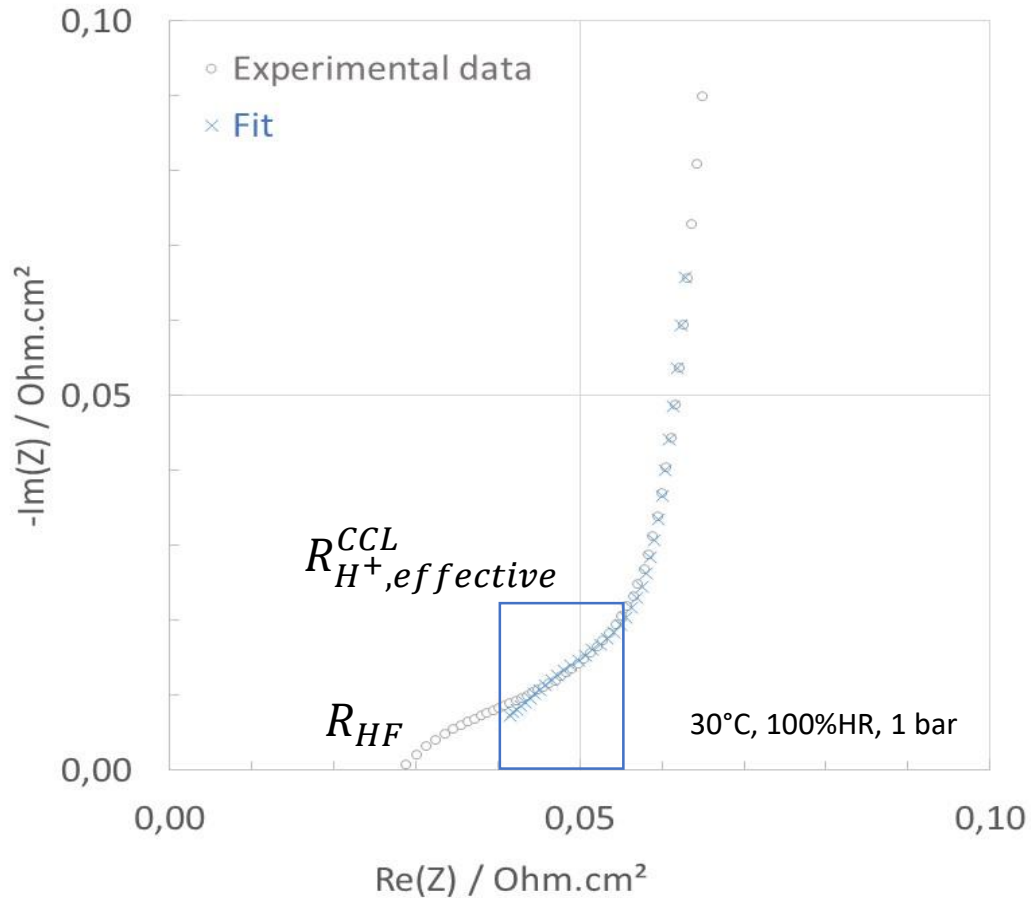
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EIS under H₂/N₂ _ No ORR



Ideal case: $R_{HF} \sim R_{Ohm} \sim R_{H^+}^{membrane} + R_{e^-}^{GDL}$ $5 < R_{e^-}^{GDL} < 10 \text{ mOhm.cm}^2$

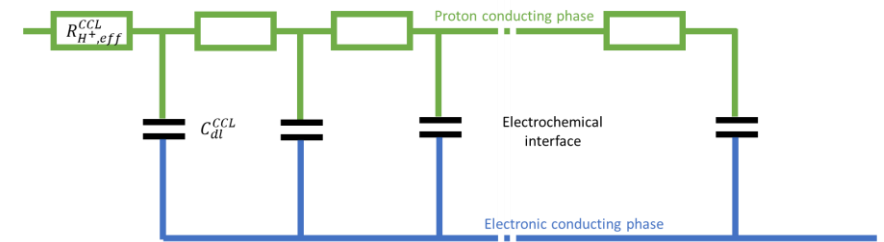
Hyp.: $R_{e^-}^{CCL} \ll R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$

If not: $R_{HF} \sim R_{Ohm} \sim R_{H^+}^{membrane} + R_{e^-}^{GDL} + \frac{R_{e^-}^{CCL} \cdot R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}}{R_{e^-}^{CCL} + R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}}$

Proper quantification of R_{Ohm} needs to fit the whole impedance Z_{H_2/N_2}

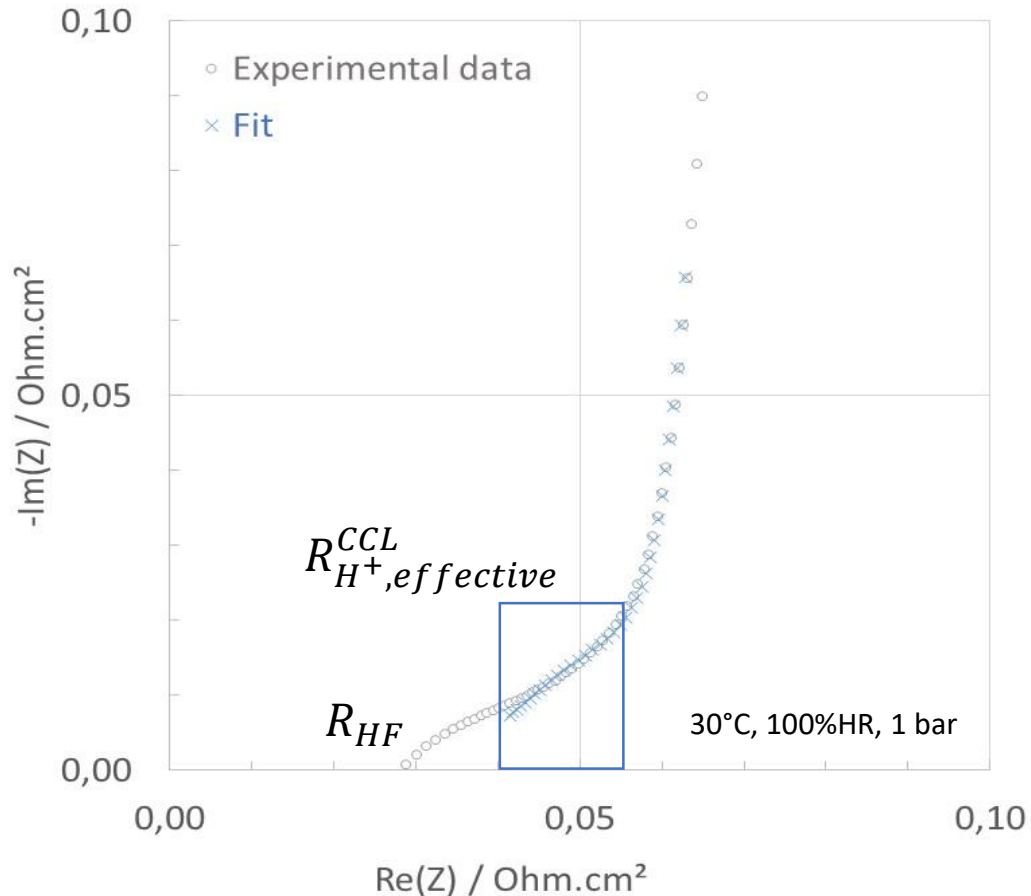
Transmission line model
 blocking electrode

$R_{e^-}^{CCL}$ is neglected



$$Z_{H_2/N_2} = R_{Ohm} + R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \frac{\coth\left(\sqrt{i \cdot \omega \cdot R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot C_{dl}^{CCL}}\right)}{\sqrt{i \cdot \omega \cdot R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot C_{dl}^{CCL}}}$$

EIS under H₂/N₂ _ No ORR



$$Z_{H_2/N_2} = R_{Ohm} + R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \frac{\coth\left(\sqrt{i \cdot \omega \cdot R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot C_{dl}^{CCL}}\right)}{\sqrt{i \cdot \omega \cdot R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot C_{dl}^{CCL}}}$$

Hyp.

- R_e^{CCL} is neglected
- Ideal capacitor
- No Faradaic reaction : blocking Working Electrode (WE)

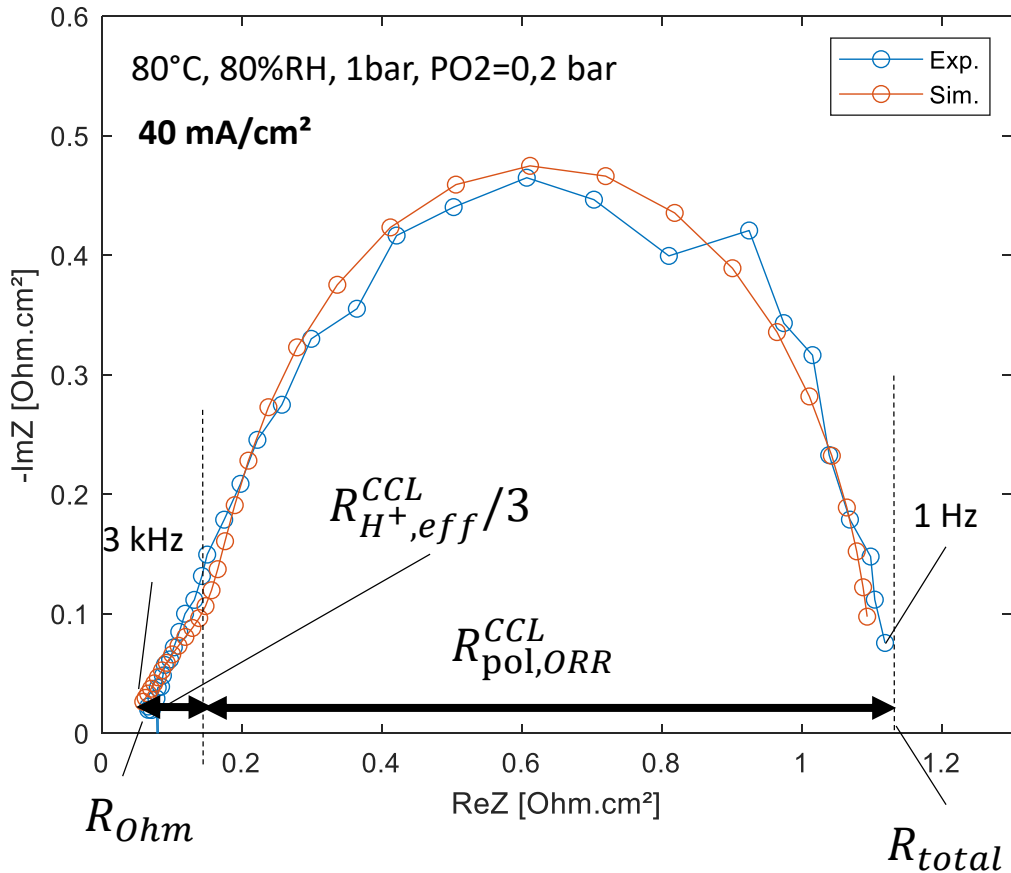
Limits

- Faradaic reaction : HOR of H₂ crossing membrane from CE
→ Limit the minimum frequency for a proper fit (~few 10 Hz)
- Inductance of the connections
- Impedance of the potentiostat
→ Limit the maximum frequency for the fit (~few kHz)
- Non ideal capacitive behaviour
→ Use Constant Phase Element (CPE) instead of C

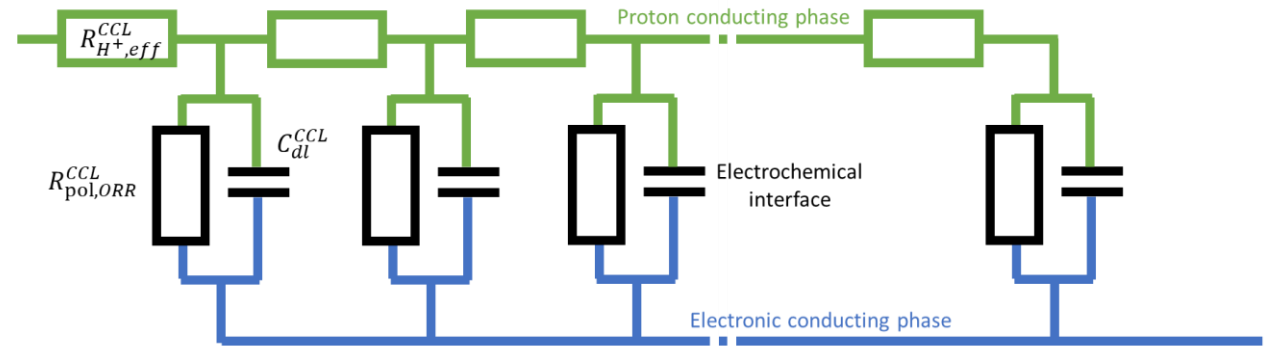
Siroma et al. 2015 *Electrochimica Acta* 160 313

