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PIC simulation of electronegative ccrf discharges

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Abstract. Capacitively coupled discharges with a radio-frequency modulated voltage (ccrf) are important for plasma assisted material processing [1]. Experiments with electronegative oxygen ccrf discharges show a high-energy peak in the energy distribution of negative ions arriving at the anode, depending on the cathode material used. One possible explanation is ionization at or close to the surface of the cathode for the production of negative ions [2][3]. By introducing an additional surface ionization model into a Particle-In-Cell (PIC) simulation with Monte Carlo Collisions (MCC) [4] the experimental result is reproduced qualitatively. Comparison of one dimensional and two dimensional simulation results allows an improved understanding of the microscopic processes determining the dynamics of negative ions.

PACS. 52.40.Hf Plasma-material interaction, boundary layer effects – 52.40.Kh Plasma sheaths – 52.30.-q Plasma dynamics – 82.33.Xj Plasma reactions – 52.65.-y Plasma simulation

Motivation

In industrial applications plasma is used for plasma etching, thin-film deposition [5] and sputter techniques [1]. Especially reactive electronegative plasmas increase sputter and deposition rates and are widely used in technology. For the treatment of surfaces it is important to know the detailed energy distribution functions (EDF) of the impinging ions, and in case of electronegative plasmas the EDF of negative ions as well. Experiments show high energy peaks in the EDF for negative ions arriving at the anode in an asymmetric ccrf discharge with oxygen as the process gas, depending on the cathode material used. Therefore, surface effects may be important for the EDF of the negative ions. Investigating surface effects and their impact on the plasma is the aim of this work.

Surface effects and secondary ion emission

In addition to secondary electron emission [6] there also exists **s**econdary **i**on **e**mission (SIE). Theoretical studies of surface ionization are mostly devoted to the production of positive ions from incident atoms of thermal energy [3]. The degree of ionization can be derived by applying thermodynamics.

The ionization coefficient $\alpha^+(M^+)$ is given by

$$\alpha^+(X^+) = \frac{n^+}{n} = \frac{1-r^+}{1-r} \cdot \frac{w^+}{w} \exp\left(\frac{\bar{\Phi}^+ + e\sqrt{eF} - I(X)}{k_B T}\right), \quad (1)$$

where n^+ and n are the numbers of positive ions X^+ and neutrals X coming from a unit surface area per unit time, w^+/w is the statistical weight ratio of X^+ to X, r^+ and r are the internal reflection coefficients at the potential barrier on the emitter surface, $\bar{\Phi}^+$ is the average work function, T is the absolute temperature at the surface, F is the externally applied field and $I(X)$ is the initial energy of the impinging atoms.

Equation (1) can also be used for a surface which emits negative ions. A negatively biased surface like the cathode in an asymmetric ccrf discharge is assumed with an equilibrium condition

$$X + e^- \text{ (in the substrate metal)} \leftrightharpoons X^- \quad (2)$$

at the surface. The equation for the negative ionization coefficient is derived in analogy to equation (1)

$$\alpha^-(X^-) = \frac{n^-}{n} = \frac{1-r^-}{1-r} \cdot \frac{w^-}{w} \exp\left(\frac{-\bar{\Phi}^- + e\sqrt{eF} + A(X)}{k_B T}\right), \quad (3)$$

where $A(X)$ is the electron affinity of atom X, $\bar{\Phi}^-$ is the average effective work function for producing the negative ion X^- on the metal surface and the other parameters are in analogy to the case of positive ion emission. No detailed theoretical and experimental studies of reflection coefficients exist r for negative ions. Therefore, no cross-section data for such processes are available. For the simulations in this work an empirical production efficiency $\eta = n_-/n_+$ is introduced for positive ions hitting a surface. n_+ is the number of incoming positive ions and n_- the number of emitted negative ions.

To get a microscopic understanding of the underlying physics a ccrf oxygen discharge is simulated kinetically with PIC-MCC [4]. This is necessary, because mean free paths are of the same magnitude as the electrode gap and relaxation of the distribution functions to Maxwell distributions due to collisions does not occur. This means that fluid models are incomplete and kinetic models have to be applied.

