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Nanoscale

EELS Tomography in multiferroic nanocomposites: from spectrum images to the spectrum volume

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Electron Energy Loss Spectroscopy (EELS) in the Transmission Electron Microscope offers the possibility of extracting high accuracy maps of composition and electronic properties through EELS spectrum images (EELSVSI). Acquiring EELSVSI for different tilt angles, a 3D tomographic reconstruction of EELS information can be achieved. In the present work we show that an EELS spectrum volume (EELSVSV), a 4D dataset where every voxel contains a full EELS spectrum, can be reconstructed from the EELSVSI tilt series by the application of multivariate analysis. We apply this novel approach to characterize a nanocomposite material consisting on CoFe\(_2\)O\(_4\) nanocolumns embedded in a BiFeO\(_3\) matrix grown on LaNiO\(_3\) buffered LaAlO\(_3\) (001) substrate.

Introduction

Magnetoelectric (ME) multiferroics, as bulk single phase materials, first raised interest in the early sixties\(^1\), but their scarcity and weak or far too low temperature response caused research to languish. However, significant progress in multiferroic oxide thin films and the appearance of epitaxial composite thin films, where two phases with different ferroic properties are grown at once, have triggered a renewed and now huge interest in these functional materials. In particular, the composite thin films are robust multiferroic systems at room temperature yielding high magnetoelectric coefficients due to elastic coupling between the ferroelectric (FE) and ferri/ferromagnetic (FM) phases\(^3\)\(^\text{-}^5\).

In the present work we consider FM CoFe\(_2\)O\(_4\) (CFO) nanocolumns embedded in a FE BiFeO\(_3\) (BFO) matrix grown on LaNiO\(_3\) buffered LaAlO\(_3\) substrate (BFO-CFO/LNO/LAO)\(^6\). This system, thoroughly studied\(^7\), is a prototypical multiferroic vertical nanostructure. Studies in the past have shown the possibility of tailoring the properties of these materials by changing the substrate material, substrate orientation, ferroic phases and phase ratio, and film thickness\(^7\)\(^\text{-}^9\).

The final functional properties of the nanocomposite being sensitive to the local composition, EELS can be much enlightening. Nevertheless, EELS is carried out in a 2D projection, while in the present case we require a 3D chemical characterization.

In transmission electron microscopy (TEM), 3D tomographic reconstruction can be achieved by acquiring a series of images at different tilt angles. A different approach is obtaining 3D chemical reconstructions from energy filtered images in the TEM (EFTEM)\(^20\)\(^\text{-}^22\), and more recently, by acquiring EELS spectrum images (EELS-SI), each pixel containing a complete EELS spectrum\(^23\),\(^24\). However, in both techniques only a limited amount of information is effectively reconstructed. In this paper we aim to derive a full EELS dataset in 4D, where every voxel of a whole volume contains a complete spectrum of energy losses, as schematized in Figure 1. By analogy to the spectrum image notation\(^25\), we will name this 4D dataset as EELS spectrum volume (EELS-SV).

G. Möbus et al.\(^20\) suggested that the EELS-SV could be recovered by acquiring several tomography sets of EFTEM images, each set...
consisting of a tilted series of images filtered for a specific energy, in a single tomography experiment. Then, a tomographic reconstruction would be required for each energy-filtered tilted series. This has already been applied for a few energy slices but to recover a large region of the spectrum would require an enormous amount of EFTEM images for every tilt angle.

Our approach to EELS-SV reconstruction is used upon SI, thus taking a single SI for every tilt angle. It takes advantage of Multivariate Analysis (MVA), and more precisely of blind source separation (BSS)\textsuperscript{27}, to find a new spectral basis which can describe all the spectra in the dataset as a weighted sum of its components. Therefore only the 3D reconstructions of the weighting components will be necessary to recover the spectra in each voxel. We will apply this approach to analyze a BFO/CFO nanocomposites, enabling the characterization of a CFO nanocolumn embedded in BFO matrix.

Methods

The BiFeO\textsubscript{3} – CoFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} epitaxial nanocomposite was deposited on a LaNiO\textsubscript{3}-buffered LaAlO\textsubscript{3} (001) substrate by pulsed laser deposition. Detailed information about preparation conditions and properties is reported elsewhere\textsuperscript{6}.

EELS and HAADF were obtained in a JEOL JEM2010F coupled to a Gatan GIF spectrometer, operated at 200 kV, with a high resolution ultra narrow pole piece. The sample was prepared in a nanoneedle shape by Focused Ion Beam (FIB) in a FEI Strata 235 Dual Beam System. The nanoneedle was attached to the usual Omniprobe grid, only shortened at both ends to keep the maximum dimension below 1.5 mm in order to fit to a special sample holder (Fishione 2030 ultra-narrow gap tomography holder).

Multivariate Analysis was performed using Hyperspy\textsuperscript{28, 29}, a Python based EELS analysis toolbox. BSS was performed using the Bayesian Linear Unmixing software by N. Dobigeon\textsuperscript{27}. The chosen software for image and tilt axis alignment and reconstruction were IMOD and Inspect3D. SIRT algorithm\textsuperscript{30} was used for the reconstruction. Avizo imaging software was used for the final segmentation and visualization of the data.

