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The Electron Spin Resonance Spectrum of $V(CO)_6$ at Liquid Helium Temperatures

David W. Pratt* and Rollie J. Myers

Contribution from the Department of Chemistry,
University of California and the
Inorganic Materials Research Division of the
Lawrence Radiation Laboratory,
Berkeley, California 94720

Abstract: The electron spin resonance spectrum of $V(CO)_6$ has been observed at liquid helium temperatures in samples of the pure solid and in benzene and n-pentane glasses. Because of an unusual power dependence of the spectrum in n-pentane, both the isotropic and anisotropic g-values have been measured directly. From a comparison of these results with the semi-empirical predictions of crystal field theory, it is concluded that $V(CO)_6$ possesses a small tetragonal distortion at 1.3°K.

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* Present address: Department of Physics, University of California, Santa Barbara, California, 93106.

The synthesis of vanadium hexacarbonyl was first reported in 1959 by Natta, et al.[1] $V(CO)_6$ was found to be a volatile, air-sensitive, blue-green solid at room temperature which is slightly soluble in hydrocarbon solvents. Magnetic susceptibility results on both the pure solid[1] and solutions of $V(CO)_6$ in benzene and toluene[2] have shown that the molecule is paramagnetic with one unpaired electron, thus confirming that $V(CO)_6$ is a low-spin, rather than high-spin, molecule. However, in a series of independent studies, Pruett and Wyman[3] were unable to obtain an ESR spectrum of $V(CO)_6$ in solution at room temperature. More recently, Haas and Sheline[4] have studied the infrared and optical spectra of $V(CO)_6$ in the gas phase. From their results, the authors suggested that there was strong evidence for the presence of a Jahn-Teller distortion in this molecule.

In view of the magnetic susceptibility results on this compound, it seemed likely to us that the absence of an ESR spectrum of $V(CO)_6$ at normal temperatures was due to a very short electron spin relaxation time of the unpaired electron in this molecule. This would make the ESR spectrum very broad and possibly unobservable except at very low temperatures. Consequently, we have investigated the ESR spectrum of $V(CO)_6$ at liquid helium temperatures in both the pure solid and in dilute hydrocarbon glasses and we have found strong ESR spectra in both cases at 1.3°K. An unusual power dependence of the spectrum in n-pentane has made possible the direct measurement of both the isotropic and anisotropic g-values, and they give evidence of a tetragonally distorted complex.

Experimental

The $V(CO)_6$ used in these experiments was prepared from bis(diglyme)-sodium hexacarbonylvanadate (Alfa Inorganics, Inc.) according to the method of Werner and Podall.[5] Reagent grade benzene and n-pentane, which were used as solvents, were dried over sodium and degassed thoroughly prior to use. As soon as possible after preparation, the $V(CO)_6$ (and solvent, when used) were vacuum-distilled into a small ampule prepared from a section of 9 mm. Pyrex tubing and the ampule was sealed at the neck with a hot flame. Although the exact concentration of $V(CO)_6$ in the solution samples was not determined, based on other experiments[6] it was thought to be of the order of one mole percent. The ampule was then placed in an X-band TE012 rectangular cavity, quick-frozen by immersing the cavity in liquid nitrogen, and inserted into the liquid helium cryostat which is described elsewhere.[6] A Varian V-4502 ESR spectrometer and nine-inch magnet equipped with Fieldial were employed in these experiments; 400 Hz modulation coils were attached to the outside of the cavity and the entire assembly was immersed in liquid helium during the experiment. Temperatures down to 1.2°K. were obtained by pumping on the liquid helium with a high-speed vacuum system.