PIC-MCC method

The discharge of the experiment is operated in cylindrical geometry. For the region close to the center of the discharge a one-dimensional approach is usually used neglecting transport processes in radial direction. This can be further improved using a two-dimensional simulation in radial and axial direction. Particle-in-Cell (PIC) with Monte-Carlo-Collisions (MCC) methods simulate the motion of pseudo-particles, representing a large number of real particles, in continuous phase space while macro quantities like density or potentials are computed on stationary mesh points [7]. The method follows the trajectories of charged particles in self-consistent electromagnetic (in this case electrostatic) fields computed on a fixed mesh. The macro-force is then calculated from the field equations. Macro forces are used to avoid the computer time consuming particle-particle interactions which scale quadratic with the particle number N^2. In contrast to this, the particle-mesh method just scales with $N \log N$ and is hence much faster [4]. For the system studied here, neutrals are considered as a constant background due to their much higher density compared with the charged species and the rather low ionization degree in such discharges. The neutrals act as a kind of reservoir. Therefore, the collision dynamics is only resolved for the charged species. different scales in density in respect to the charged species.

Simulation of ccrf oxygen discharges

As standard parameters a pressure of 10 Pa and a peak-to-peak voltage of 800 V are chosen. Pressure is reduced down to 2 Pa. The radio-frequency is set to 13.56 MHz as in experiment. Reference parameters are an electron density of $n_e = 5 \cdot 10^9\ /\mathrm{cm}^{-3}$ and an electron temperature of $T_e = 4\,\mathrm{eV}$. This results in a Debye-length of the system of $\lambda_{Db} \approx 0.021\,\mathrm{cm}$ and an electron plasma frequency of $\omega_{pe} \approx 3.99 \cdot 10^9\,\mathrm{s}^{-1}$. The electrode gap of the experiment is 5 cm.

Discharges with secondary ion emission

Including the SIE injection model of oxygen anions at the cathode, one can see in figure (1) that the number density of the anions is slightly shifted towards the cathode compared with the other electrode where no SIE model is applied. A typical injection coefficient of $\eta = 0.03$ was used [6].

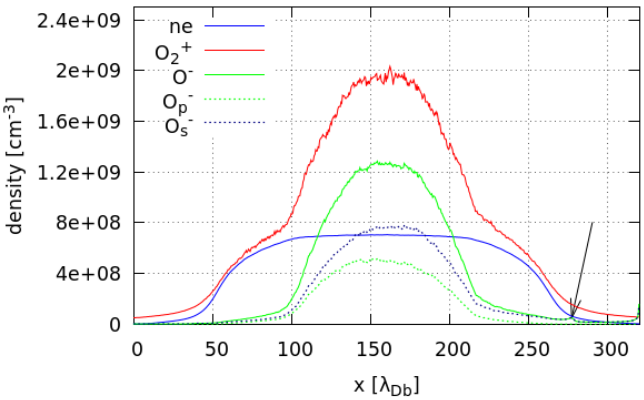

Fig. 1: Densities of e^-, O_2^+ and O^- with secondary ion emission at the cathode ($\eta = 0.03$). The pressure was 5 Pa and the rf power was set to $U_{rf} = 800\,\mathrm{V_{pp}}$. The arrow marks the small density peak of O_s^- at the cathode sheath edge.

The anions were separated into the ones produced by volume processes in the plasma O_p^- and the ones produced at the surface O_s^-.