More accurate with larger resistance, e.g. smaller geometrical active surface

EIS under H₂/O₂_ORR

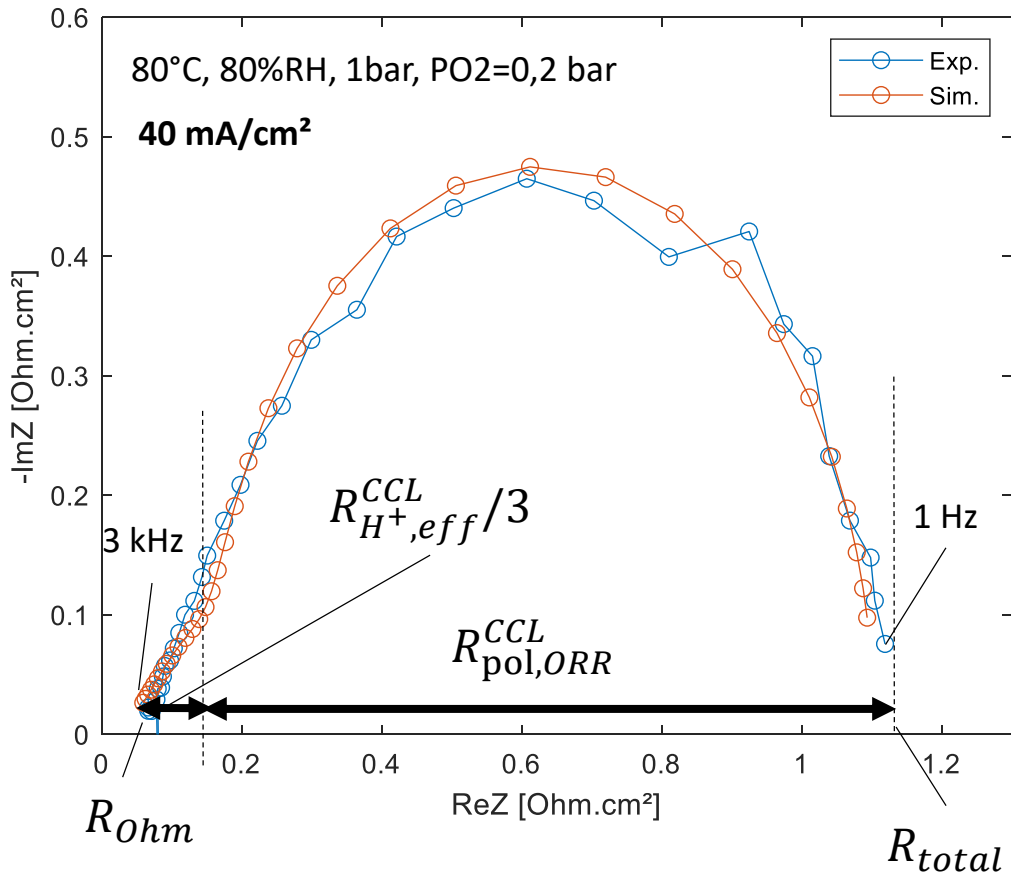


Proper quantification needs to fit the whole impedance Z_{H_2/O_2}



$$Z_{H_2/O_2} = R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot \frac{\coth \left(\sqrt{i \cdot \omega \cdot R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot C_{dl}^{CCL} + \frac{R_{pol,ORR}^{CCL}}{R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}}} \right)}{\sqrt{i \cdot \omega \cdot R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot C_{dl}^{CCL} + \frac{R_{pol,ORR}^{CCL}}{R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}}}}$$

EIS under H₂/O₂_ORR



$$Z_{H_2/O_2} = R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot \frac{\coth \left(\sqrt{i \cdot \omega \cdot R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot C_{dl}^{CCL} + \frac{R_{pol,ORR}^{CCL}}{R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}}} \right)}{\sqrt{i \cdot \omega \cdot R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot C_{dl}^{CCL} + \frac{R_{pol,ORR}^{CCL}}{R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}}}}$$

Hyp.

- No gas transport limitations at all
- Homogeneous operation across the CL

Limits

- No reliable analytical model when transport limitations can not be neglected
→ Fitting at low current density (<0.1 – 0.2 A/cm²)
- Inductance of the connections
- Impedance of the potentiostat
→ Limit the maximum frequency for the fit (~few kHz)

$\sigma_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ for different I/C
Reference I/C = 0.8

In-plane H^+ conductivity of ultra-thin film measured ex-situ

$$\sigma_{H^+,in-plane}^{D2020 \text{ thin film}, 7 \text{ nm @ } 80^\circ\text{C}, 80\%RH} = \sigma_{H^+}^{thin \text{ film}} = 1 \text{ mS} \cdot \text{cm}^{-1}$$

Theoretical effective CCL H^+ conductivity from ultra-thin film

$$\sigma_{H^+,eff}^{CCL \text{ theo @ } 80^\circ\text{C}, 80\%RH} = \sigma_{H^+}^{thin \text{ film}} \frac{\phi_v^{D2020}}{\tau} < 0.215 \text{ mS} \cdot \text{cm}^{-1}$$

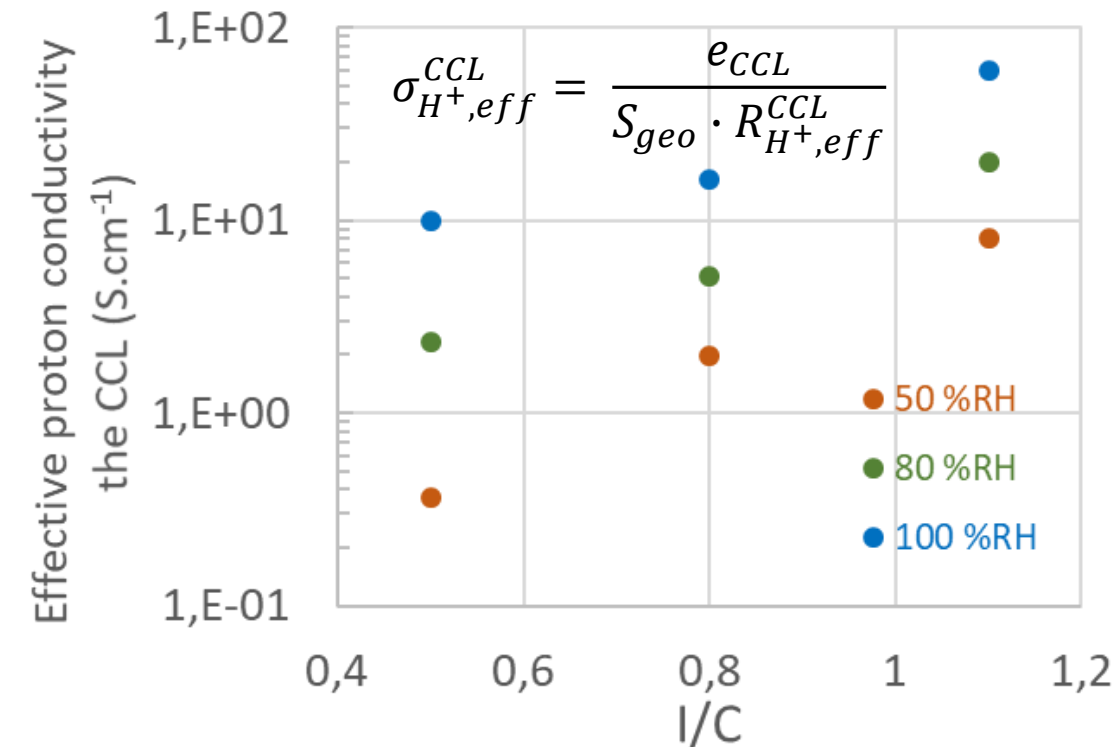
$$\phi_v^{D2020} = 0.215, \text{ volume fraction of D2020 in CCL}$$

$$\tau = 1, \text{ minimum tortuosity of the ionomer network}$$

Experimental effective CCL H^+ conductivity

$$2 < \sigma_{H^+,eff}^{CCL \text{ exp. @ } 80^\circ\text{C}, 80\%RH} < 20 \text{ mS} \cdot \text{cm}^{-1} \gg \sigma_{H^+,eff}^{CCL \text{ theo @ } 80^\circ\text{C}, 80\%RH}$$

Values for ultra-thin ionomer conductive films may not be representative

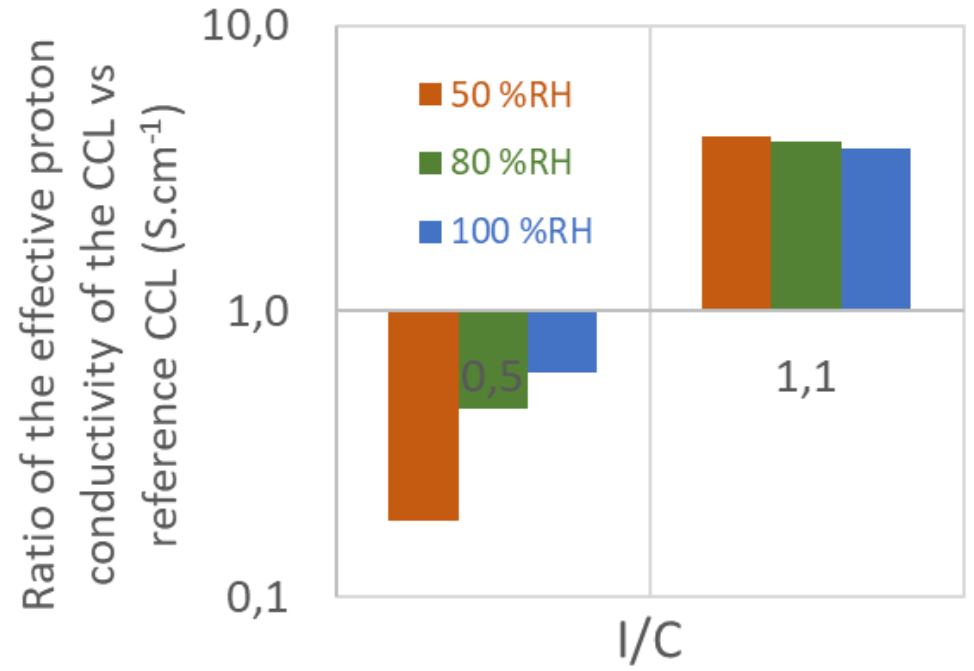
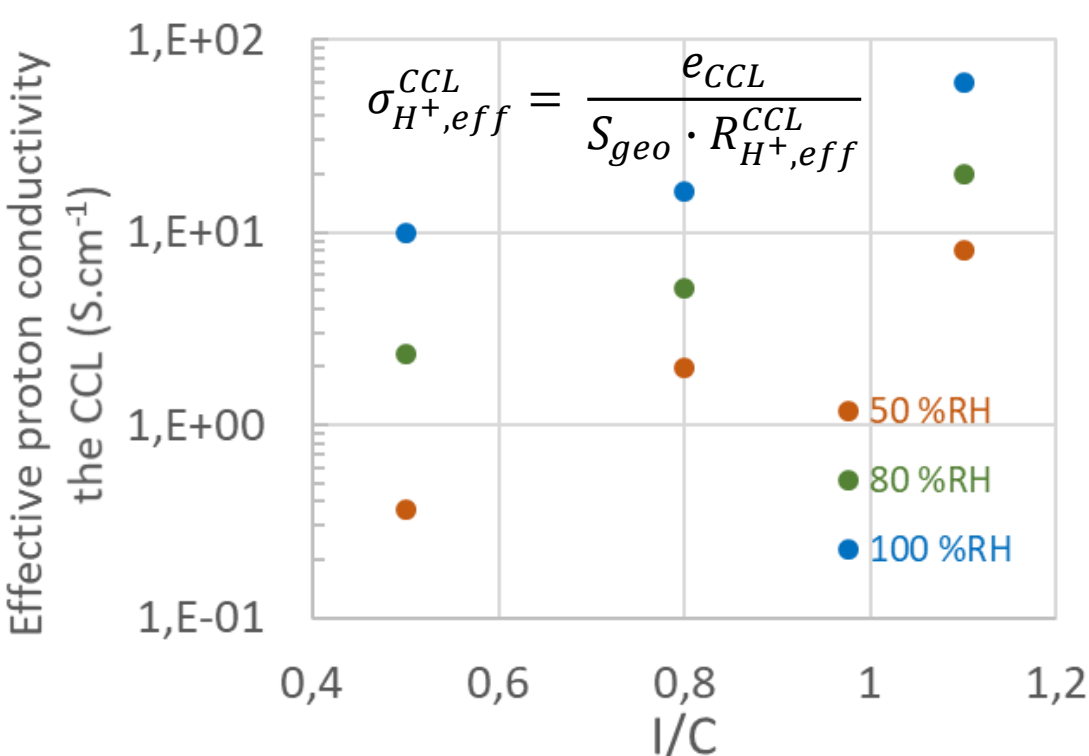


$\sigma_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ increases as I/C and RH increase

$$e_{ccl} = 6.5 \cdot 10^{-4} \text{ cm}, \text{ thickness of CCL}$$

$\sigma_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ for different I/C
Reference I/C = 0.8