Experimental Results

Reproducible ESR spectra have been obtained at liquid helium temperatures for samples of pure $V(CO)_6$ and glasses of the carbonyl in n-pentane and benzene. Of particular interest here is the observation that some of the spectral lineshapes depend in an unusual way on the intensity of microwave power incident on the cavity. For example, Figure 1 shows a series of ESR

spectra which were obtained from a sample of $V(CO)_6$ in n-pentane at various power levels. In spectrum 1a, the incident power level was -30 DB (~0.5 mw) and the line has a peak-to-peak width of about 215 G. As the power level is increased, the line becomes considerably narrower and at -16 DB is apparently narrowed to a width of about 100 G. (1b). However, when the power level is increased above -16 DB (or when the field is swept at a slower rate at -16 DB), the shape changes abruptly (see spectrum 1c). These changes were completely reversible. With the exception of the broad feature centered at about 3400 G., the spectrum at high power (1c) is characteristic of a molecule possessing an axial spin Hamiltonian with $g_{\perp} > g_{||}$.[7] The temperature of the sample in this experiment was estimated to be 1.3°K. from liquid helium vapor pressure data and did not vary noticeably with changes in power. A lineshape similar to 1b is obtained from a sample of pure polycrystalline $V(CO)_6$ at the same temperature when the power level is such that no saturation occurs. In this case, the linewidth is 130 G.

The g-values for $V(CO)_6$ obtained in these experiments are listed in Table I; these were determined by measuring the microwave frequency and comparing the field positions of the $V(CO)_6$ spectra with that of DPPH at this temperature.[6] The isotropic g-value listed for the $V(CO)_6$/n-pentane sample at high power was calculated from the measured values of $g_{||}$ and $g_{\perp}$, 1.981 and 2.103, respectively. It can be seen from Table I that there is excellent agreement between the g-values for pure $V(CO)_6$ and for the $V(CO)_6$/n-pentane sample at medium and high power levels. This supports the assignment of the high power spectrum described above and encourages a comparison of these results with semi-empirical estimates.

Discussion

Formally, the electronic structure of the zerovalent vanadium in $V(CO)_6$ is $(Ar)3d^5$, and crystal field theory predicts a $^2T_{2g}$ ground state for the low-spin configuration in a field of octahedral symmetry. According to the theorem of Jahn and Teller, an octahedral complex in a $^2T_{2g}$ electronic state is unstable with respect to distortion. Group theoretical considerations show that either a trigonal distortion (D_{3d}) or a tetragonal distortion (D_{4h}) will remove the orbital degeneracy of the $^2T_{2g}$ state and satisfy the Jahn-Teller theorem. With a trigonal distortion, crystal field calculations for the g-values show[6] that $g_{||}$, $g_{\perp}$, and the isotropic g-value must be less than the free electron value of 2.0023. This is clearly not characteristic of $V(CO)_6$. If, however, a tetragonal distortion with a decreased crystal field along the tetragonal axis is assumed, then the observed order of $g_{||}$, $g_{\perp}$, and the free electron value results. Of course, not all this distortion must be due to the Jahn-Teller theorem, for it is difficult to quantify, but such a distortion is consistent with this theorem.

If one then assumes that the molecule undergoes a small tetragonal distortion (yielding a $^2B_{2g}$ ground state), application of perturbation theory in the usual way[8] gives the following predicted g-values for the elongated octahedron, correct to first order:[6]

$$g_{||} = g_e - 8(|\xi|/\Delta_1) \qquad (1)$$

$$g_{\perp} = g_e + 2(|\xi|/\Delta_2) \qquad (2)$$

In these expressions, g_e is the free electron g-value ξ is the one-electron spin-orbit parameter, and Δ_1 and Δ_2 are crystal-field splittings defined by

$$\Delta_1 = E(b_{1g}) - E(b_{2g}), \qquad \Delta_2 = E(b_{2g}) - E(e_g).$$

Taking $\xi \leqslant 95\ cm^{-1}$[9] and the observed values of $g_{||}$ and $g_{\perp}$ for the $V(CO)_6$/n-pentane sample, one obtains from (1) and (2) the estimates $\Delta_1 \leqslant 36{,}200\ cm^{-1}$ and $\Delta_2 \leqslant 1880\ cm^{-1}$. The value of Δ_1 found in this way is in good agreement with the values of 10 Dq ($\sim\Delta_1$) observed for other low-spin, strong-field complexes such as $Cr(CO)_6$, for which 10 Dq = 34,150 cm^{-1}.[10] Further, although the optical spectrum of $V(CO)_6$ has not been assigned, this result is consistent with existing UV data.[4]

