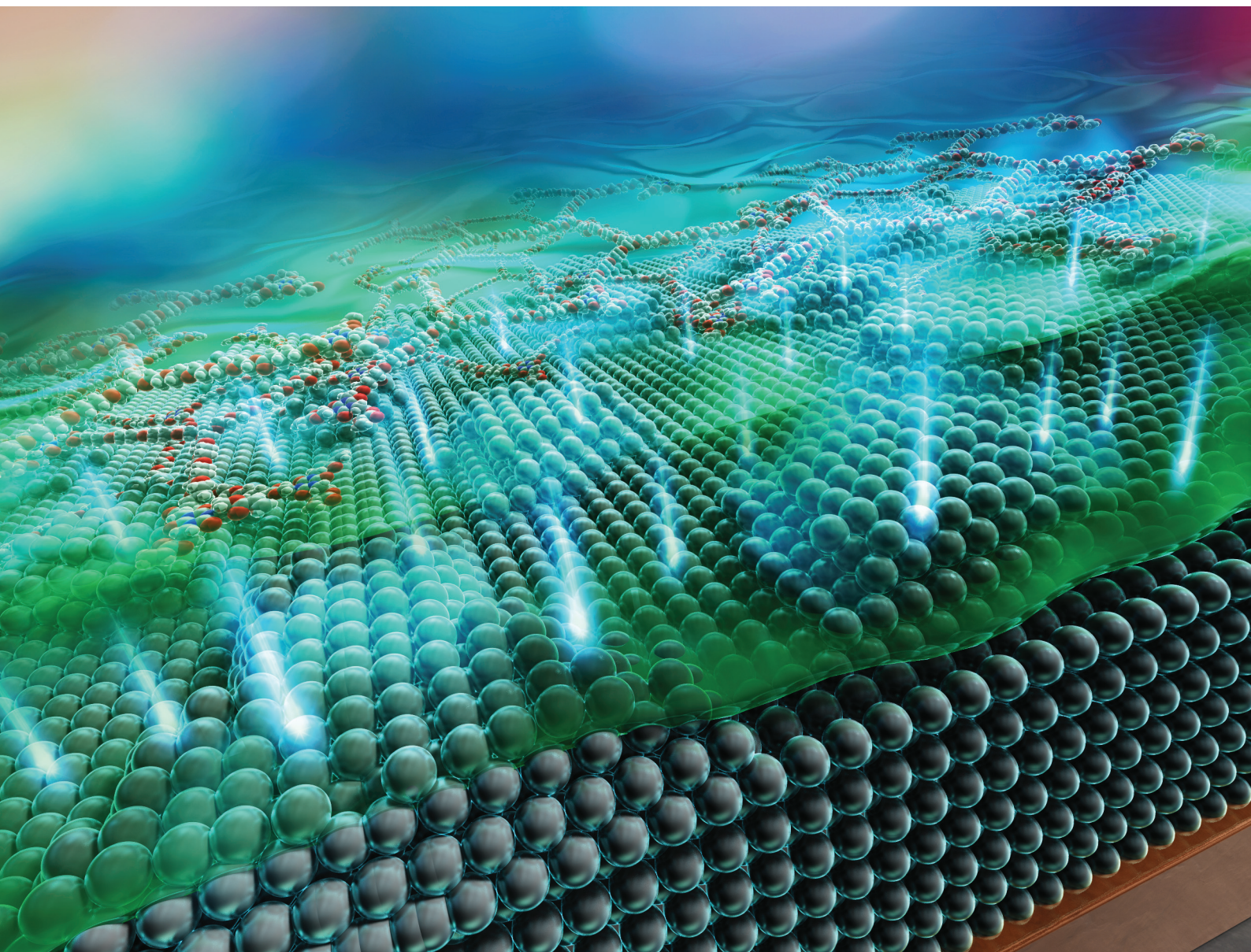


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PAPER

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Artificial solid electrolyte interphase composed of a tris(2-acryloyloxyethyl) isocyanurate-based polymer for lithium metal anode