A small density peak of O_s^- at the sheath edge in front of the cathode is noticeable. It forms due to elastic collisions of the anions O_s^- in the sheath.
The O_s^- get accelerated in the sheath, cross the bulk and then get reflected in the anode sheath similar to the movement of the electrons, but on a larger time scale.
In the energy distributions of O_s^- an additional high-energy peak builds up. It decays with the time of flight (distance to the cathode) due to charge-exchange and elastic collisions with neutral molecules O_2 which results in an energy loss for the anions. Also, a part of the anions get detached by neutrals or recombine with positive ions. In

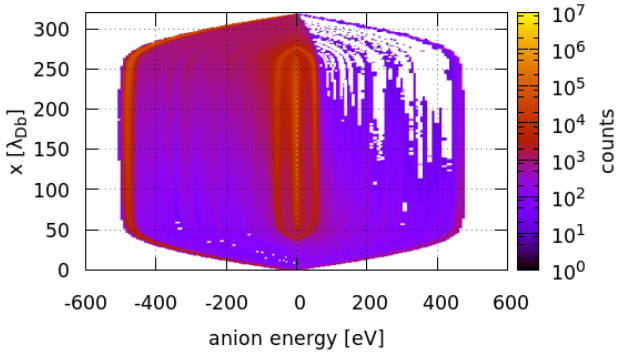

Fig. 2: Energy distribution function of O_s at 5 Pa and a driver voltage of 800 V_{pp}. The cathode with additional SIE is located at $x = 320\lambda_{Db}$.

existing publications it is assumed that if an anion collides with a neutral it almost gets detached every time [8].

In figure (3) the difference between the numbers of elastic collisions for a normal discharge and a discharge with additional SIE are shown. It is obvious that the anions undergo elastic collisions which leads to an energy loss and a continuous plateau in the energy distribution. Most elastic collisions occur in the bulk while the sheaths

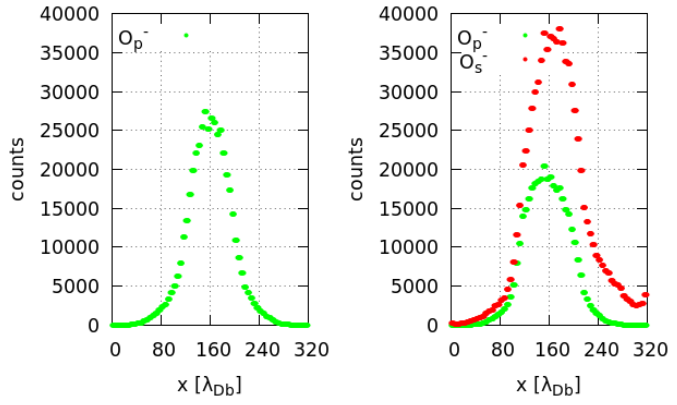

Fig. 3: Number of elastic collisions of negative ions O^- with neutral molecules O_2 per 10^5 steps without SIE (left) and with SIE ($\eta = 0.03$) (right) where the two O^- species are separated.

are mostly collisionless. But for the surface ions O_s^- one can see that the collisions in the cathode sheath cannot be neglected. They lead to an energy loss for the anions which influence their energy distribution.

In figure (2) a structure in the lower energy region in the bulk can be seen. The elastic collisions produce a peak structure in the ion energy distribution. To study the sheath dynamics during a rf period the phase resolved energy distribution function for O_s^- is shown in figure (4).

The density peak at the sheath edge (as seen earlier in

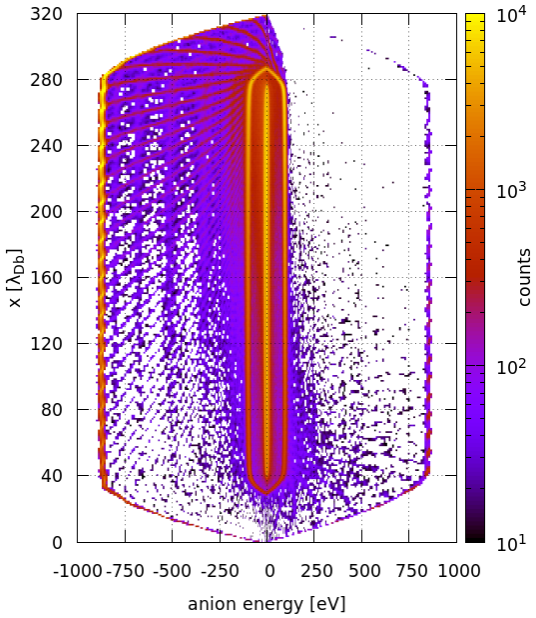

Fig. 4: Same energy distribution as in figure (2) at t=0 of the rf cycle, which is equal to a voltage of $U(t) = 0$ at the cathode.