Although the value of Δ_2 is less amenable to direct comparison with other results, some qualitative remarks can be made. First, the parameter Δ_2 is considerably larger than the splitting on the t_{2g} manifold by a spin-orbit interaction acting alone, which produces a separation of about $3\xi/2$.[6,11] It is therefore necessary to postulate the existence of other mechanisms which might contribute to the distortion. One possibility[12] is that a change in the π-character of the metal-carbon bonds from that normally present in the mononuclear carbonyls occurs in $V(CO)_6$. For example, in $Cr(CO)_6$ the metal atom has the configuration $(t_{2g})^6$ and the π-bonding which is thought to exist between the t_{2g} orbitals and the antibonding π-orbitals of the ligands would strengthen all M-C bonds equally. Thus the octahedral symmetry resulting from the d^2sp^3 hybridization of the σ-orbitals is preserved. In $V(CO)_6$ the $^2B_{2g}$ ground state has only one electron in the b_{2g} orbital. This orbital corresponds to the d_{xy} orbital for octahedral

symmetry. In this case there would be less "back donation" to the ligands in the x, y plane. This is equivalent to a stronger crystal field in the x, y plane for it would result in less charge compensation in this plane in agreement with the crystal field calculation. At the same time the CO bonds in the x, y plane would be strengthened because of the decreased "back donation" to the anti-bonding CO orbitals. Haas and Sheline[4] have observed, in the gas phase infrared spectrum, a broadening in the CO stretching region which could be ascribed to such an effect on the CO bonds. This explanation of our results, though probably over-simplified, supports the concept of "back-donation" in metal carbonyls. In our experiments, the existence of intermolecular effects cannot, of course, be entirely ruled out and further experiments to test these ideas are in progress.

No resolvable hyperfine structure was observed in any of the spectra recorded in these experiments. Since the nuclear spin of ^{51}V is 7/2, an upper limit for the isotropic coupling constant would be about one-seventh of the linewidth, or 30 G. or less for the widest lines observed. This is considerably smaller than normally observed for paramagnetic vanadium compounds and suggests the presence of an exchange interaction in our samples. Further evidence for exchange is provided by a closer inspection of the lineshapes.[6] The existence of such an interaction in the n-pentane glass samples could be the result of precipitation of $V(CO)_6$ which may occur during the freezing process; however, experiments with benzene as a solvent also yielded no hyperfine structure. The benzene spectra were asymmetric even at low power levels; the g-values measured from the benzene spectrum ($g_{||} = 2.023$ and $g_{\perp} = 2.126$) do not agree with those calculated

on the basis of either tetragonal or trigonal models. It is possible that this is due to the formation of an associated $V(CO)_6$-benzene species.

The presence of rather strong exchange forces can, in some cases, produce unusual variations in ESR lineshapes when the spectrum is power saturated. For example, Goldsborough, et al.[13] have observed that in pure crystalline free radical systems such as DPPH, a pronounced narrowing of the resonance line occurs when it is power saturated. In such systems, spin-lattice relaxation occurs via an exchange reservoir and the narrowing occurs when the exchange "temperature" exceeds the lattice temperature. It is possible that such a mechanism accounts for some, if not all, of the observed variations in the shape of the $V(CO)_6$ spectra.

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Table I.

$V(CO)_6$ observed g-Values at 1.3°K

Sample	Isotropic g-Value	Power Level
Pure $V(CO)_6$	2.063 ± 0.002[a]	-20 DB
$V(CO)_6$/n-pentane	2.079 ± 0.002[a]	-30 DB
$V(CO)_6$/n-pentane	2.061 ± 0.001[a]	-16 DB
$V(CO)_6$/n-pentane	2.062 ± 0.001[b]	- 6 DB

[a] Center field determined by the point at which the signal crossed the baseline.

[b] Calculated from the values $g_{\perp} = 2.103$ and $g_{||} = 1.981$.

