Thermodynamic Models for Vapor-Liquid Equilibria of Nitrogen+Oxygen+Carbon Dioxide at Low Temperatures

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Abstract

For the design and optimization of $CO₂$ recovery from alcoholic fermentation processes by distillation, models for vapor-liquid equilibria (VLE) are needed. Two such thermodynamic models, the Peng-Robinson equation of state (EOS) and a model based on Henry's law constants, are proposed for the ternary mixture $N_2+O_2+CO_2$. Pure substance parameters of the Peng-Robinson EOS are taken from the literature, whereas the binary parameters of the Van der Waals one-fluid mixing rule are adjusted to experimental binary VLE data. The Peng-Robinson EOS describes both binary and ternary experimental data well, except at high pressures approaching the critical region. A molecular model is validated by simulation using binary and ternary experimental VLE data. On the basis of this model, the Henry's law constants of N_2 and O_2 in CO_2 are predicted by molecular simulation. An easy-touse thermodynamic model, based on those Henry's law constants, is developed to reliably describe the VLE in the $CO₂$ -rich region.

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1 Introduction

The recovery of $CO₂$, produced during alcoholic fermentation, is an economically and ecologically interesting process for breweries. $CO₂$, which is the main component of the fermentation flue gas, can be collected and purified to be used as an auxiliary material during the production process or for other purposes. E.g., $CO₂$ is used to avoid contact of the beer product with O_2 from the atmosphere to minimize oxidation processes and flavor derogation. It is needed in this case with a high purity, particularly the O_2 concentration has to be below 5 ppm $[1, 2]$.

 $CO₂$ originates from the anaerobic metabolism of yeast during fermentation processes. Yeast, mostly saccharomyces cerevisiae uvarum varians carlsbergensis, ferments the hexoses glucose and fructose as well as the disaccharides saccharose and maltose and the trisaccharides maltotriose. The fermentation produces per liter of beer about 42 g $CO₂$. Wort solves about 4 g/l, thus 38 g/l are released and may predominantly be recovered. Fermentation by-products and components from the atmosphere in the fermentation tank contaminate the emerging $CO₂$ and can be separated by different cleaning steps via activated carbons and silica gels [3]. The permanent gases N_2 and O_2 from the atmosphere, however, are the main obstacles in the recovery of $CO₂$. Available experimental data indicates low solubilities of O_2 and N_2 in liquid CO_2 at temperatures below -35 °C, which allow a sufficiently high purification [4].

 N_2 and O_2 can be separated from CO_2 by distillation, recovering up to 66 % (i.e. 25 $g(1)$ of the produced $CO₂$. Common one-stage cooling devices used in breweries, mostly with $NH₃$ as working agent, are unable to provide the required low temperatures down to −55 °C [5]. Therefore, an additional low temperature stage has to be considered. $CO₂$ itself is an appropriate cooling agent for such devices due to its volumetric refrigerating capacity and the optimal pressure range at the required temperatures. In a pilot plant at the Flensburger Brauerei, Emil Petersen GmbH & Co. KG (Germany), which is discussed in [6], a cascade cooling device was added. After liquefaction and super-cooling, the recovered CO_2 -rich liquid is stored into an interim tank. Subsequently, the liquid mixture is heated by three heating sections to remove the super-cooling and to boil out the permanent gases N_2 and O_2 . The gaseous fraction is dissipated to avoid a re-solution.

For the design and optimization of such recovery and cleaning processes, vapor-liquid equilibrium (VLE) data for the ternary mixture $O_2 + N_2 + CO_2$ at temperatures between [−]55 and [−]²⁰ ◦C are needed. The focus of the present work is the assessment of the available experimental VLE data and the development of two thermodynamic models for that purpose. Particular attention is given to the $CO₂-rich$ region. Beside the classical approach with the Peng-Robinson equation of state (EOS), molecular modelling and simulation were used to develop an easy-to-use model based on Henry's law constants. It should be noted that the molecular approach is very much suitable to predict mixing properties for a wide variety of fluids.