Ratio of $\sigma_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ for different I/C
Reference I/C = 0.8

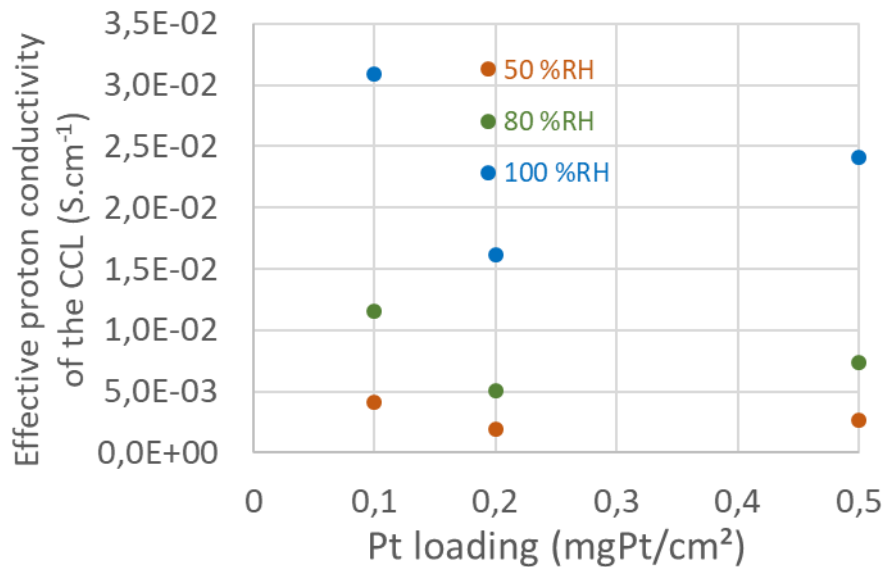


$\sigma_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ increases as I/C and RH increase

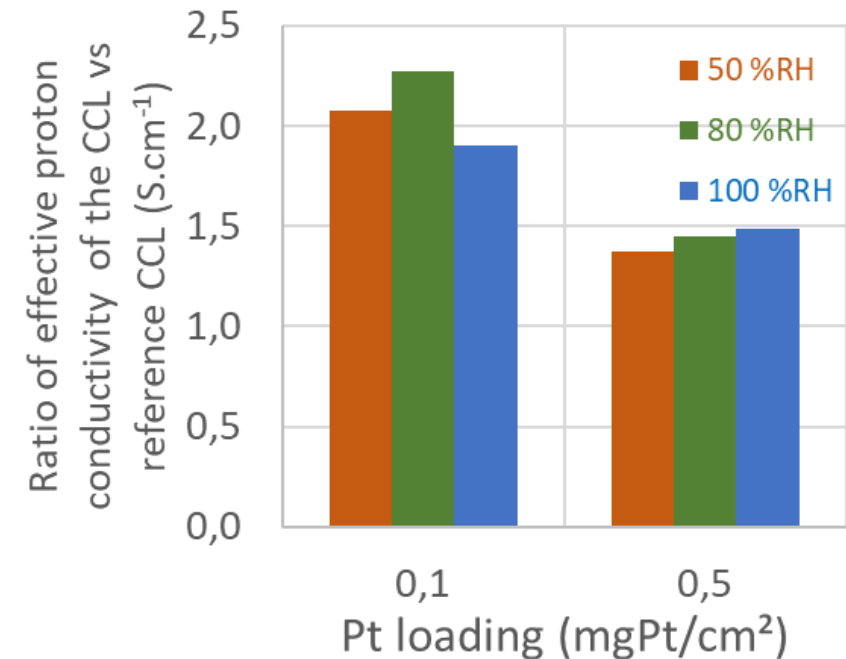
$R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ ratio depends on RH for low I/C
→ Water « independently » of ionomer plays a role in H⁺ transport

$e_{ccl} = 6.5 \cdot 10^{-4} \text{ cm}$, thickness of CCL

$\sigma_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ as a function of CCL thickness for different RH



Ratio of $\sigma_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ for different Pt loading
Reference $0.2 \text{ mg}_{Pt}/\text{cm}^2_{geo}$



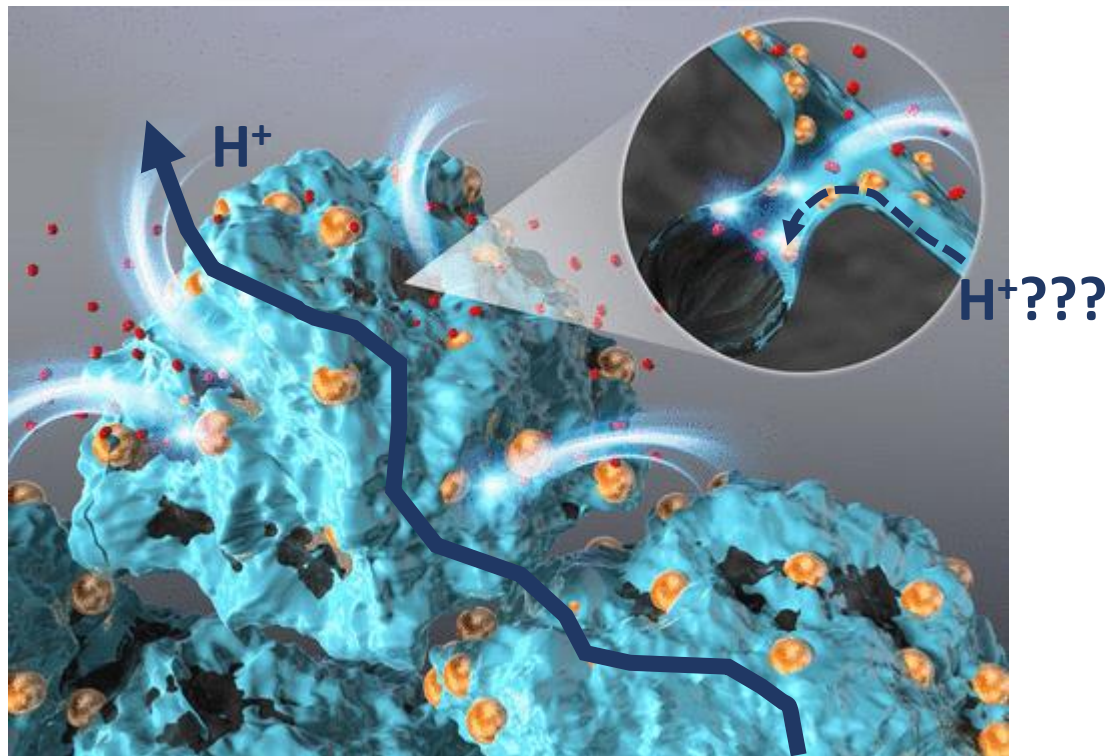
- $\sigma_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ ratio does not depend RH
- ➔ Similar overall behaviour for all RH
- $\sigma_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ ratio does depend on Pt loading/CCL thickness and $\neq 1$
- ➔ Difference in ionomer distribution through CCL?

Proton transport limitations

Does it give relevant information to correlate with losses?

Scheme of Pt/C catalyst layer

Artist's impression



$R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ proton transport across CCL

Does $R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ tackles H^+ transport limitations at the nm scale e.g. inside the nanopores of the C???

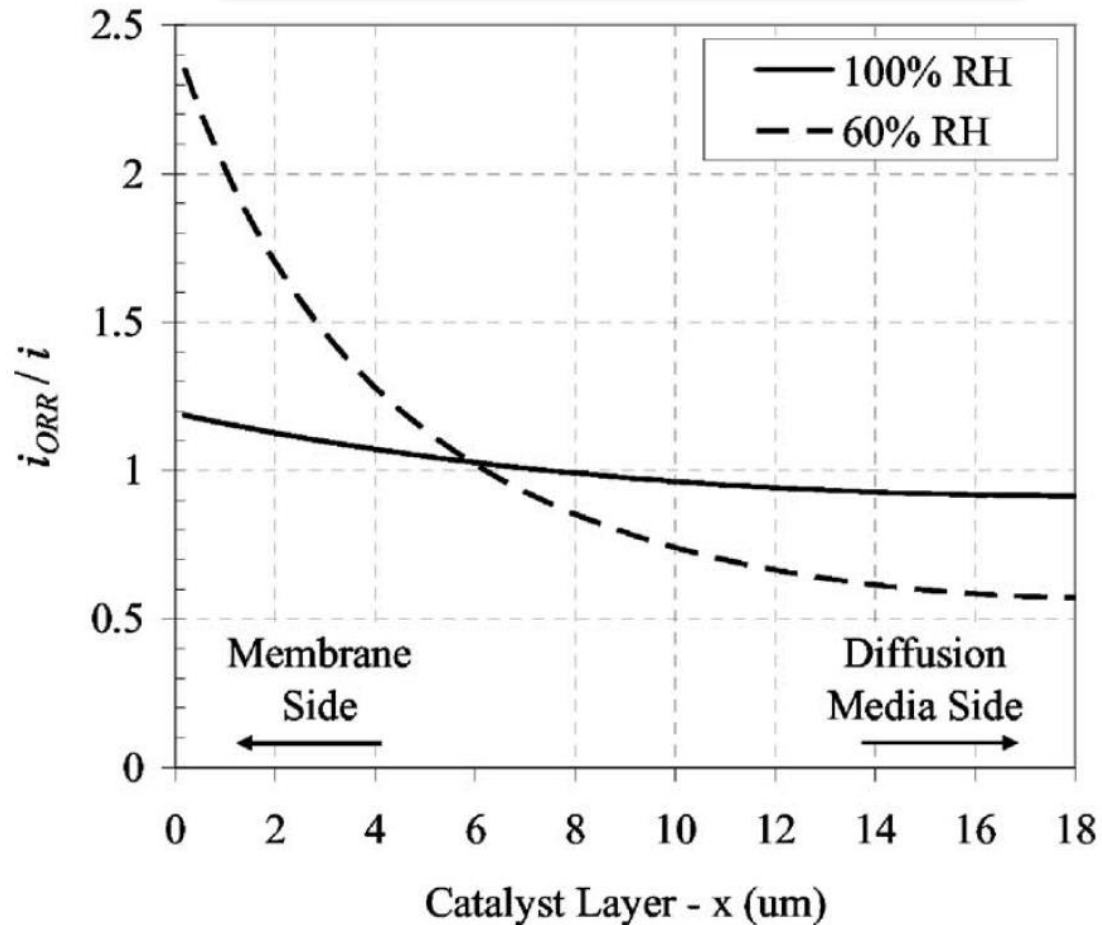
→ It is currently of paramount importance

Kobayashi et al. 2021 ACS Appl. Energy Mater.
Univ. Yamanashi

Proton transport limitations

What does it correspond to?

ORR current density distribution across CCL



Neyerlin *et al.* 2007 *J. Electrochem. Soc.* **154** B279

Limits

- $R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ implies heterogeneous operation across CCL
→ Not the same reaction rate on all catalytic sites

- $R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}$ losses due to H^+ transport across CCL
→ No information on its impact on effective use of catalyst or to kinetic losses due to heterogeneous operation

General considerations

CCM losses

Proton transport resistance thanks to EIS measurements

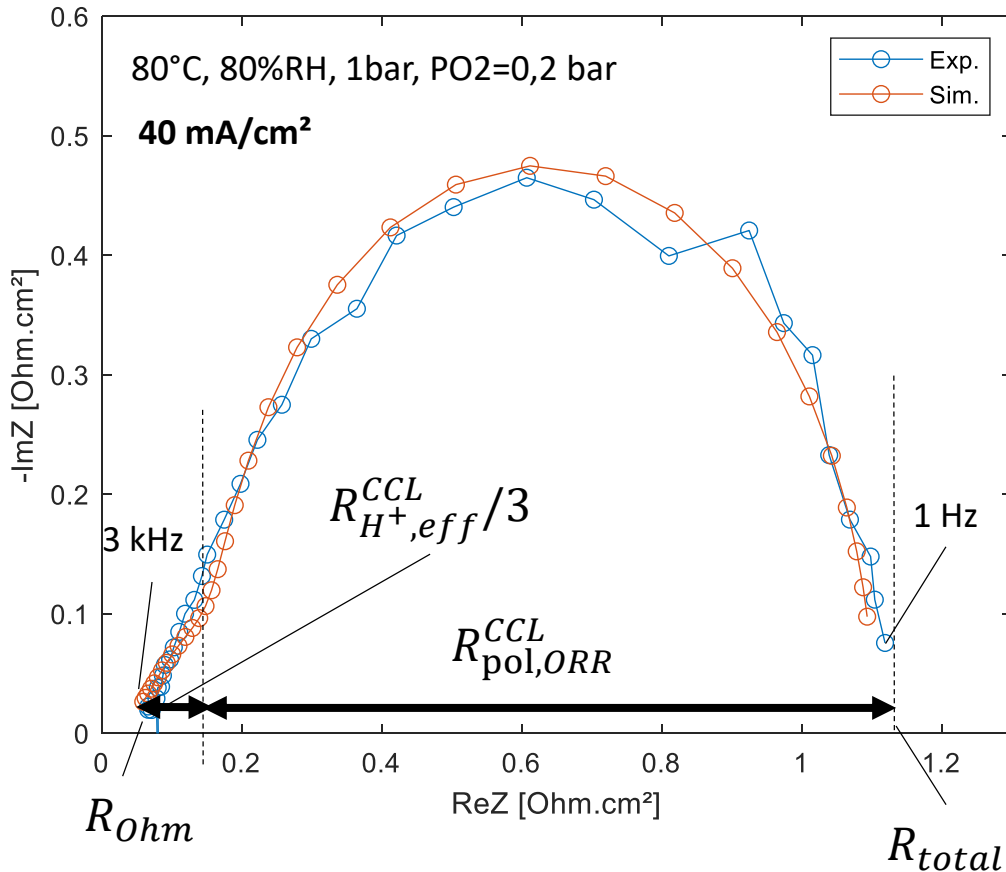
What else can we extract from EIS?