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To enhance the mechanical robustness of artificial solid electrolyte interphases (SEIs), particularly their resistance to swelling in liquid electrolytes, we developed a cross-linked polymer coating derived from tris(2-acryloyloxyethyl) isocyanurate (TAIC) and trimethylolpropane ethoxylate triacrylate (ETPTA) for lithium metal anodes. The TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1)-based polymer exhibited excellent film-forming ability, mechanical stability, and interfacial compatibility with lithium metal. Symmetric cell tests demonstrated prolonged cycling stability exceeding 3500 hours (equivalent to 350 charge–discharge cycles), and a high lithium ion transference number ($t_{\text{Li}^+} = 0.75$). Furthermore, the polymer film effectively suppressed dendritic lithium growth and minimized electrolyte decomposition. Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy and surface morphology analysis revealed that the coating reduced SEI thickening and interfacial resistance growth during cycling. This work presents a rational design of a mechanically and ionically optimized artificial SEI, offering a viable strategy for stabilizing lithium metal electrodes in high-energy-density batteries such as lithium–sulfur systems.

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Broader context

Lithium metal is considered the ultimate anode material for next-generation batteries due to its extremely high capacity and low redox potential. However, its practical application is severely limited by dendrite formation and continuous electrolyte decomposition. Artificial solid electrolyte interphases (SEIs) offer a promising strategy to address these challenges. Inorganic SEIs provide mechanical strength but suffer from poor flexibility and interfacial defects, while organic SEIs offer flexibility but lack sufficient ionic conductivity and strength. Here, we report a novel tris(2-acryloyloxyethyl) isocyanurate (TAIC)-based polymer system that balances these requirements through a molecularly designed copolymer network with trimethylolpropane ethoxylate triacrylate (ETPTA). The resulting artificial SEI not only enables uniform lithium deposition but also significantly enhances interfacial stability and ionic transport. By effectively preventing excessive SEI growth, the coating enables extended cycling of lithium metal electrodes, which is critical for lithium–sulfur and other high-energy battery chemistries. Our findings highlight the importance of interfacial engineering using tailored polymer coatings and open new avenues for stabilizing reactive metal anodes in practical battery systems.

Introduction

The reduction of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions is recognized as a critical global challenge to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all, and to facilitate urgent actions to mitigate climate change and its associated impacts. This aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015, particularly Goals 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and 13 (Climate

Action).^{1,2} To achieve this challenge, the electrification of mobility and effective utilization of green energy, such as solar and wind power, using energy storage are essential. Energy storage is required to achieve a high energy density, high cycle durability, and cost-effectiveness. As next-generation rechargeable batteries, sulfur and air cathodes are promising from the viewpoint of high energy density and cost-effectiveness. These cathodes are combined with lithium metal anodes because of their high theoretical capacity (3860 mAh g^{−1}) and low redox potential (−3.045 V vs. SHE).^{3,4} Thus, lithium metal has been recognized as the ultimate anode material. However, lithium metal faces the critical problem of dendritic deposition, which causes short circuits, leading to capacity loss and severe accidents such as fire and battery explosions.³ Furthermore, the negative potential of lithium metal leads to solid electrolyte

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The second is an additive that adsorbs onto the lithium electrode surface, resulting in uniform lithium deposition. This promotes uniform Li precipitation morphology. For example, at low concentrations, Cs^+ and Rb^+ , which have a lower standard reduction potential than Li^+ , adsorb onto the convex parts of the electrode, which have a strong electric field, making the convex part positively charged. The positive charge suppresses the concentration of the lithium-ion flux at the convex parts, which is called the self-healing electrostatic shield (SHES) mechanism.^{18,19} However, these additives continue to decompose owing to reductive decomposition and coprecipitation with Li^+ . It can be said that their effectiveness is limited because they are consumed during this process.²⁰ While there are approaches to protect the lithium metal surface by artificial SEI prior to the SEI formation derived from the reductive decomposition of electrolyte. An artificial SEI is required to be mechanically stable against an electrode volume change, to achieve uniform lithium-ion flux, and to stabilize the interface between the electrolyte and electrode by reducing

