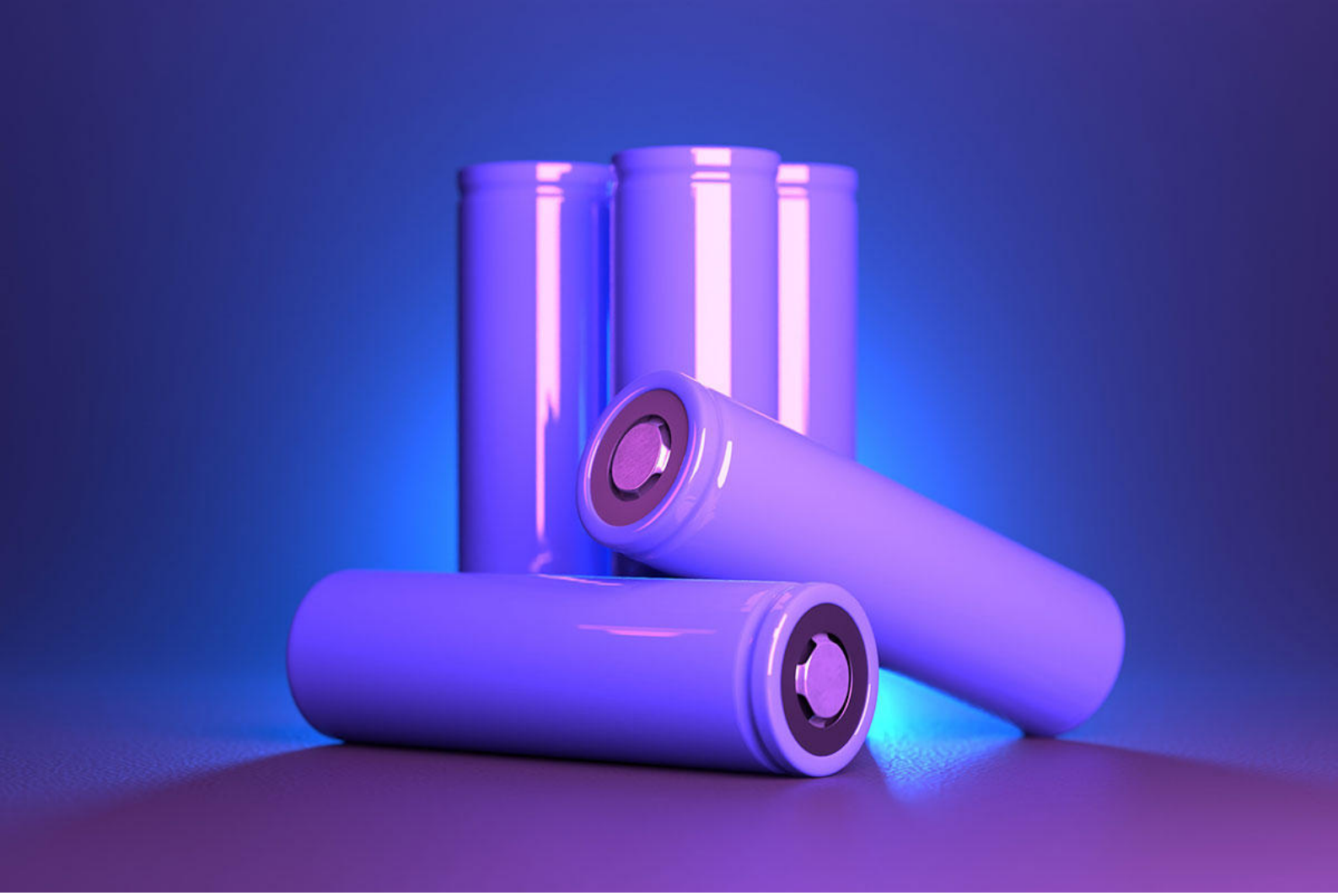

Application Note AN-S-372

Analysis of Li-ion battery electrolytes with ion chromatography

In the next decade, our reliance on batteries is predicted to increase five-fold [1]. Lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries (LIBs) dominate the current market. LIBs operate by moving electrons from an anode to a cathode (discharging) and back (charging). The Li ions from the liquid electrolyte balance this flow [2].