2 Experimental Data

Experimental VLE data of the ternary mixture $N_2 + O_2 + CO_2$ are available only from two publications, Zenner et al. [7] and Muirbrook et al. [8]. The later [8] deals exclusively with the 0 ◦C isotherm, thus Zenner et al. [7] is the only ternary source within the regarded temperature range. In [7], the VLE has been measured at the temperature -40.3 °C and pressures of 5.17, 6.90 and 12.69 MPa with $CO₂$ liquid mole fractions ranging from 0.73 to 0.92. At [−]⁵⁵ ◦C pressures of 6.90, 10.35, and 13.10 MPa have been investigated with $CO₂$ liquid mole fractions ranging from 0.69 to 0.87. These are high pressure VLE so that the very CO_2 -rich region is not covered.

Regarding the three binary subsystems, the available experimental data base is much better and extensive VLE data can be found. For N_2+O_2 , which consists of the two lower boiling components of the present ternary mixture, 15 publications are available [8-22]. Both components have very low critical temperatures, i.e. -147.05 °C (N₂) and -118.57 °C (O₂), so that the binary VLE lies considerably lower than the temperature range of interest as well.

The VLE of the binary subsystem N_2+CO_2 has been investigated in 21 publications [6,7,23-41]. $CO₂$ has a much higher critical temperature of 30.98 °C and experimental binary VLE data can be found in the regarded temperature range in 12 publications [25-36].

Also for the third subsystem, i.e. $O_2 + CO_2$, sufficient VLE data is available [6,31,42-44]. In this case, numerous data points are known in the relevant temperature range from −55 to -20 °C [7, 43, 44] as well.

In the following, a subset of the experimental data was used to adjust and validate the thermodynamic models developed in this work, i.e. $[12, 17, 21]$ for N_2+O_2 , $[7]$ for N_2+CO_2 , [43] for O_2+CO_2 , and [7] for the ternary mixture $N_2+O_2+CO_2$. For N_2+O_2 and N_2+CO_2 those data sets were selected, which contain a larger number of data points.

3 Molecular Model

To describe the intermolecular interactions in the ternary mixture, effective state independent pair potentials were used here, which implies that many-body interactions were neglected. For this purpose, the two-centre Lennard-Jones plus point quadrupole (2CLJQ) pair potential was employed [46]. It is composed of two identical Lennard-Jones sites a distance L apart (2CLJ) and an axial point-quadrupole of momentum Q placed in the geometric centre of the molecule. The intermolecular potential writes as

$$
u_{2CLJQ}(\boldsymbol{r}_{ij},\boldsymbol{\omega}_i,\boldsymbol{\omega}_j) = \sum_{a=1}^2 \sum_{b=1}^2 4\epsilon \left[\left(\frac{\sigma}{r_{ab}}\right)^{12} - \left(\frac{\sigma}{r_{ab}}\right)^6 \right] + \frac{3}{4} \frac{Q_i Q_j}{|\boldsymbol{r}_{ij}|^5} f_Q(\boldsymbol{\omega}_i,\boldsymbol{\omega}_j).
$$
(1)

Herein, r_{ij} is the centre-centre distance vector of two molecules i and j, r_{ab} is one of the four Lennard-Jones site-site distances; a counts the two sites of molecule i, b counts those of molecule j. The vectors ω_i and ω_j represent the orientations of the two molecules i and j. $f_{\rm Q}$ is a trigonometrical function depending on these molecular orientations, cf. Gray and Gubbins [47]. The Lennard-Jones parameters σ and ϵ represent size and energy, respectively. In total, the 2CLJQ model has four model parameters: σ , ϵ , L, and Q. These parameters have been adjusted to VLE for numerous pure fluids in prior work [46]. Table 1 summarizes the parameters of the three pure fluid molecular models considered here.