To overcome the issues of compatibility between mechanical strength and ionic conductivity, we developed a cross-linked polymer film based on tris(2-acryloyloxyethyl) isocyanurate (TAIC), which is a monomer with one functional group and three polymerizable groups, expecting ionic conductivity and mechanical strength after polymerization, as an artificial SEI. Also, TAIC has a polar group, which is expected to homogenize the distribution of Li ion flux.²⁸ Aiming to application of lithium-sulfur (Li-S) battery, we investigate the TAIC-based artificial SEI in 1,3-dioxolane (DOL)/dimethoxyethane (DME) electrolyte system which is commonly used for Li-S battery.^{29,30} In addition, trimethylolpropane ethoxylate triacrylate (ETPTA), which possesses three polymerizable groups and an ester group that interacts with anions of lithium salts,²⁸ is copolymerized to adjust the electrochemical properties of the artificial SEI.

TAIC and ETPTA possess C=C bonds in their acrylate groups, which serve as sites for photopolymerization (Fig. 1a). Polymerization occurs through cleavage of the C=C bond by

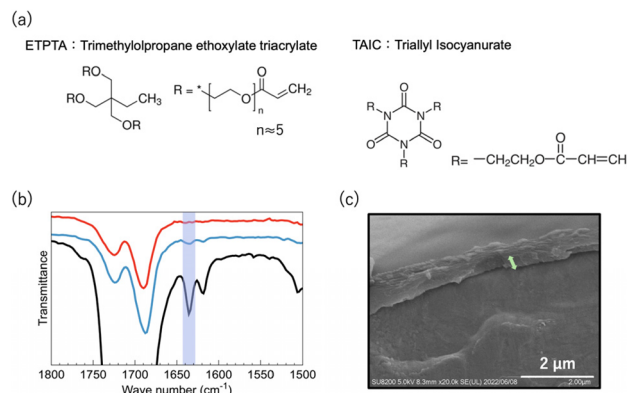


Fig. 1 (a) Chemical structure of TAIC and ETPTA. (b) FT-IR spectra of mixture of TAIC and ETPTA monomers (black line), TAIC after UV radiation (blue line), and TAIC and ETPTA (3:1 by weight) after UV radiation (red line). (c) Cross-sectional SEM image of the TAIC:ETPTA (3:1)-derived polymer coated on Cu substrate, prepared with a diluent ratio of the polymer precursor to THF (1:100).

photoradicals initiated by UV radiation. The C=C bond in acrylate groups has been reported to photo-polymerize efficiently due to its high electron density and close proximity to adjacent functional groups.³¹ To confirm the polymerization of TAIC and ETPTA, the monomers were photopolymerized on a Cu substrate, followed by FT-IR analysis (Fig. 1b and the overview in Fig. S1). The peak at approximately 1640 cm^{-1} , which represents the C=C bond, was observed before polymerization. The peaks in TAIC and ETPTA after UV radiation completely disappeared, indicating that the monomers were fully polymerized. However, a slight peak in TAIC after UV radiation was observed, implying residual C=C. This is because the steric barrier of TAIC disturbs polymerization. In other words, ETPTA buffers the steric barrier of TAIC, achieving the complete polymerization of TAIC and ETPTA. Thickness was optimized by changing the dilution ratio of the polymer precursor and the diluent (1 : 50, 1 : 100, and 1 : 150 by mass). Complete coating on substrate was achieved with the mass ratio of 1 : 50 and 1 : 100 only (Fig. S1a and Fig. 1c). Thickness of the polymerized TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1) film with the mass ratio of 1 : 50 and 1 : 100 was ~ 1 and $\sim 0.4\text{ }\mu\text{m}$, respectively. The mass ratio of 1 : 150 resulted in island like coating (Fig. S1b). In addition, EIS analysis revealed that the coating film polymerized with the ratio of 1 : 100 indicated lower resistance (Fig. S1c).