Consequently, the lithium battery electrolyte composition is crucial for the performance and lifetime of the battery [3,4]. Li electrolytes are mostly composed of lithium hexafluorophosphate ($LiPF_6$) or lithium difluorophosphate ($LiPO_2F_2$) dissolved in organic carbonates. The content of $LiPF_6$ or $LiPO_2F_2$ significantly influences the ionic conductivity, electrolyte stability, and battery safety. Therefore, it is crucial to determine the $LiPF_6$ or $LiPO_2F_2$ content to ensure that Li-ion batteries meet performance, safety, and aging criteria [5,6].

Analysis is challenging for certain techniques due to solvent or salt effects. Ion chromatography provides an accurate, economic solution for battery electrolyte analysis. The **Metrohm intelligent Partial-Loop Technique (MiPT)** simplifies the analysis, improves reproducibility and accuracy, and decreases costs. This Application Note details an ion chromatographic approach to determine lithium-ion battery electrolyte composition, i.e., the concentration of lithium bis(trifluoromethanesulfonyl)imide (LiTFSI), lithium difluoro(oxalato)borate (LiODFB), $LiPF_6$, and $LiPO_2F_2$.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLE PREPARATION

Three different samples of Li-ion battery electrolytes were used for this study (Sample 1, Sample 2, and Sample 3, as noted in the Results section). A 500 mg portion of the respective sample material was weighed into a 50 mL volumetric flask and brought up to the correct volume with acetone (HPLC grade, 99.8%).

A mixed standard with a concentration of 40 mg/L LiODFB (lithium difluoro(oxalato)borate), $LiPO_2F_2$ (lithium difluorophosphate), $LiPF_6$ (lithium hexafluorophosphate), and LiTFSI (lithium bis(trifluoromethanesulfonyl)imide) was used for the automatic system calibration with MiPT.

EXPERIMENTAL

Sample handling was performed with the 858 Professional Sample Processor and MiPT. MiPT enables the precise generation of a calibration curve out of a single standard. Therefore, the 800 Dosino accurately aspirates a specific volume of the given standard into the injection loop. Samples were injected with a volume of 4 µL.

After injection, the target analytes ($ODFB^-$, $PO_2F_2^-$, PF_6^- and $TFSI^-$) were separated using the high-capacity Metrosep A Supp 7 - 250/4.0 column and a mixture of 14.4 mmol/L Na_2CO_3 and 40 vol% acetone as eluent. For accurate conductivity measurement, the background conductivity is reduced via sequential suppression, followed by conductivity detection. The example flow path for this analysis is shown in Figure 1.