On the basis of existing models for pure fluids, molecular modelling of mixtures reduces to specifying the interaction between unlike molecules. Following prior work [48], a modified Lorentz-Berthelot combining rule with one adjustable binary interaction parameter ξ was used for each unlike Lennard-Jones interaction

$$
\sigma_{AB} = \frac{\sigma_A + \sigma_B}{2},\tag{2}
$$

$$
\epsilon_{AB} = \xi \cdot \sqrt{\epsilon_A \cdot \epsilon_B}.\tag{3}
$$

Table 2 summarizes the three binary interaction parameters needed for the ternary mixture model that were taken from [48]. The interaction between the quadrupolar sites is treated in a physically straightforward way without the use of binary parameters. It was shown in [48] that this ternary model yields an accurate description of the thermodynamic properties of this mixture. It can readily be used to predict a wide range of thermodynamic properties such as Henry's law constants as discussed below.

To calculate the VLE on the basis of this molecular model by simulation, the Grand Equilibrium method was applied here. The description of this method can be found elsewhere [49] and is not repeated. Only the technical details of the present calculations are concisely given in the following. Molecular dynamics simulations for the liquid phase were performed in the isobaric isothermal (NpT) ensemble, using Anderson's barostat [50] and isokinetic velocity scaling [51]. A total of 864 molecules were placed initially in a fcc lattice configuration in a cubic simulation volume. Depending upon the density of the state point, the reduced membrane mass parameter for the barostat Mm/σ^4 was chosen from 10^{-3} to 10^{-6} , where m is the molecular mass. The intermolecular interactions were evaluated explicitly up to a cut-off radius of 5σ and standard long range corrections were used, employing angle averaging as proposed by Lustig [52].

For the vapor phase, pseudo-grand canonical $(p-\mu VT)$ Monte-Carlo simulations were performed. The cut-off radius was also $r_c = 5\sigma$ and the long range corrections were considered. The maximum displacement was set to 5% of the simulation box length, which was chosen to yield on average 300 to 400 molecules in the volume. After 1 000 initial cycles in the canonical (NVT) ensemble starting from a fcc lattice, 9 000 equilibration cycles in the $p-\mu VT$ ensemble were performed. One cycle is defined here to be a number of attempts to displace and rotate molecules equal to two times the actual number of molecules plus three insertion and three deletion attempts. The length of the production run was 100 000 cycles. In this way, VLE data on the basis of the molecular model were generated. The results from simulation are presented in section 6 and validated by comparison to experimental data.

4 Peng-Robinson Equation of State

Cubic EOS offer a compromise between generality and simplicity that is suitable for numerous purposes. They are excellent tools to correlate experimental data and are therefore often used for many technical applications. In the present work, the Peng-Robinson EOS with the Van der Waals one-fluid mixing rule was adjusted to binary experimental data and validated regarding the ternary mixture. The Peng-Robinson EOS [53] is defined by

$$
p = \frac{RT}{v - b} - \frac{a}{v(v + b) + b(v - b)},
$$
\n(4)

where the temperature dependent parameter a is defined by

$$
a = \left(0.45724 \frac{R^2 T_c^2}{p_c}\right) \left[1 + \left(0.37464 + 1.54226 \omega - 0.26992 \omega^2\right) \left(1 - \sqrt{\frac{T}{T_c}}\right)\right]^2. \tag{5}
$$

The constant parameter b is

$$
b = 0.07780 \frac{RT_c}{p_c}.
$$
 (6)

Therein, critical temperature T_c , critical pressure p_c , acentric factor ω , and the ideal gas constant R of the pure substances are needed, cf. Table 3. The values were taken from [54].

To apply the Peng-Robinson EOS to mixtures, mixed parameters a_m and b_m have to be defined. For this purpose a variety of mixing rules can be found in the literature. Here, the Van der Waals one-fluid mixing rule [53] was chosen. It defines the temperature dependent parameter of the mixture as

$$
a_m = \sum_i \sum_j x_i x_j a_{ij}.\tag{7}
$$

The indices i and j denote the components, with

$$
a_{ij} = \sqrt{a_i a_j} (1 - k_{ij}),\tag{8}
$$

where k_{ij} is an adjustable binary parameter. The constant parameter of the mixture is defined as

$$
b_m = \sum_i x_i b_i. \tag{9}
$$

This classical thermodynamic model was used to fit the experimental VLE data of the three binary subsystems, i.e. $N_2 + O_2$, $O_2 + CO_2$, and $N_2 + CO_2$. The three binary parameters k_{ij} were adjusted to the same experimental data as the binary parameters of the molecular model ξ . It turned out that temperature independent k_{ij} values are sufficient in all cases in the regarded range of states, cf. Table 4. The results of the Peng-Robinson EOS are presented in section 6 and validated by comparison to experimental data.