First of all electrochemical evaluations, the effect of the artificial SEI made of TAIC was investigated by charge–discharge test of a symmetrical cell composed of Li coated with the TAIC-derived polymer film and polyolefin-based separator impregnated with a liquid electrolyte (Fig. 2a). The cell with the TAIC-derived polymer coating initially exhibited an overvoltage of approximately 50 mV, which subsequently decreased to approximately 15 mV after five charge–discharge cycles. This behavior is attributed to the expansion of the electrode surface area caused by the formation of deposits and pits, respectively.³² Afterwards, the cell cycles were stable for more than 2000 h; however, after 1500 h, the overvoltage increased in each charging and discharging cycle. On the other hand, the cell without the TAIC-derived polymer coating initially shows a lower overvoltage compared to that with the TAIC-derived polymer coating, followed by a gradual increase in the overvoltage (Fig. 2a). The increase in overvoltage is primarily caused by an increase in the SEI resistance and electrolyte resistance owing to continuous electrolyte consumption. Conversely, the TAIC-derived polymer coating effectively suppresses the continuous consumption of electrolyte. To confirm the effect of polymerization, a symmetrical cell of non-coated Li but TAIC monomer was added to the electrolyte. The results indicate a flat voltage profile during charging and discharging, indicating

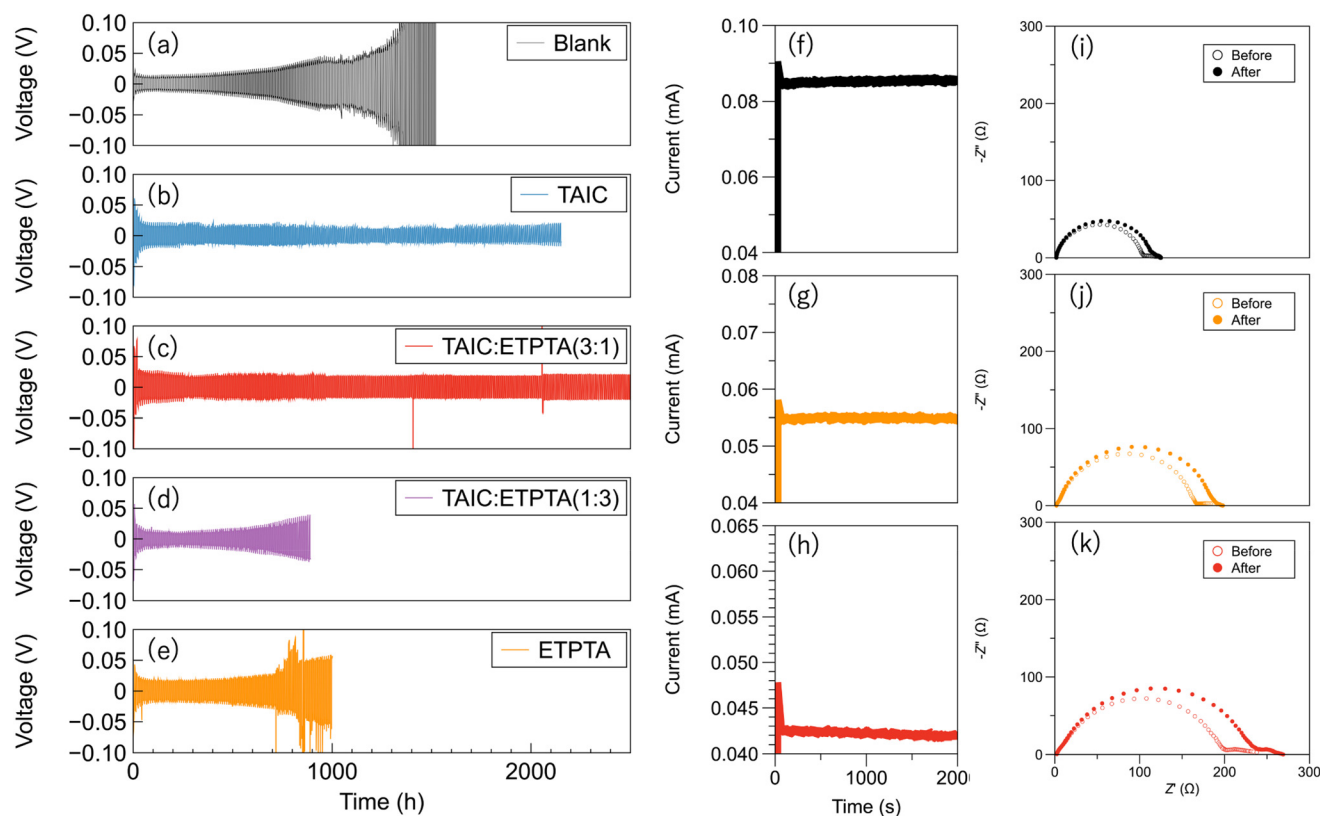


Fig. 2 Charge–discharge test, with a current density of 0.4 mA cm^{-2} for 5 hours, of a symmetrical cells composed of Li coated with (a) no polymer and (b) TAIC, (c) TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1), (d) TAIC : ETPTA (1 : 3), (e) ETPTA and polyolefin-based separator impregnated with a liquid electrolyte; Chronoamperograms, under 10 mV polarization, of symmetrical cells of Li (f) coated with no polymer, (g) ETPTA, (h) TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1); Nyquist plots before and after 10 mV polarization of symmetrical cells of Li (i) coated with no polymer, (j) ETPTA, (k) TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1).