Oxygen transport resistance thanks to LCA measurements

Decoupling electrokinetic from transport limitations

Conclusion

EIS under H₂/O₂_ORR



$$Z_{H_2/O_2} = R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \frac{\coth \left(\sqrt{i \cdot \omega \cdot R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot C_{dl}^{CCL} + \frac{R_{pol,ORR}^{CCL}}{R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}}} \right)}{\sqrt{i \cdot \omega \cdot R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot C_{dl}^{CCL} + \frac{R_{pol,ORR}^{CCL}}{R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL}}}}$$

Limits

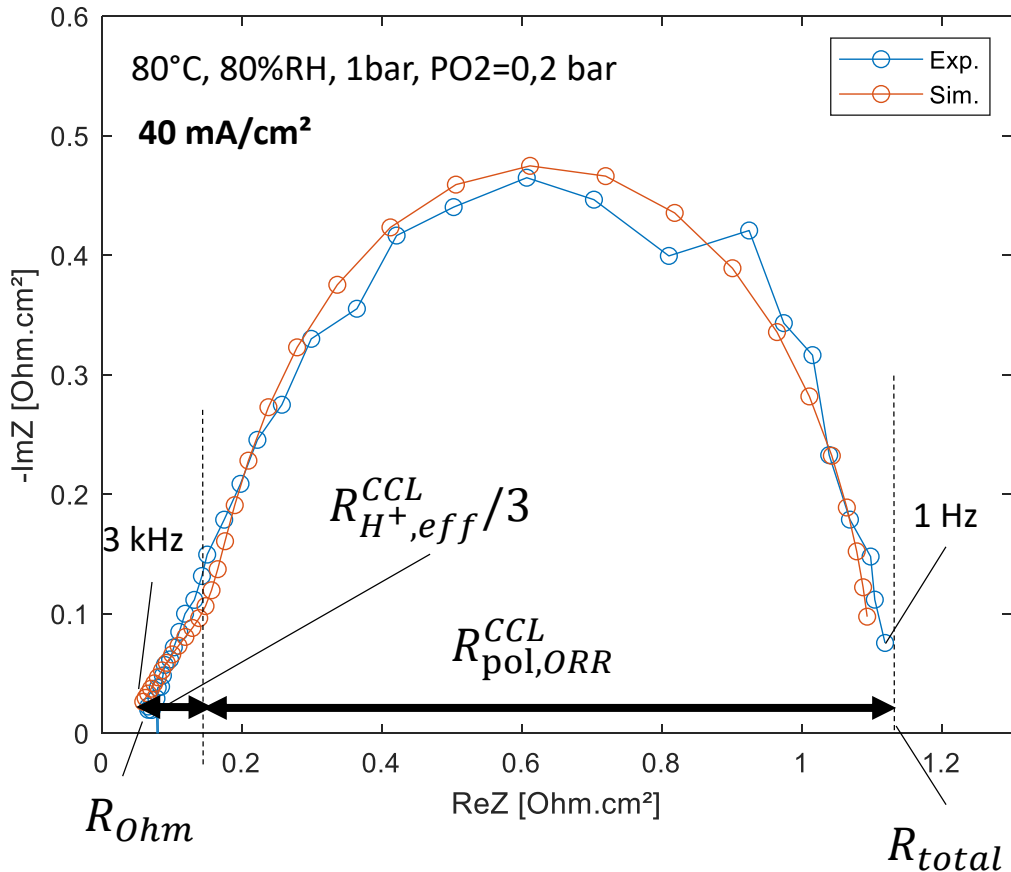
- $R_{pol,ORR}^{CCL}$ does not give you any information on the catalyst activity for ORR or the overall activity of your CCL

$$U_{cell} = U_{rev} - \eta_{ORR} - R_{Ohm} \cdot I - R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot I - \eta_{transport(gas)}$$

If no transport limitations and correction from Ohmic drop and H⁺ transport limitation in CCL

$$U_{corr} = U_{cell} + R_{Ohm} \cdot I + R_{H^+,eff}^{CCL} \cdot I = U_{rev} - \eta_{ORR}$$

EIS under H₂/O₂_ORR



$$R_{pol,ORR}^{CCL} = - \left(\frac{d\eta_{ORR}}{dI} \right)_{\omega \rightarrow 0}$$

Simple Butler-Volmer:

$$I = I_0 \left(e^{\frac{-\alpha_C F \eta_{ORR}}{RT}} - e^{\frac{(1-\alpha_C) F \eta_{ORR}}{RT}} \right)$$

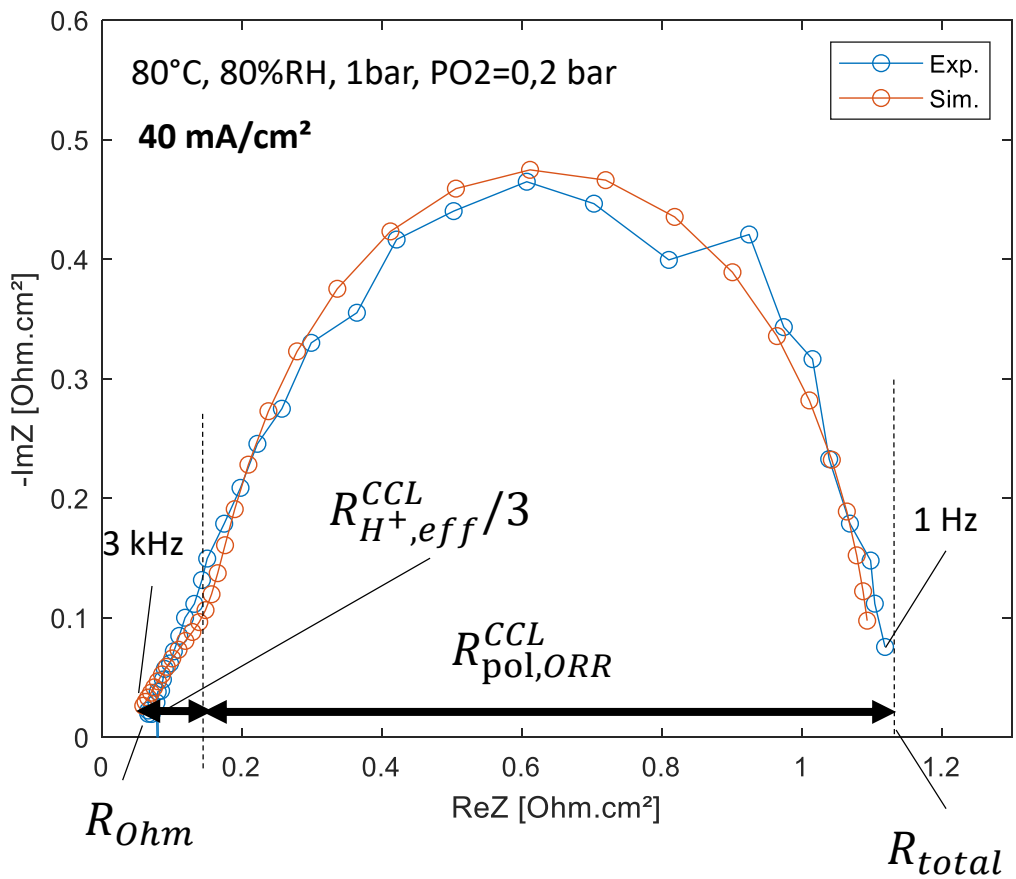
Tafel approximation: $|\eta_{ORR}| > \frac{3RT}{\alpha_C F}$

$$I = I_0 e^{\frac{-\alpha_C F \eta_{ORR}}{RT}}$$

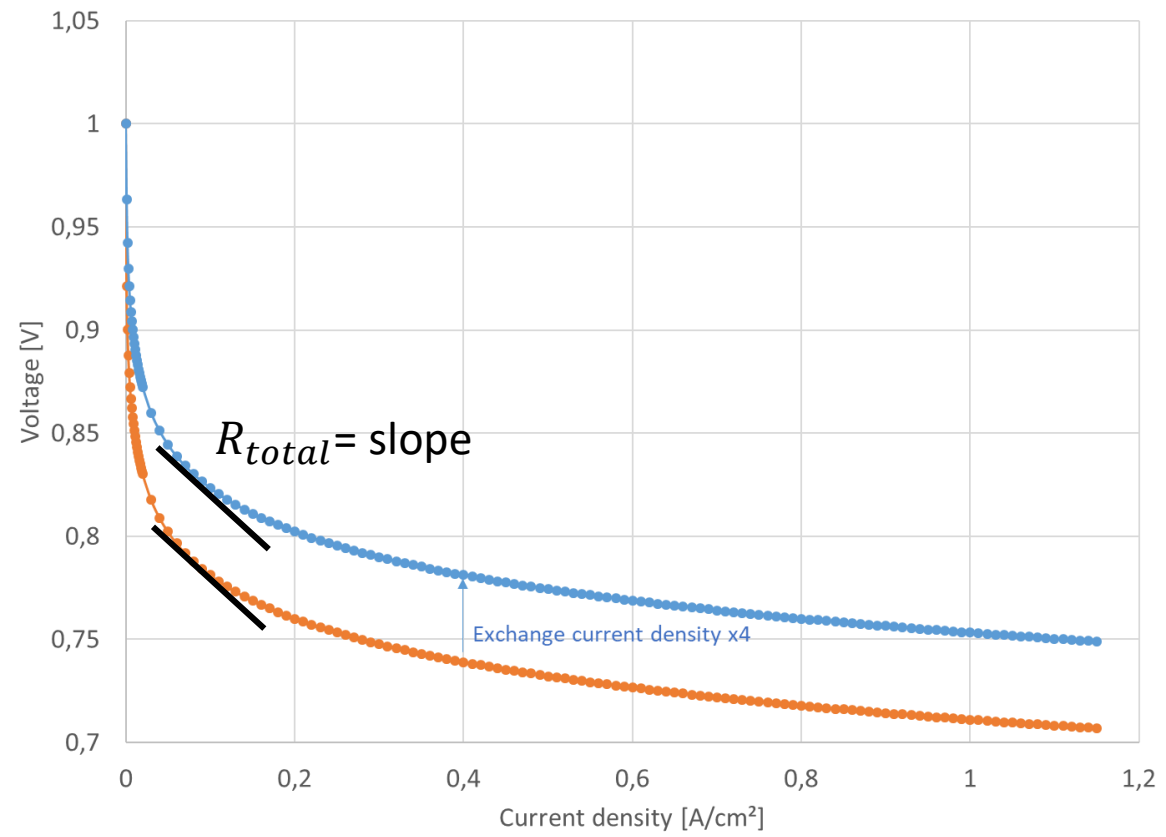
$$\eta_{ORR} = -b \ln \frac{I}{I_0} \quad b = \frac{RT}{\alpha_C F} : \text{Tafel slope}$$