5 Henry Model

Molecular simulation allows the prediction of Henry's law constants on the basis of a given molecular model straightforwardly. Different approaches have been proposed in the literature, e.g. [55, 56]. The Henry's law constant is related to the residual chemical potential of the solute i at infinite dilution μ_i^{∞} [57]

$$
H_i = \rho k_{\rm B} T \exp\left(\mu_i^{\infty} / (k_{\rm B} T)\right),\tag{10}
$$

where k_B is the Boltzmann constant, T the temperature, and ρ the density of the solvent.

For the calculation of Henry's law constants, a series of simulations, ranging from 0 to −55 °C, were performed with at intervals of 5 °C. To evaluate μ_i^{∞} , Widom's test insertion method $[58]$ was used. Therefore, 3456 test molecules representing the solute i were inserted after each time step at random positions into the liquid solvent and the potential energy between the solute test molecule and all solvent molecules ψ_i was evaluated within the cut-off radius

$$
\mu_i^{\infty} = k_{\rm B} T \langle V \exp(-\psi_i/(k_{\rm B} T)) \rangle / \langle V \rangle, \tag{11}
$$

where the brackets represent the ensemble average in the NpT ensemble. Note that appropriate long range corrections [51] have to be applied. The residual chemical potential at infinite dilution from this procedure is solely attributed to the unlike solvent-solute interactions. The mole fraction of the solute in the solvent is exactly zero, as required for infinite dilution, since the test molecules are instantly removed after the potential energy calculation. Simulations were performed at a specified temperature and the according pure substance vapor pressure of CO_2 . The results for the Henry's law constants H_i are given as functions of the temperature as shown in Figure 1. Linear functions were found to be sufficient to fit the data. The resulting equations are for N_2 in CO_2

$$
H_{\rm N2}/\rm MPa = 178.21 - 0.47998 \; T/K,\tag{12}
$$

and for O_2 in CO_2

$$
H_{\text{O2}}/\text{MPa} = 104.26 - 0.23214 \, T/\text{K}.\tag{13}
$$

It can be seen in Figure 1 that the predicted Henry's law constant of O_2 in CO_2 agrees well with the experimental data [7, 24, 43], especially in the low temperature region. But a considerable scatter of experimental data has to be noted. For N_2 in CO_2 systematic deviations between simulation and experiment were found. At [−]⁵⁵ ◦C the agreement is very good, but with increasing temperature the data sets diverge, where simulation yields higher values. The deviation is 14% at -40.3 °C.

The classical approach to model VLE on the basis of Henry's law constants includes the activity coefficient γ_i and the fugacity coefficient ϕ_i . The phase equilibrium condition for the two low boiling components $i = N_2$, O_2 is then given by [53]

$$
H_i \exp\left\{\frac{1}{RT} \int_{p_{\text{CO2}}^s}^p v_i^{\infty} dp\right\} x_i \gamma_i = p y_i \phi_i. \tag{14}
$$

Here, x_i and y_i are the mole fractions in the saturated liquid and vapor, respectively, and v_i^{∞} \tilde{i} is the partial molar volume of the solute at infinite dilution. The exponential term, known as Krichevski-Kasarnoski correction, accounts for the higher pressure of the liquid mixture compared to the pure solvent vapor pressure. In the pressure range of interest, its influence is small so that this correction term was set to unity.

For the solvent $CO₂$, the equilibrium condition includes the pure substance vapor pressure p^s _{CO2} instead of Henry's law constant

$$
p^{s}_{\text{CO2}} \ x_{\text{CO2}} \ \gamma_{\text{CO2}} = p \ y_{\text{CO2}} \ \phi_{\text{CO2}}.\tag{15}
$$

Therefore, a correlation for p^s_{CO2} [59] was taken from the literature

$$
\ln(p^s_{\text{CO2}}/p_c) = \sum_{i=1}^4 A_i (1 - (T/T_c))^{n_i} / (T/T_c),\tag{16}
$$

where the parameters A_i and n_i are listed in Table 5.