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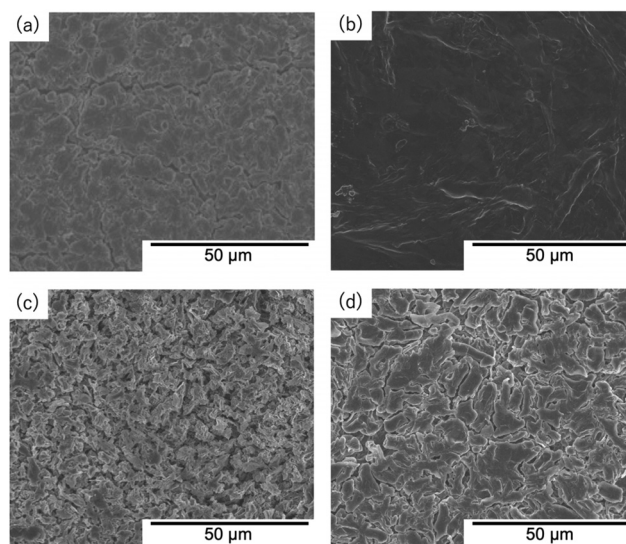


Fig. 3 SEM images of the lithium electrode surface: (a) and (b) after 10 charge–discharge cycles, and (c) and (d) after 87 cycles. (a and c) show uncoated electrodes, while (b and d) show electrodes coated with the TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1)-derived polymer.

Table 1 Surface atomic composition (%) of Li electrodes after 10 charge–discharge cycles, with and without TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1) polymer coating, as determined by XPS analysis

	Li	C	N	O	F	S
Blank	44.4	28.3	0.8	22.0	3.1	1.5
TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1)	12.5	37.5	4.4	22.4	19.0	4.3

contents, as evidenced by the F 1s, S 2p, and N 1s spectra (see the note in Fig. S5), suggest the incorporation of LiTFSI into the polymer phase. The transport number of lithium ion (t_{Li^+}) in the symmetrical cell of the TAIC:ETPTA (3:1)-derived polymer coating was measured and compared with those without polymer coating, with the ETPTA by means of chronopotentiometry and EIS³⁵ (Fig. 2f–k and Table S1). Polymer coating improved the t_{Li^+} from 0.38 ± 0.08 (without polymer coating) to 0.59 ± 0.05 and 0.75 ± 0.07 with ETPTA and TAIC:ETPTA (3:1)-derived polymer coating, respectively. This result is supported by a previous report that C=O strongly adsorbed TSFI anion through electrostatic interaction.²⁸ Thus the polymer phase effectively suppressed the anion migration. Furthermore, the bridging ETPTA with TAIC limit the swelling of the CH₂–CH₂–O part, resulting in higher t_{Li^+} value in the TAIC:ETPTA (3:1)-derived polymer coating.