$$R_{pol,ORR}^{CCL} = \frac{b}{I} \quad \text{If no transport limitations}$$

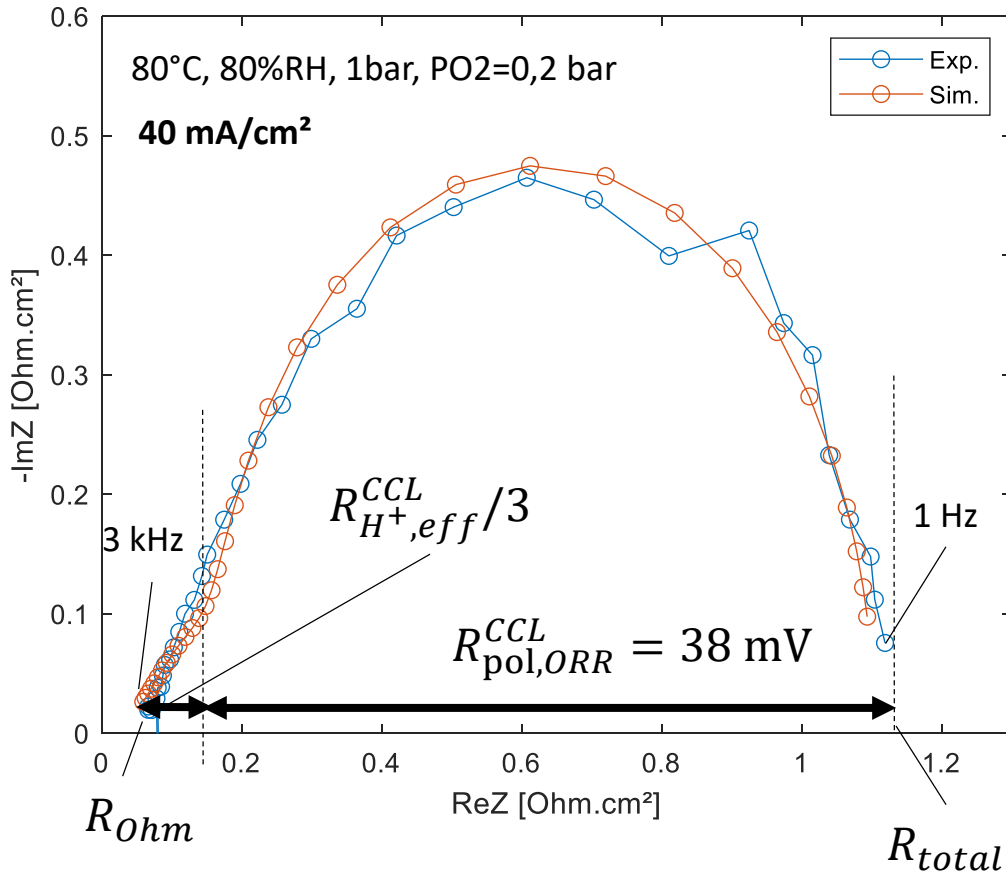
EIS under H₂/O₂_ORR



Simulated I-V curve without transport limitations



EIS under H₂/O₂_ORR



$$R_{pol,ORR}^{CCL} = - \left(\frac{d\eta_{ORR}}{dI} \right)_{\omega \rightarrow 0}$$

$$b = \frac{RT}{\alpha_c F} : \text{Tafel slope}$$

$$R_{pol,ORR}^{CCL} = \frac{b}{I} \text{ If transport limitations have negligible impact}$$

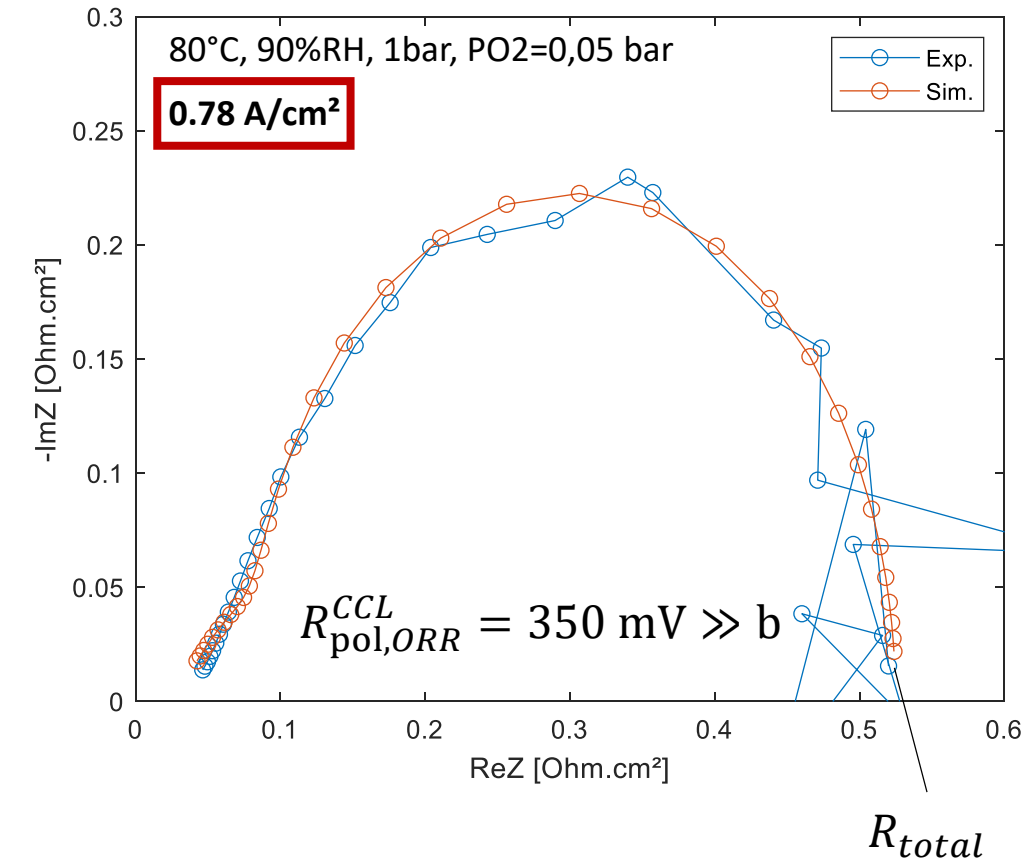
If $R_{pol,ORR}^{CCL} \cdot j > b$ transport limitations most probably not negligible

EIS under H₂/O₂_ORR

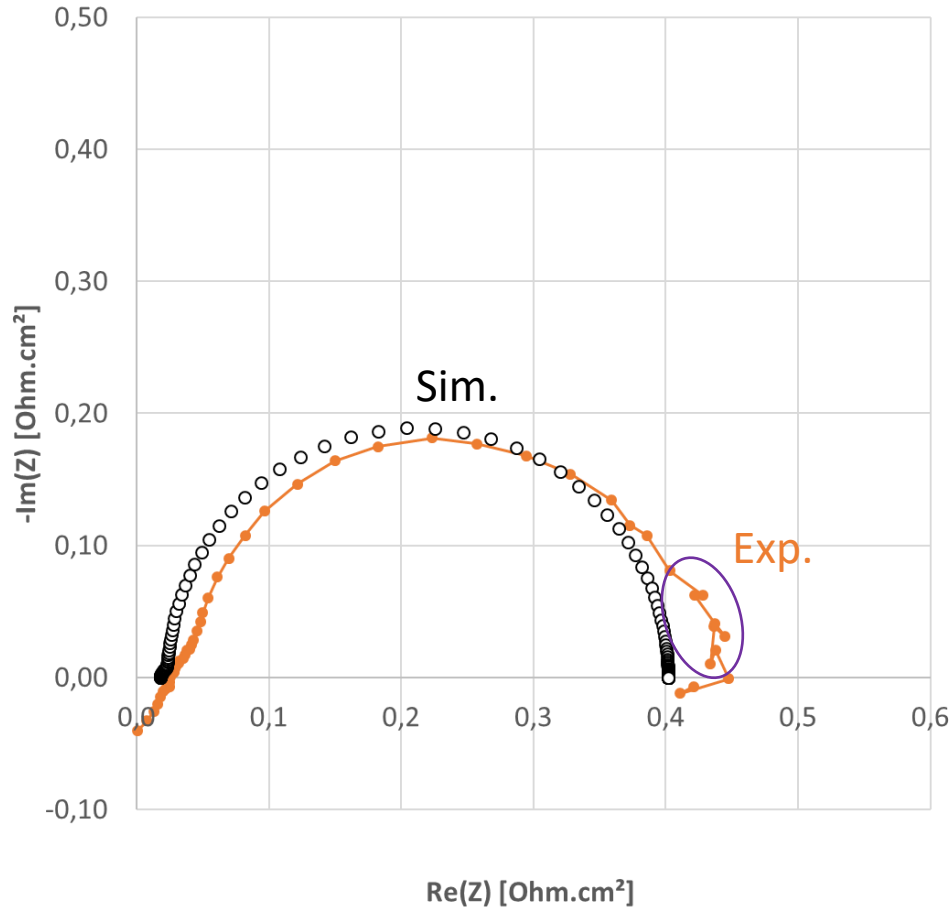
But where is the famous second loop???

Limits:

➤ $R_{pol,ORR}^{CCL}$ includes the coupling between kinetic & transport

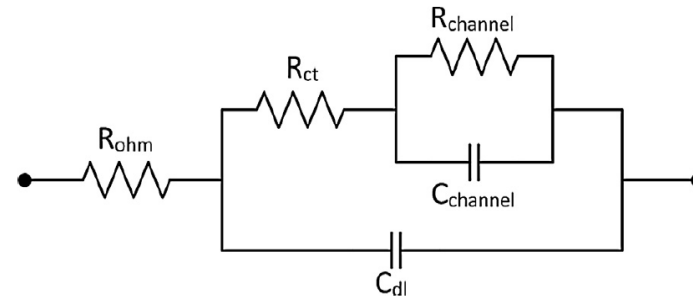


EIS under H₂/O₂_ORR



But where is the famous second loop???

May be due to transport limitations along/within the channel



$$Z = R_{ohm} + \frac{1}{\frac{1}{R_{ct} + \frac{1}{\frac{1}{R_{channel}} + i\omega C_{channel}}} + i\omega C_{dl}}$$

$$R_{channel} = \frac{\gamma R_{ct}}{2St_{O_2} - 1}$$

$$C_{channel} = \frac{2St_{O_2} - 1}{\gamma R_{ct}} \frac{V}{2Q}$$

Chanderis *et al.* **2015** *Electrochimica Acta* **180** 581

General considerations

CCM losses

Proton transport resistance thanks to EIS measurements

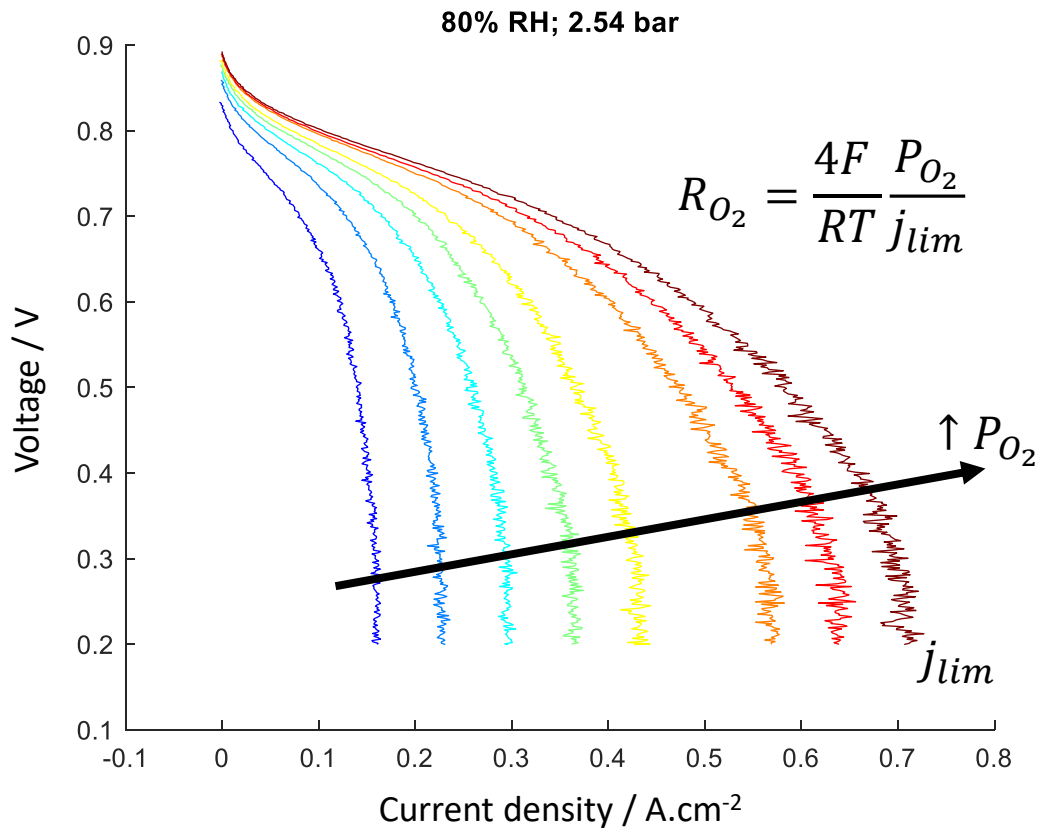
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I-V for different O₂ concentration