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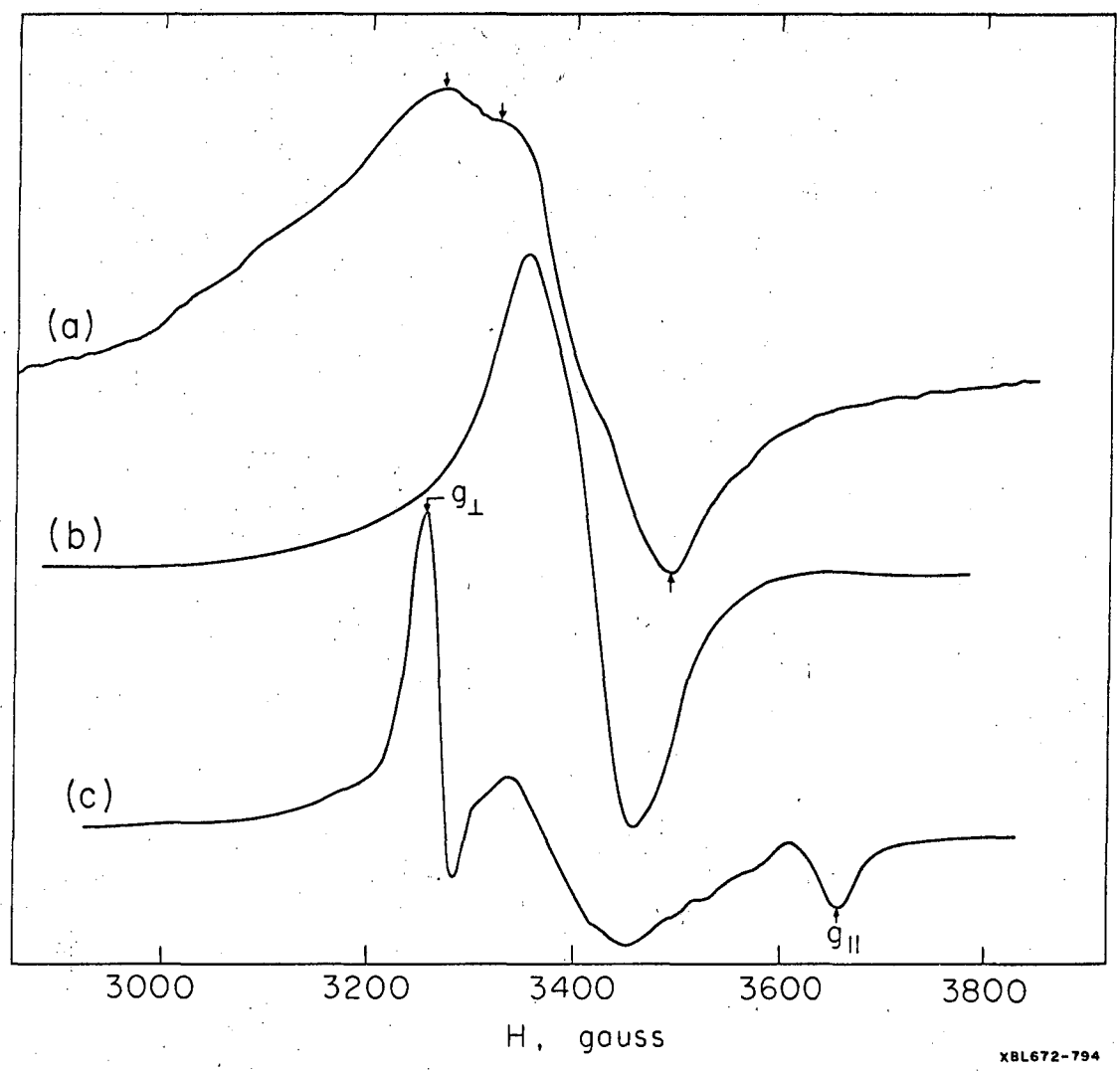

Figure 1. ESR spectra of $V(CO)_6$ in n-pentane at 1.3°K.; (a) -30 DB, (b) -16 DB, (c) -6 DB.

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