In addition, the electrochemical stability of the coating of the TAIC:ETPTA (3:1)-derived polymer was investigated by LSV on Cu working electrode with comparison of those without the coating, with TAIC, and with ETPTA derived polymer coating (Fig. 4a). The reduction peak at 1.0 V was observed in all samples and is attributed to the reductive decomposition of DOL.³⁶ The reduction peak at 0.55 V was observed only in the ETPTA-derived polymer coating, being

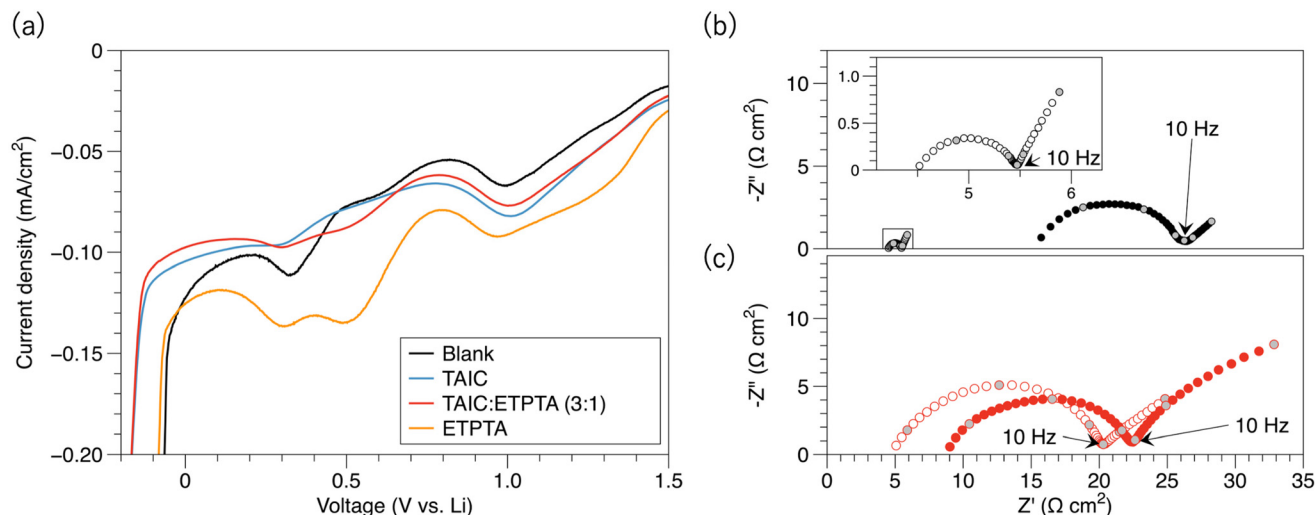


Fig. 4 (a) LSV curves of Cu electrodes with polymer coatings derived from TAIC, TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1), and ETPTA, along with an uncoated Cu electrode. (b and c) Nyquist plots of symmetric Li–Li cells: (b) without and (c) with a TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1)-derived polymer coating. Open and closed markers indicate the impedance after 16 and 50 charge–discharge cycles, respectively. The inset in (b) shows an enlarged view of the plots after 16 cycles. Grey markers indicate data points corresponding to one frequency decade.