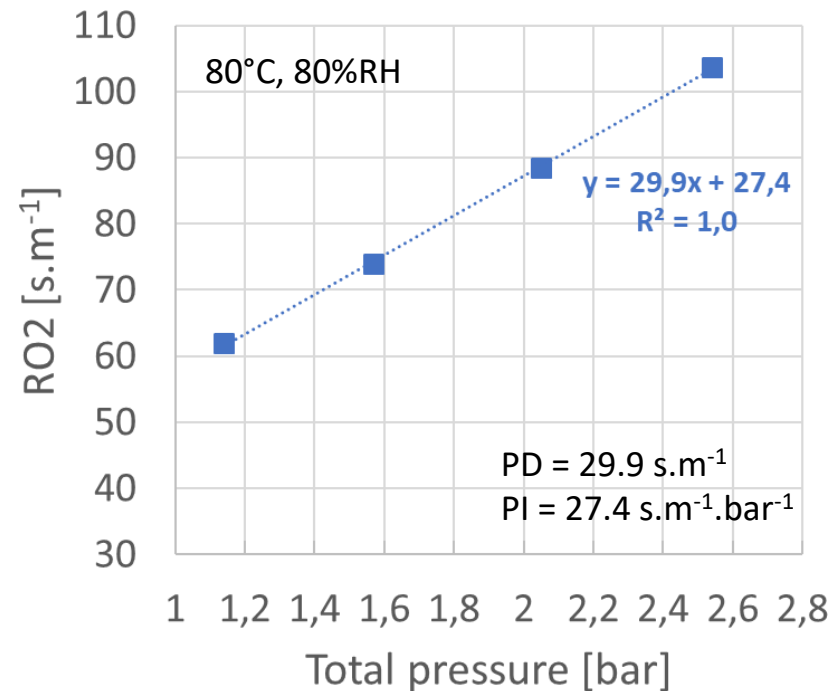
Baker et al. 2009 J. Electrochem. Soc. 156 B991

Pressure Dependent (PD) term:

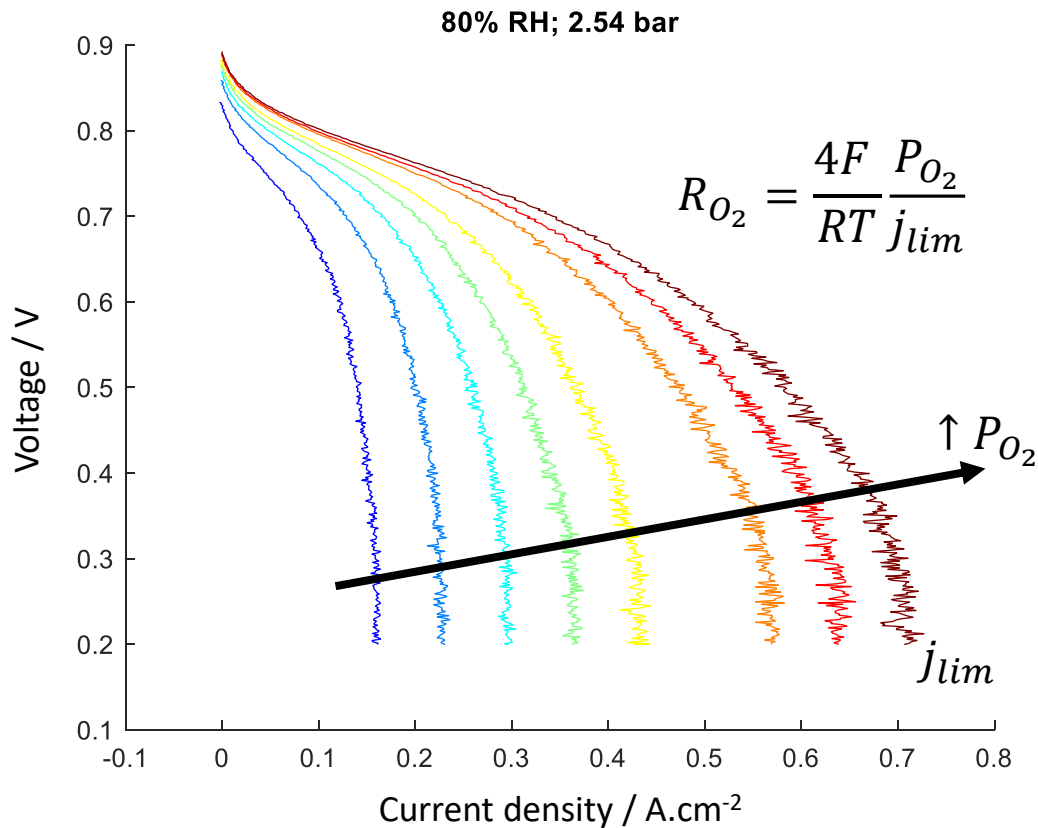
- Fickian diffusion in largest pores ($d > \text{mean free path } O_2 \sim 100 \text{ nm}$ @ 80°C, 1bar)

Pressure Independent (PI) term:

- Knudsen diffusion in smallest pores ($d < 100 \text{ nm}$)



I-V for different O₂ concentration



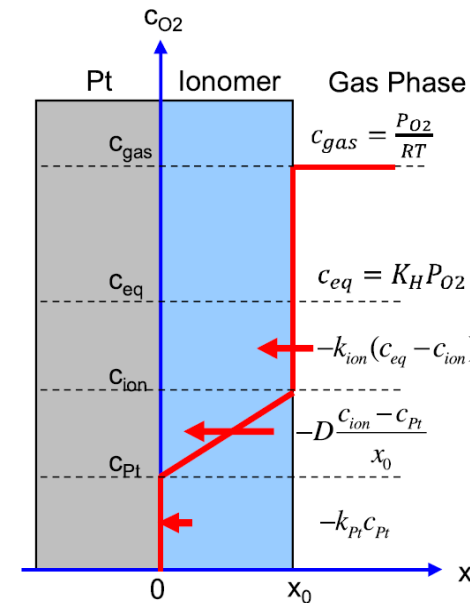
Baker et al. 2009 J. Electrochem. Soc. 156 B991

Pressure Dependent (PD) term:

- Fickian diffusion in largest pores ($d >$ mean free path O₂ ~ 100 nm @ 80°C, 1bar)

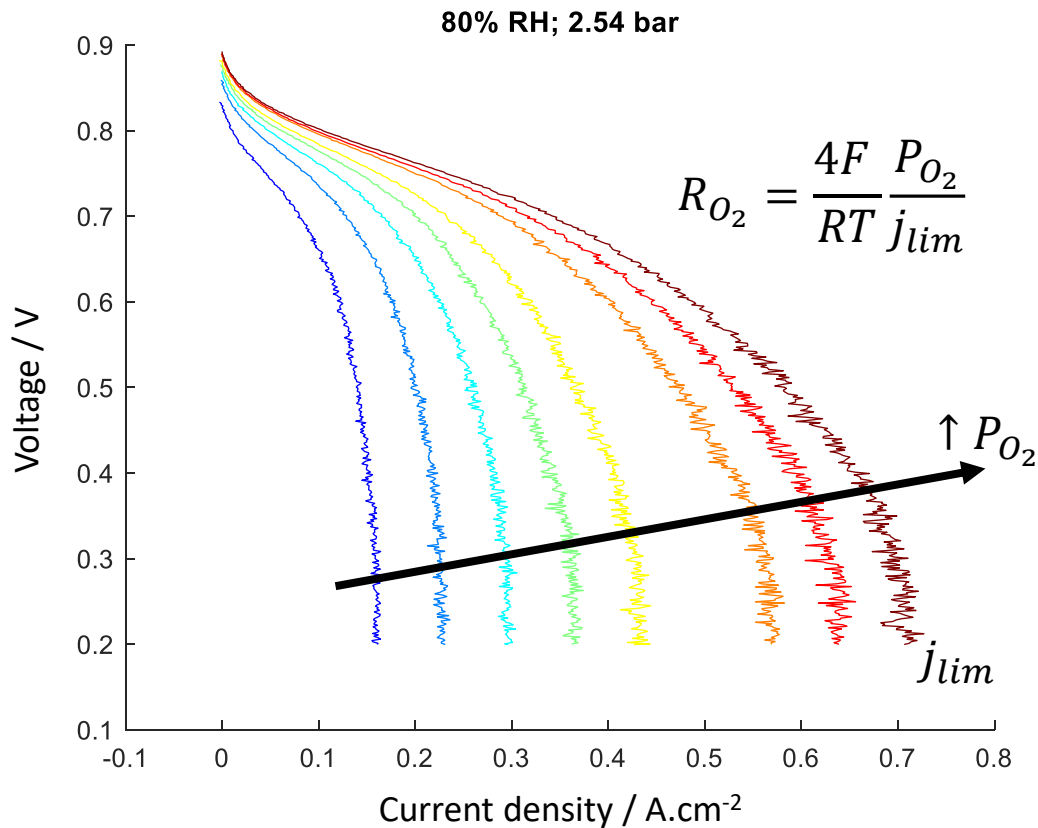
Pressure Independent (PI) term:

- Knudsen diffusion in smallest pores ($d <$ 100 nm)
- Diffusion within electrolyte (hydrated ionomer and/or water)
- Transfert through gas/electrolyte interface
- Transfert through electrolyte/Pt interface



Kudo et al. 2016 Electrochimica Acta, 682

I-V for different O₂ concentration



Baker et al. 2009 *J. Electrochem. Soc.* 156 B991

Pressure Dependent (PD) term:

- Fickian diffusion in largest pores ($d > \text{mean free path } O_2 \sim 100 \text{ nm}$ @ 80°C, 1bar)

Pressure Independent (PI) term:

- Knudsen diffusion in smallest pores ($d < 100 \text{ nm}$)
- Diffusion within electrolyte (hydrated ionomer and/or water)
- Transfert through gas/electrolyte interface
- Transfert through electrolyte/Pt interface

Hyp.

- Current is limited only by O₂ transport and not by H⁺ transport or kinetic

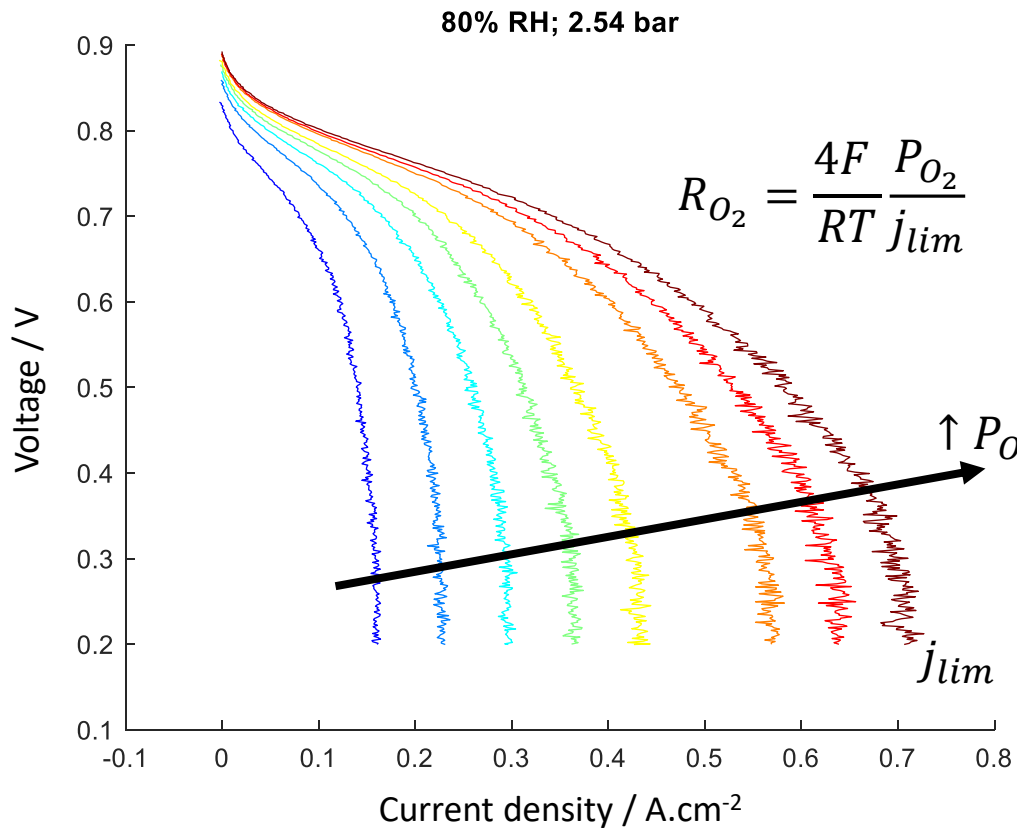
Caution must be taken in the choice of measurement conditions

- RH must be sufficiently high not to be limited by the H⁺ transport
- RH must not be too high to avoid excessive water condensation
- Increased water condensation as current density increases