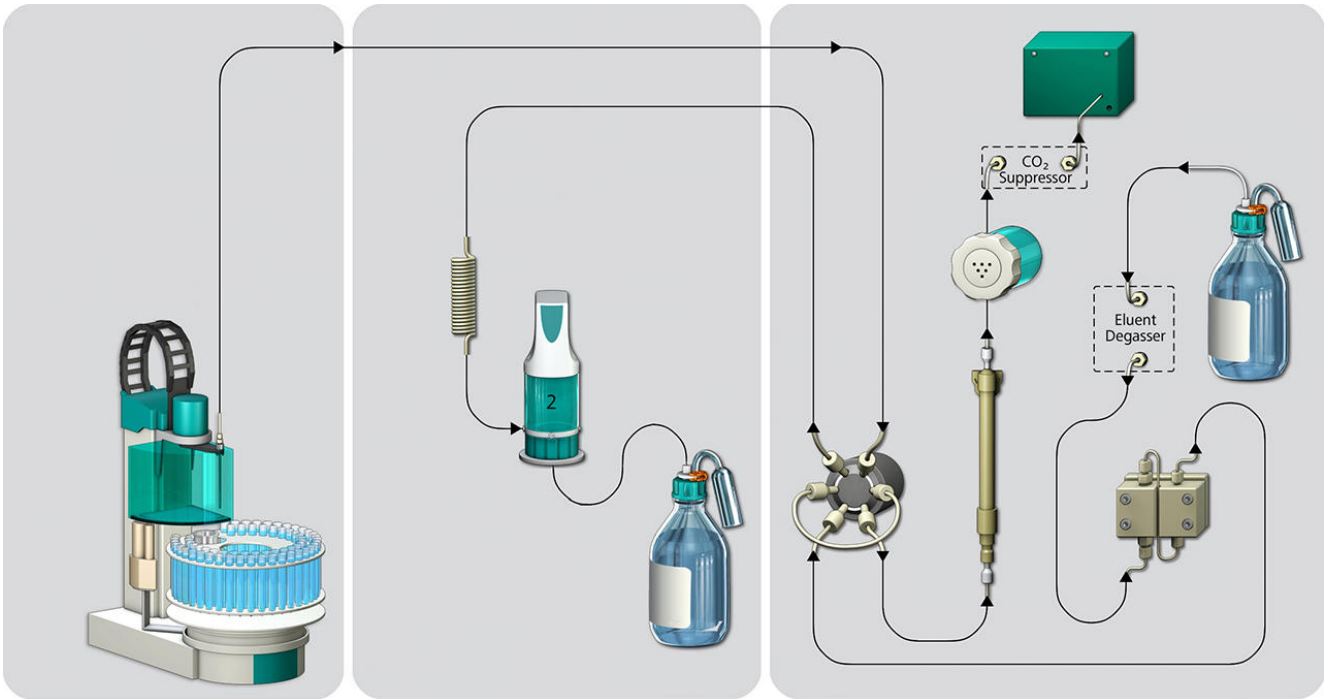

Figure 1. Schematic of an ion chromatographic setup with MiPT.

SAMPLE ANALYSIS

Five standards each of LiODFB, $LiPO_2F_2$, $LiPF_6$, and LiTFSI were automatically prepared (at concentrations of 40, 80, 200, 400, and 800 mg/L) via MiPT. Due to the precise liquid handling offered by MiPT, the resulting calibration curve for LiODFB, $LIPO_2F_2$, and $LiPF_6$ had RSD values <2%, and LiTFSI achieved an RSD value of 2.61%.

RESULTS

The target analytes, i.e., LIB electrolyte components (LiODFB, $LiPO_2F_2$, $LiPF_6$ and LiTFSI), are effectively separated in their anionic forms (i.e., $ODFB^-$, $PO_2F_2^-$, PF_6^-, and $TFSI^-$) within 29 minutes (Figure 2). The recovery from two-level spike experiments (Table 1) ranged from 90–100% and reveals the robustness of the analysis. The sample concentration ranges covered 0.52–1.1 mg/L for $ODFB^-$ (Table 2), 0.28–0.76 mg/L for $PO_2F_2^-$ (Table 3), 11.05–14.07 mg/L for PF_6^- (Table 4), and 0.45–1.05 mg/L for $TFSI^-$ (Table 5). The samples were determined in triplicate and showed average RSD values of 2.8% for $ODFB^-$, 2.8% for $PO_2F_2^-$, 1.8% for PF_6^-, and 0.8% for $TFSI^-$.