assigned to the reduction of ETPTA. Although a slight shoulder of the reduction current was detected in the TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1)-derived polymer coating, it was significantly suppressed due to copolymerization with TAIC. An obvious reduction peak at 0.3 V was observed in both without the coating and ETPTA-derived polymer coating, which can be attributed to the reductive decomposition of the TFSI anion.³⁶ These results suggest that the dense polymer network coatings derived from TAIC or TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1) trap TFSI anions, thereby reducing their concentration at the electrode surface and suppressing their reductive decomposition. The trapping of TFSI anion is also supported by the transport number. Furthermore, the cycle durability of the lithium electrode coated with or without the TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1)-derived polymer was investigated. As shown in Fig. 2(a) and (b), the overvoltage increase of the symmetrical cells of Li during the charge–discharge cycles was effectively suppressed by applying the coating. To investigate the cause of the overvoltage increase, electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) was performed on symmetric cells composed of lithium metal electrodes with or without the TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1)-derived polymer coating after 16 and 50 charge–discharge cycles (Fig. 4b and c). In the early stages of cycling, the resistance (R_s), corresponding to the x -axis intercept in the high-frequency region, remained nearly identical between the cells with and without the polymer coating, as it reflects the bulk electrolyte resistance. In contrast, the interfacial ionic resistance (R_i), associated with the SEI and polymer coating, was significantly lower in the uncoated cell ($2 \Omega \text{ cm}^2$) than in the cell coated with the TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1)-derived polymer ($15 \Omega \text{ cm}^2$). This pronounced difference is attributed to the contribution of the polymer layer to the overall ionic resistance. After 50 cycles, both R_s and R_i increased markedly in the uncoated cell, whereas these increases were suppressed in the

coated cell. These results demonstrate that the TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1)-derived polymer coating effectively protects the lithium metal surface by suppressing further SEI formation and electrolyte decomposition, thereby preventing increases in both interfacial and bulk resistances.

Conclusions

In this study, we developed an artificial solid electrolyte interphase (SEI) using a cross-linked polymer derived from tris(2-acryloyloxyethyl) isocyanurate (TAIC) and trimethylolpropane ethoxylate triacrylate (ETPTA), with the aim of enhancing mechanical robustness—particularly resistance to swelling—at the interface of lithium metal anodes. The copolymerization of TAIC and ETPTA (3 : 1 by weight) yielded a robust and flexible polymer coating that demonstrated superior electrochemical performance. This artificial SEI enabled uniform lithium deposition, suppressed dendritic growth, and significantly extended cycle stability over 3500 hours in symmetric cells. The polymer-coated lithium electrodes exhibited a high lithium ion transference number ($t_{\text{Li}^+} = 0.75$), effective suppression of electrolyte decomposition, and enhanced resistance against SEI thickening during long-term cycling. Furthermore, electrochemical analyses revealed that the TAIC : ETPTA (3 : 1)-derived film effectively trapped TFSI anions, minimized interfacial side reactions, and contributed to suppression of electrolyte and SEI resistance increase over prolonged operation. These results demonstrate that TAIC-based copolymer coatings are a promising strategy for constructing stable, high-performance artificial SEIs suitable for next-generation lithium metal batteries, particularly under high-energy-density conditions such as lithium–sulfur systems.



Data availability

The raw data supporting the findings of this study are available in the SI of this article as a ZIP archive: original experimental data such as electrochemical measurements and XPS spectra used in the main figures and SI. No custom code was used in this study. See DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1039/d5eb00109a>

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The thickness of the polymer coating was verified through cross-sectional scanning electron microscopy (SEM, SU8200, Hitachi High-Tech Corporation). The occurrence of polymerization was confirmed *via* Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FT-IR, Prestige-21, Shimadzu Corp.). The chemical composition of the electrode surface was analyzed using X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS, PHI-VersaProbeII, ULVAC-PHI).

Author contributions

The manuscript was written through the contributions of all authors. All authors have approved the final version of the manuscript. H. Nara: conceptualization, writing – original draft, visualization, supervision. T. Miyamoto: investigation, data curation. T. Kosaki: formal analysis. H. Hayashi: formal analysis, writing – review & editing. T. Momma: conceptualization, supervision, funding acquisition.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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