With the previously adjusted Peng-Robinson EOS, activity coefficients were calculated in the temperature and composition range of interest. It was found that they are between 1 and 1.001 and were thus set to unity in the present Henry model.

The fugacity coefficients, which describe the non-ideality of the vapor phase, were calculated with the Peng-Robinson EOS as well. The values do have a considerable temperature dependence, cf. Figure 2, and were thus included in the present Henry model. Quadratic fits were found to be sufficient for all components, i.e. for N_2

$$
\phi_{N2} = 5.5276 - 0.038326 \ T/K + 0.00008294 \ (T/K)^2,\tag{17}
$$

for O_2

$$
\phi_{O2} = 0.54440 - 0.00053697 \ T/K + 0.00001082 \ (T/K)^2,\tag{18}
$$

and for $CO₂$

$$
\phi_{\text{CO2}} = 0.51216 + 0.0046540 \ T/K - 0.00001082 \ (T/K)^2. \tag{19}
$$

Equations (12) to (19) define the present Henry model to describe the VLE of the ternary mixture in the $CO₂$ -rich region.

6 Results and Discussion

In this section, present thermodynamic models are validated against experimental data. It is started with the three binary subsystems and subsequently the ternary case is regarded. Particular attention is given to the molecular model as it was used to predict data for development and validation of the Henry model.

6.1 Nitrogen+Oxygen

In Figure 3, molecular simulation results and the Peng-Robinson EOS are compared to experimental VLE data [12, 17, 21] of N_2+O_2 at -153.15 °C. This temperature is considerably lower than the target range of -55 to -20 °C due to the fact that both components have very low critical temperatures. It can be seen that the Peng-Robinson EOS correlates the experimental data well. By simulation, an equimolar composition in the liquid phase was regarded, where the mixing effect is strongest. The agreement between the three data sets is very good, which is also the case for other temperatures (not shown here).

6.2 Nitrogen+Carbon Dioxide

Figure 4 depicts the VLE of N_2+CO_2 at -40.3 °C including experimental data [7], molecular simulation results, Peng-Robinson EOS, and Henry model. The experimental data shows some scatter, the simulation results are within this error bound. This also holds for the Peng-Robinson EOS for pressures up to 8 MPa. Approaching the critical region of the mixture, it is found that the Peng-Robinson EOS overshoots considerably which is a well known problem of this thermodynamic model. The Henry model is insufficient at $0 °C$ (not shown here), but for lower temperatures, e.g. cf. Figure 4, it agrees well in

the $CO₂$ -rich region. By closer inspection of the data, which will be made below, some deviations are found on the dew line that can hardly be seen with the resolution chosen for Figure 4.

6.3 Oxygen+Carbon Dioxide

Figure 5 presents the VLE data of O_2+CO_2 at -40.3 °C from experiment [43], molecular simulation, Peng-Robinson EOS, and Henry model. As before, the experimental data shows some scatter, particularly on the dew line. Again, it can be seen that the Peng-Robinson EOS overshoots in the critical region of the mixture. The agreement between Peng-Robinson EOS and Henry model is good in the $CO₂$ -rich region. The molecular model shows reliable results, also for other temperatures (not shown here). As for the previous binary mixture, some deviations are observed on the dew line.

6.4 Nitrogen+Oxygen+Carbon Dioxide

In Figures 6 and 7 simulation results and the Peng-Robinson EOS are compared with experimental ternary VLE data of the ternary system at -40.3 and -55 °C [7]. Due to the fact that experimental data is available only at high pressures between 5.17 and 13.10 MPa, the Henry model is not included into this validation. The Peng-Robinson EOS represents the VLE well at pressures of 6.9 MPa and below as depicted in Figures 6 and 7. But it shows larger deviations at higher pressures approaching the critical region (not shown here). In the target region of state points, molecular simulation data is throughout in very good agreement with the experimental data.