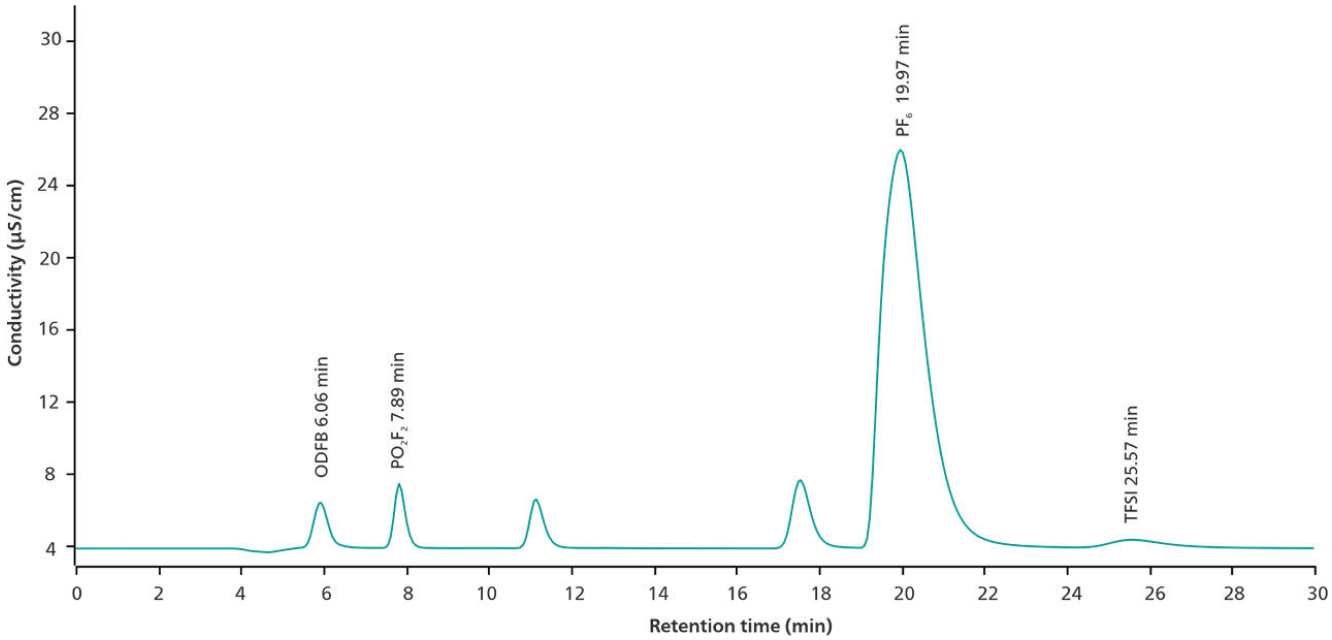

Figure 2. Chromatogram for the determination of lithium difluoro(oxalato)borate, lithium difluorophosphate, lithium hexafluorophosphate, and lithium bis(trifluoromethanesulfonyl)imide with a 930 Compact IC Flex and MiPT. The LiB electrolyte components are determined in their anionic forms and separated on a Metrosep A Supp 17 column.

Table 1. Results for the recovery of the spiked samples. The spike experiments were performed in two levels (added concentration) and the recovery was determined from the target and final concentrations.

Sample, [conc.] (mg/L)	Added conc. (mg/L)	Target conc. (mg/L)	Final conc. (mg/L)	Recovery(%)
$ODFB^-$, [0.52]	0.20	0.72	0.72	100
	0.40	0.92	0.94	100
$PO_2F_2^-$, [0.42]	0.20	0.62	0.60	90
	0.40	0.82	0.79	95
PF_6^-, [12.64]	5.58	18.22	18.37	100
	11.42	24.06	23.99	99
$TFSI^-$, [1.05]	0.79	1.84	1.83	99
	1.58	3.42	2.61	99

Table 2. Results of concentration and %RSD for the analyte ODFB- .

Analyte		Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3
$ODFB^-$ (mg/L)	1	0.52	0.68	1.08
	2	0.54	0.68	1.12
	3	0.49	0.66	1.09
	Average	0.52	0.67	1.10
	%RSD	4.9	1.7	1.9

Table 3. Results of concentration and %RSD for the analyte PO2F2-.

Analyte		Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3
$PO_2F_2^-$ (mg/L)	1	0.43	0.75	0.29
	2	0.43	0.76	0.28
	3	0.40	0.76	0.27
	Average	0.42	0.76	0.28
	%RSD	4.1	0.8	3.6

Table 4. Results of concentration and %RSD for the analyte PF6-.

Analyte		Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3
PF_6^- (mg/L)	1	12.63	14.23	11.15
	2	12.33	13.95	11.18
	3	12.95	14.03	10.81
	Average	12.64	14.07	11.05
	%RSD	2.4	1.0	1.9

Table 5. Results of concentration and %RSD for the analyte TFSI-. N.D: Not detectable.

Analyte		Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3
$TFSI^-$ (mg/L)	1	1.07	N.D.	0.44
	2	1.09	N.D.	0.46
	3	0.99	N.D.	0.45
	Average	1.05	N.D.	0.45
	%RSD	1.1	—	0.5

CONCLUSION

Ion chromatography with the Metrohm intelligent Partial-Loop Injection technique is an accurate and efficient method to determine the concentration of LIB electrolytes such as LiODFB, $LiPO_2F_2$, $LiPF_6$, and LiTFSI.

An advantage of ion chromatography over other analytical methods is that the salts and organic solvents that are present in LIB samples do not interfere with the analysis, and therefore results are more accurate and reproducible. With the help of spike experiments and replicate measurements, this application example shows that ion chromatography is a reliable method to determine the LIB electrolyte composition.

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