FURTHER-FC

→ J @ 0.2V 80/80%RH, x_{O₂} < 2%

I-V for different O₂ concentration



Baker et al. 2009 *J. Electrochem. Soc.* **156** B991

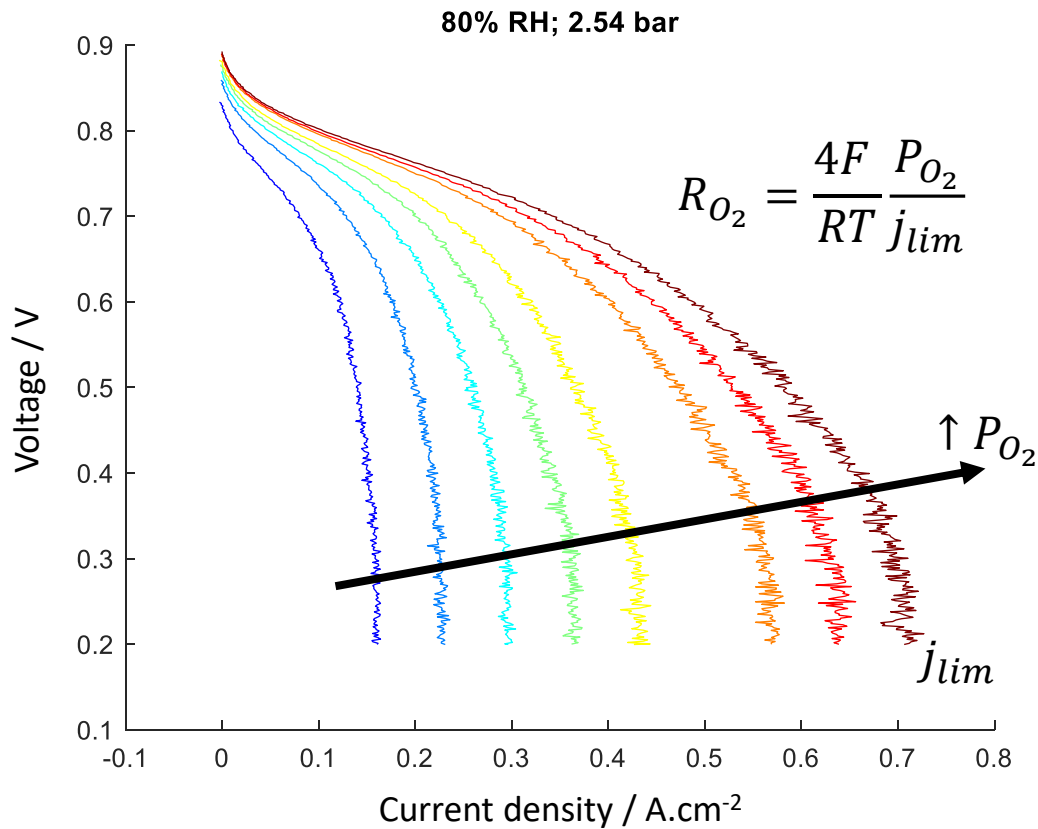
Pressure Dependent (PD) term:

- not impacted by CCL variation
- only impacted if non-reproducible parts of the GDL was used

Pressure Independent (PI) dominated by CCL composition and structure and decreases with:

- increasing roughness factor (more active sides)
- decreasing I:C ratio (less ionomer coverage and water)
- GC as Pt support vs HSAC (no diffusion in nanopores)
- increasing Pt:C ratio (thinner CCL)
- HOPI vs D2020, but limited to HSAC support and not visible for GC

I-V for different O₂ concentration

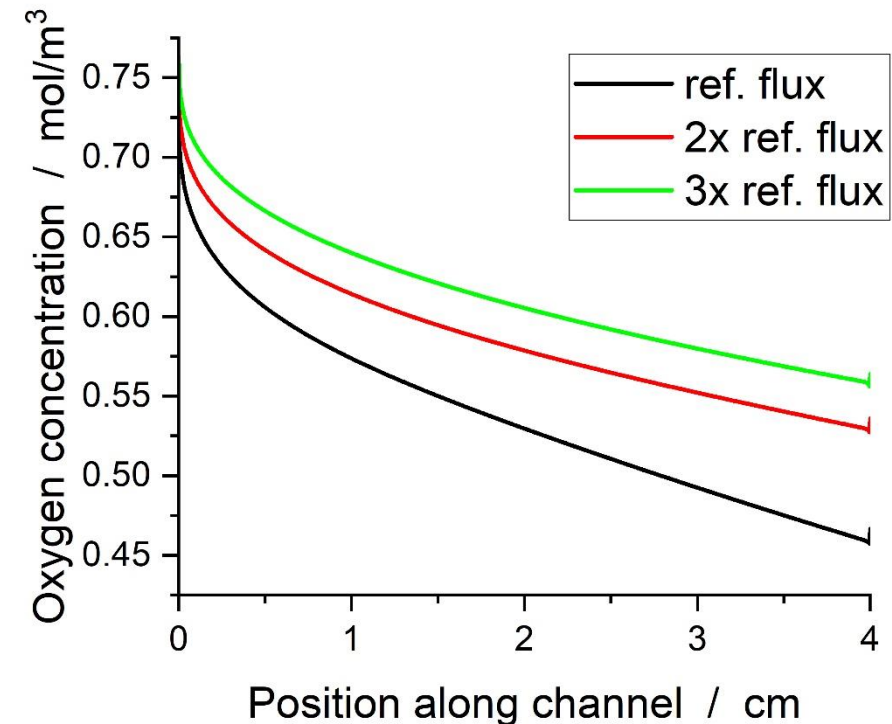


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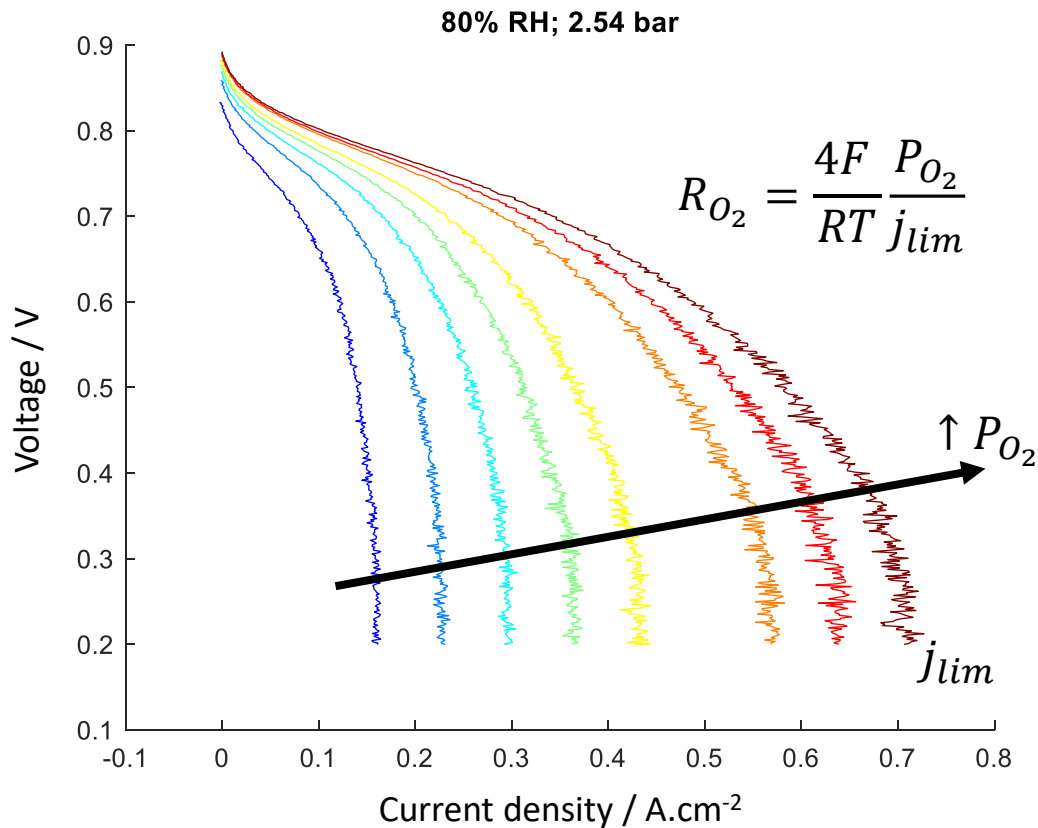
Limits

- Not possible to dissociate the different contributions in the PI
- Not possible to have reliable information as a function of RH
- O₂ through-plane transport limitations in the channel

O₂ concentration at the GDL/channel interface along the channel



I-V for different O₂ concentration



Baker et al. 2009 *J. Electrochem. Soc.* **156** B991

Limits

- Not possible to dissociate the different contributions in the PI
- Not possible to have reliable information as a function of RH
- O₂ through-plane transport limitations in the channel

FURTHER-FC approach:

- ➔ Use numerical models to analyse LCA
- ➔ Use LCA to validate the models

General considerations

CCM losses

Proton transport resistance thanks to EIS measurements

What else can we extract from EIS?

Oxygen transport resistance thanks to LCA measurements

Decoupling electrokinetic from transport limitations

Conclusion

Decoupling transport from kinetic

Kinetic often described with Butler-Volmer equation

$$i_r = i_0 \gamma_{CL} \left[\exp\left(\frac{\alpha n F}{RT} \eta\right) - \exp\left(-\frac{(1-\alpha) n F}{RT} \eta\right) \right]$$

$$i_0 = i_0^\circ \left(\prod_{\nu_j > 0} a_j^{\nu_j} \right)^{1-\alpha} \left(\prod_{\nu_j < 0} a_j^{-\nu_j} \right)^\alpha$$

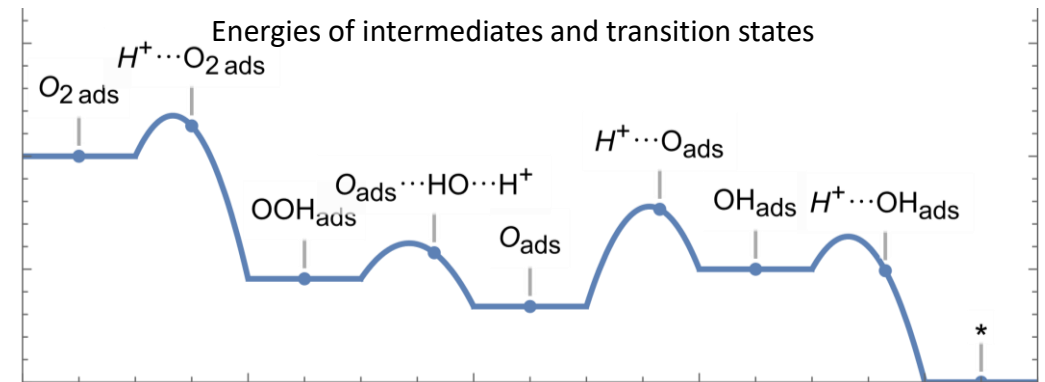
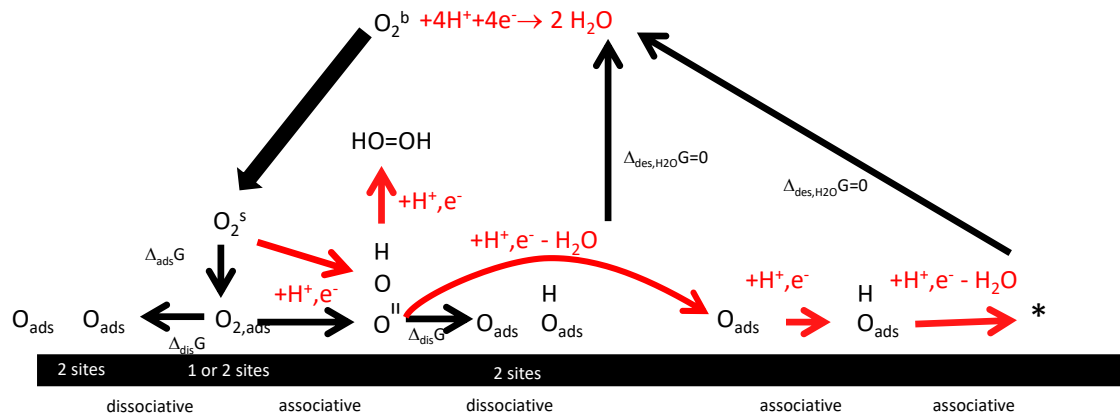
Depends on the local concentration of reactant and product
→ Depends on O₂ transport limitations