Results and discussion

A nanoneedle sample was prepared by FIB from the BFO-CFO/LNO/LAO sample (see Supplementary Information, Figure S1). In order to test the suitability of the sample for EELS-SV reconstruction, a preliminary EELS-SI tomography experiment was carried out in a small area of the sample. The experiment consisted on the acquisition of 44 SI at tilt angles ranging from -66º to 62º. Figure 2 shows a HAADF survey image used for drift correction (2a), a coacquired HAADF signal used for alignment of the images (2b) and f) volume reconstruction. As an example, Figure 3 displays in the following order original edge intensity maps from the projection at V38.2º, BSS was performed using Principal Components Analysis (PCA)\textsuperscript{31} and the extracted edge intensities for O K, Fe L\textsubscript{2,3} and La M\textsubscript{4,5} were measured for each EELS-SI (Figure S3 in the supporting information). Other elements present in the dataset (Co and Ni) were not exploitable due to their low signal. As an example, Figure 3 displays in the following order original edge intensity maps from the projection at -38.2º, orthoslices through the reconstructed volume and a direct visualization of the reconstructed volume for oxygen, iron and lanthanum. If the necessary assumption that the intensities in the extracted maps are monotonically proportional to the amount of each element and the thickness of the sample (as discussed in the supporting information) is fulfilled, the orthoslices through the reconstruction should be proportional to the density of each element. Taking this into account, the intensities observed in Figure 3 can be interpreted as follows: the two higher intensities in the oxygen maps correspond to CFO and LAO/LNO, with densities of 54 atoms/nm\textsuperscript{3} and 55 atoms/nm\textsuperscript{3} respectively. BFO has an oxygen density of 48 atoms/nm\textsuperscript{3} and therefore appears darker. The same reasoning applies to iron, with a concentration of 27 atoms/nm\textsuperscript{3} in CFO and 16 atoms/nm\textsuperscript{3} in BFO. Thanks to...
these differences in concentration and following the procedure explained in reference\textsuperscript{24}, the three expected regions (LAO/LNO, BFO and CFO) could be separated in EELS maps and the subsequent segmentation of the areas of interest render the volumes presented in Figure 4. (See the supporting information for the movie and a full explanation and discussion of the procedure).

First, the sample stability was confirmed (despite the long duration of the experiment to acquire the whole tilt series of EELSVSI) and the EELS signal is proved adequate for tomographic reconstruction of the sample. In a second step, the tomographic acquisition was carried out in a wider region of the nanoneedle as shown in Figure 2d, 2e and 2f. For this second EELSVSI dataset comprising the whole multiferroic structure, the aim of data treatment was the reduction of the dataset to independent components. First the noise was reduced using PCA and then Blind Source Separation (BSS) was used to retrieve the independent components as explained in the supporting information. It is important that the components have physical meaning, so they can fulfill the projection requirement and be reconstructed using the usual tomography techniques.

The main three independent components of the dataset, assigned to background contribution, iron oxide and lanthanum oxide respectively are shown in Figure 5a. If we assume that each spectrum image is a weighted sum of these three independent components, each EELS-SI can be decomposed in three images corresponding to the weighting factors for the three independent components. Therefore, the whole EELS SI dataset was transformed to three new datasets suitable for tomographic reconstruction algorithms (for a thorough description see supporting information). The results of these reconstructions are shown in Figure 5b for the three components as labeled in Figure 5a and their superposition, which clearly corresponds to the whole volume in Figure 2f. A fourth component representing the noise in the vacuum was also retained for calculations, but its contribution will not be presented in the reconstructions.

At this point, the EELSVSV is already available, as the spectrum in each voxel can be calculated with the components and the three weighting factors corresponding to each component. In particular, we can retrieve an EELSVSI in any section of the EELSVSV by calculating the corresponding through EELSV. From a SV of 32x32x36 spectra, the transversal orthoslice in Figure 5c shows the plane z=16, with a single spectrum extracted at the (15,12,16) voxel in Figure 5d. A spectrum line along the red arrow in the transversal orthoslice y=16 is shown in Figure 5e with its background subtracted by a power law.

To prove the validity of the voxel specific spectra, we integrate along the thickness, i.e., we calculate a new projection, to see whether the results are equivalent to the experimental data obtained in the microscope. In Figure 6, elemental maps of edge intensities for O, Fe and La extracted according to Figure 3 from three different sources are presented: from the original SI corresponding to 0° of tilt (6a), from the SI recalculated with the corresponding BSS components (6b) and from projection SI calculated from the reconstructed 4D EELSVSV (6c). The distribution of the elements (O, Fe and La) and the shape of the
Conclusions

In summary, EELS SI tomography has been shown capable of reconstructing the three dimensional structure of a nanocomposite sample as in conventional STEM-HAADF tomography, but adding a fourth dimension corresponding to chemical composition in a quantitative approach. In this case, CFO columns were properly reconstructed in a BFO matrix grown on a LNO/ LAO substrate. Moreover, the feasibility of reconstructing EELS spectrum volumes (EELS-SV) such as those in Figure 1 has been shown and applied to extract single spectra from the inside of the nanocomposite sample, a step beyond the EELS-SI tomography and more accurate if compared to conventional SI, which integrates information all along the thickness of the sample. This approach could be extended to other spectroscopies.

The present work proves the great potential of EELS tomography for the characterization of nanostructured materials, especially if we take into account that the results shown here were not acquired using an ultrafast reading spectrometer, neither aberration-corrected TEM.

Notes and references

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