6.5 Carbon Dioxide-Rich Region

The present Henry model is developed for the design of technical applications in the $CO₂$ -rich composition range. Therefore, further validations in this region, at state points where no experimental data is available, are presented here. The molecular model, being validated on the basis of experimental mixture VLE as discussed above, was used as the benchmark here.

Figure 8 presents the pressure over the vapor mole fractions of N_2 and O_2 in VLE for constant liquid mole fractions $x_{N2}=x_{O2}=0.01$ in the temperature range from -55 to [−]²⁰ ◦C. Simulation data, Peng-Robinson EOS, and Henry model are compared. It can be seen that simulation data and Peng-Robinson EOS agree very well, deviations are minor. The Henry model deviates somewhat, yielding approximately 8% too low pressures and 5% too low vapor mole fractions.

The limits, where the Henry model shows deviations of less than 2% from molecular model and Peng-Robinson EOS, were investigated. Table 6 shows that the Henry model is reliable for $CO₂$ liquid mole fractions above 0.995. This limit is examined in Figure 9, where the pressure over the vapor mole fractions of N_2 and O_2 in VLE for constant liquid mole fractions $x_{\text{N2}}=x_{\text{O2}}=0.0025$ is shown in the temperature range from -55 to -20 °C. The results from all three models agree well, proving the reliability of the thermodynamic models presented in this work.

7 Conclusion

In this work three thermodynamic approaches, i.e. a molecular model, the Peng-Robinson EOS, and a model based on Henry's law constants, were used to investigate the VLE of the ternary mixture $N_2+O_2+CO_2$ in the temperature range from -55 to -20 °C. A

thorough validation by comparison to experimental VLE data was made, where possible. The molecular model and the Peng-Robinson EOS are appropriate throughout, except in the critical region. For the very $CO₂$ -rich region, which is important for purification processes, the computationally convenient Henry model can be used reliably.

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List of symbols

Latin Letters

Greek Letters

Subscripts

Superscripts

 ∞ at infinite dilution s saturated

Abbreviations

Vector properties

 \boldsymbol{r}_{ij} center-center distance vector between two molecules i and j ω orientation vector of a molecule

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Fluid		$(\epsilon/k_B)/K$	L/A	Q/DA
N ₂	3.3211	34.897	1.0464	1.4397
$()_{2}$	3.1062	43.183	0.9699	0.8081
CO ₂	2.9847	133.22	2.4176	3.7938

Table 1: Parameters of the molecular models for the pure fluids, taken from [46].

Table 2: Binary interaction parameters of the molecular model, taken from [48].

Mixture	۴	
$N_2 + Q_2$	1.007	
$N_2 + CO_2$	1.041	
$O_2 + CO_2$	0.979	

Table 3: Pure substance parameters of the Peng-Robinson EOS, taken from [54].

Fluid	T_c/K	p_c/MPa	ι
N_2	126.19	3.3958	0.0372
O ₂	154.58	5.0430	0.0222
CO ₂	304.13	7.3773	0.2239

Table 4: Binary parameters of the Van der Waals one-fluid mixing rule adjusted in the present work.

Mixture	k_{ij}
$N_2 + Q_2$	-0.0119
$N_2 + CO_2$	0.0015
$O_2 + CO_2$	0.124

Table 5: Parameters of the vapor pressure correlation for $CO₂$, taken from [59].

i.	A_i	$n_{\it i}$
	6.95626	
2	1.19695	3/2
3	3.12614	3
	2.99448	6

Table 6: Minimum mole fractions of $CO₂$ in the liquid and vapor where the Henry model deviates by less than 2 % from the molecular model and the Peng-Robinson EOS.

T /°C	$x_{\rm CO2}$	y_{CO2}
-20	0.994	0.872
-35	0.995	0.811
-55	0.996	0.706

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- 9 Pressure over vapor mole fraction in vapor-liquid equilibrium at constant liquid mole fraction $x_{N2} = x_{O2} = 0.0025$ in the temperature range -55 to −20 °C: $\blacksquare,$
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Figure 1: Vrabec et al.

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