$$i_0^\circ = nF(k_{ox}^\circ)^{1-\alpha} (k_{red}^\circ)^\alpha$$

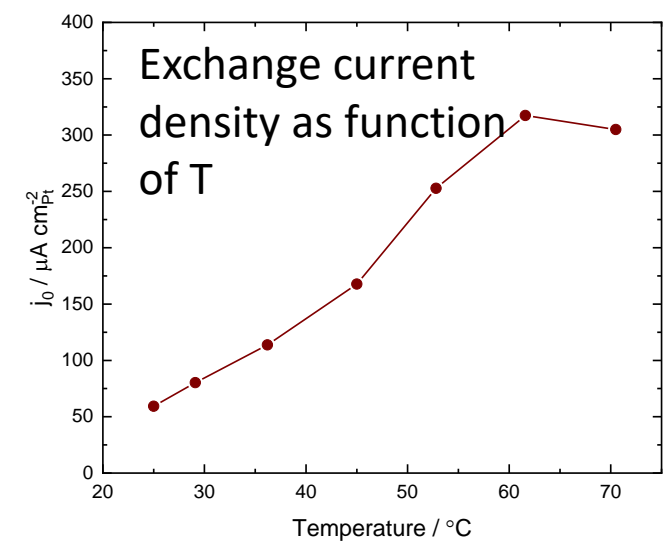
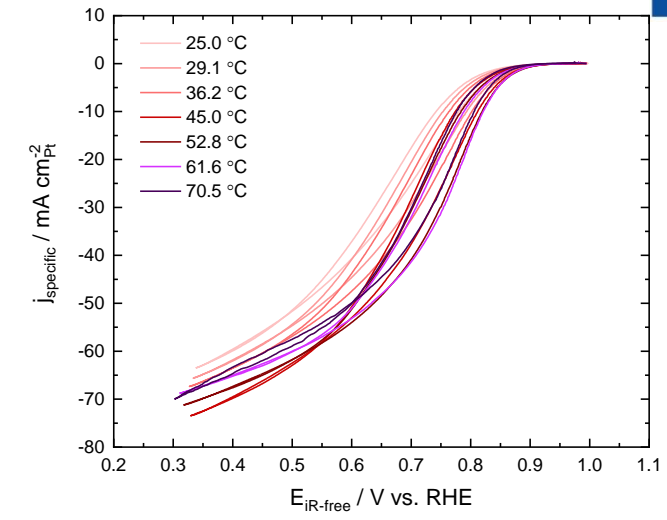
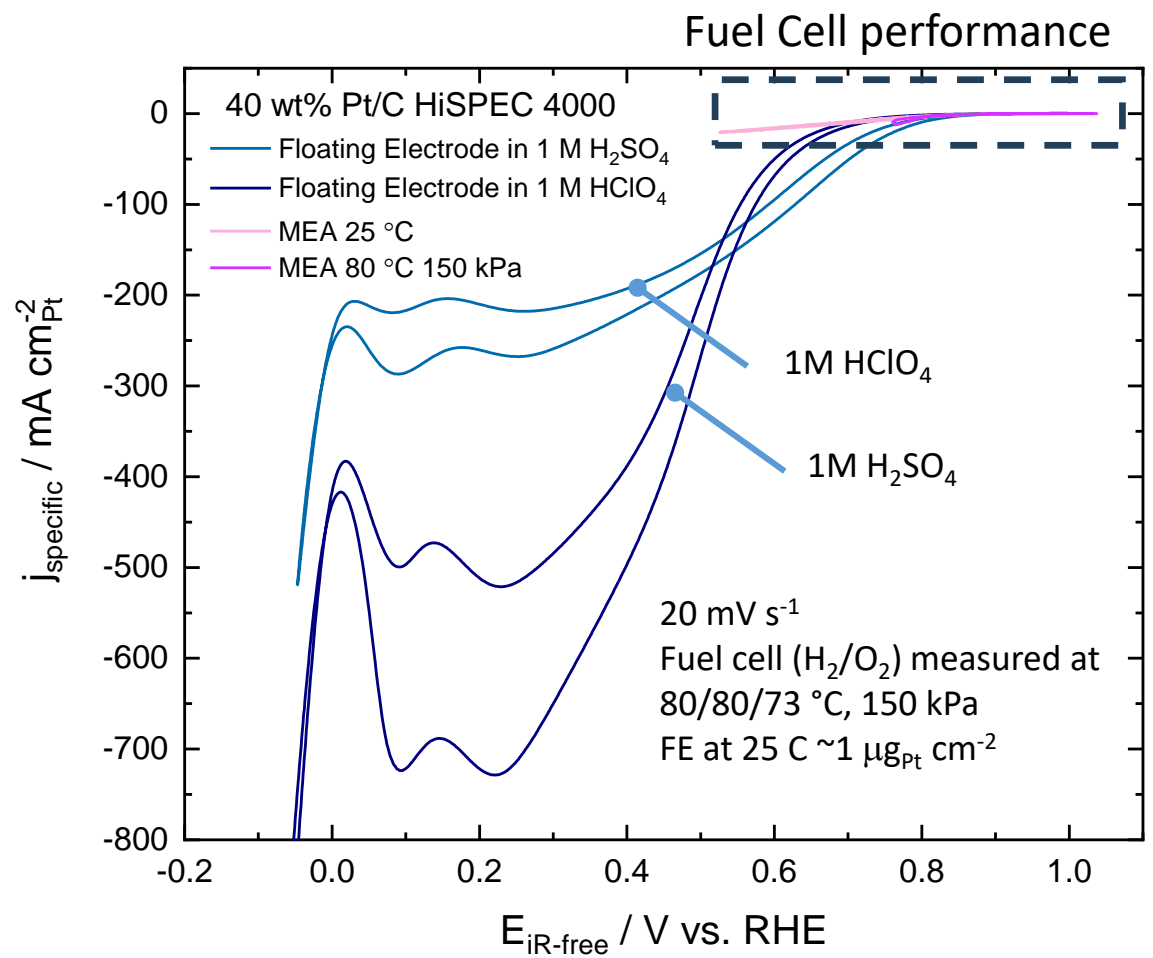
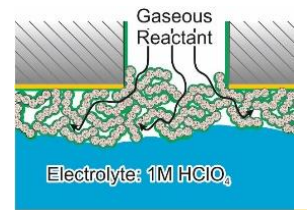
Depends on the local potential within the electrolyte
→ Depends on H⁺ transport limitations

$$\eta = \phi_{e^-} - \phi_{H^+} - E_{eq}$$

Extremely difficult to decouple kinetics from transport limitations experimentally



Decoupling transport from kinetic Floating electrode

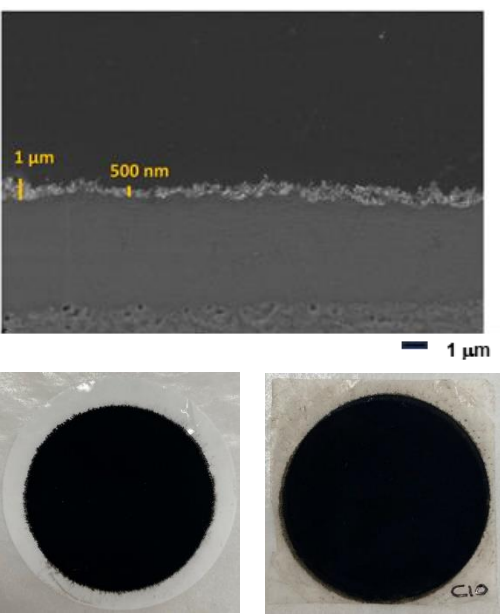
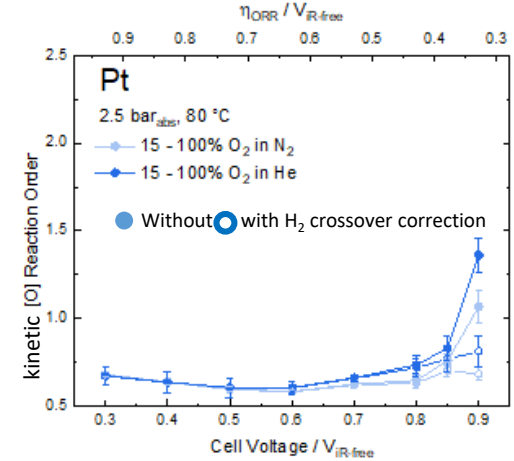


Jackson, S Kucernak et al., . *ACS Catalysis*, 2022, 12(1), 200-211. doi/10.1021/acscatal.1c03908

Conclusion: Pt has plenty of activity

Decoupling transport from kinetic

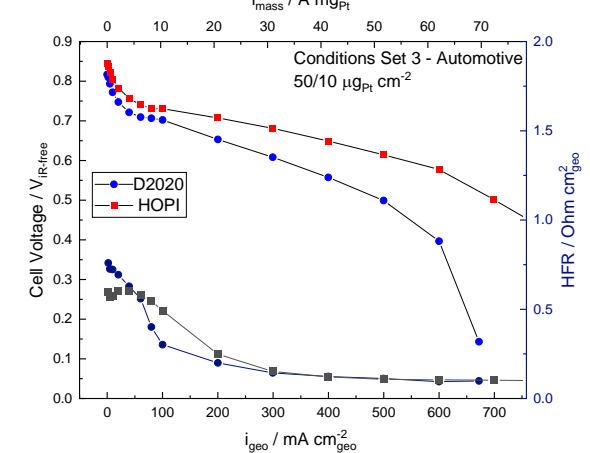
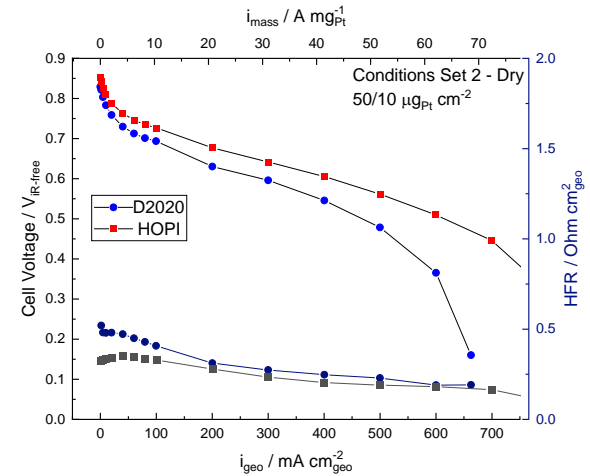
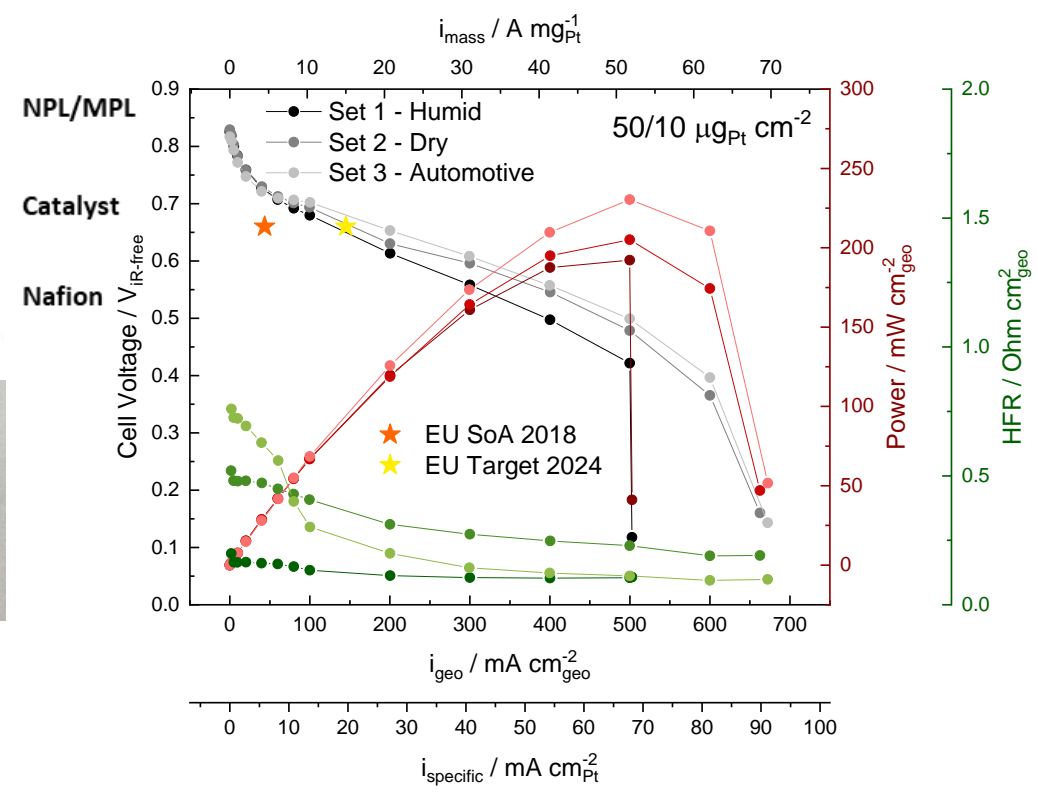
Ultrathin CCL



CCMs with loading down to $3 \mu\text{g}_{\text{Pt}}\text{cm}^{-2}$

In mass activity terms, catalysts can reach required performance goals at low loading

- Kinetic reaction order is between 0.5-0.75 (0.3-0.8V)
- Mass transport at catalyst/ionomer interface not an issue
- For $10 \mu\text{g}_{\text{Pt}}\text{cm}^{-2}$ cathode layer, significant shift in performance when using HOPI across entire current range





OUTLINE



General considerations

CCM losses

Proton transport resistance thanks to EIS measurements

What else can we extract from EIS?

Oxygen transport resistance thanks to LCA measurements

Decoupling electrokinetic from transport limitations

Conclusion

- Transport limitations very difficult to quantify properly experimentally
- Coupling between transport and electrokinetic will always exist
- Simple Butler Volmer model is insufficient to describe electrochemistry of ORR on Pt
- Not possible to quantify with a simple analytical model the impact of transport losses on performance

FURTHER-FC approach:

Do not use this simplified analytical approach

- **Compute the transport properties** from the « real » structure of the components
 - Reduce the number of parameters to be fitted by the model
- **Use physical model** to directly fit the experimental data
 - Quantify the contribution of the different components on the performance losses



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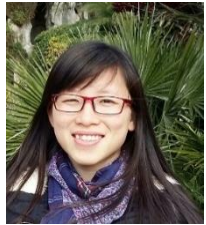
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