figure (1)) originates from the low-energy peak in the energy distribution. With the approximate transit time of an anion τ_{ion} and the rf-cycle time τ_{rf} one can calculate the transit time τ_{ion}. Assuming an average ion energy of $40 - 50\,\mathrm{eV}$ and a traveled distance of $\approx 1\,\mathrm{cm}$ it follows the ratio $\frac{\tau_{ion}}{\tau_{rf}} \approx 4.5$. This is the number of rf-cycles an anion stays in the sheath. Hence the number of peaks in the ion energy distribution must be similar. At the sheath edge these energy density cycles overlay. Hence, the energy plateau of the anions is mainly influenced by elastic collisions. This explains the density peak at the sheath edge.

In the experiment the cathode potential is shifted by the self-bias voltage due to the asymmetry of the electrodes resulting in an asymmetric potential. As a consequence of this asymmetry the anions can get enough energy to get to the anode while in the 1d3v simulation they get reflected by the sheath potential due to its intrinsic symmetry. Figure (5) confirms that negative ions produced at the surface may lead to the measured high-energy peak. But the energy distribution function of the simulation has additional low energy peaks (at $< 100\,\mathrm{eV}$), too. They are probably created due to the intrinsic symmetry in the 1d3v simulation. In the experiment all high-

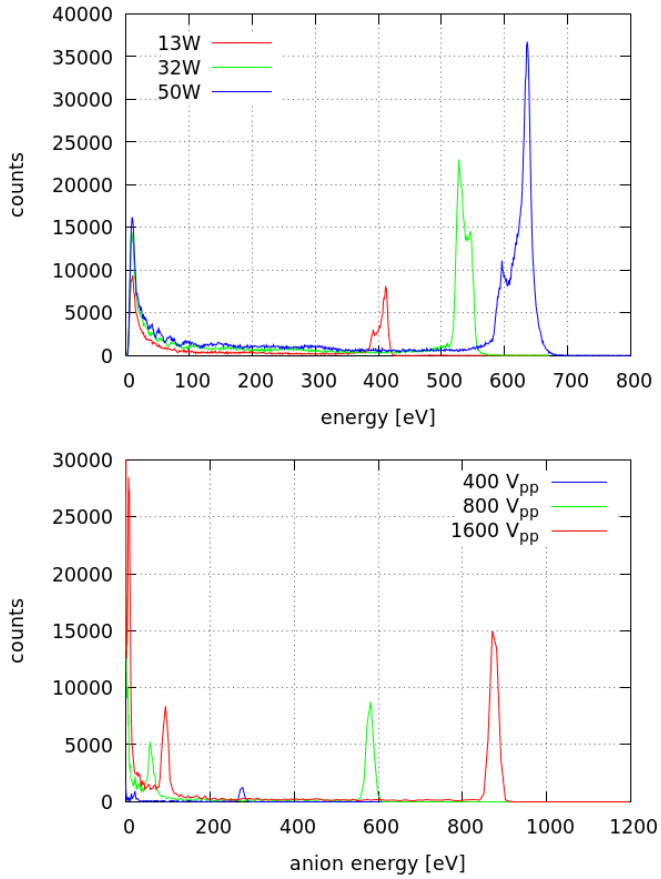

Fig. 5: Energy distribution of negative ions O^-. Top: Experimental results for MgO measured at the anode for different rf powers. Bottom: Simulation result with 1d3v PIC simulation with additional SIE taken at the anode sheath edge at different rf powers at 5 Pa and $\eta = 0.01$.

energy anions are detected and thereby removed from the discharge.

Additional studies have been done varying pressure, voltage and injection coefficient. Their results support the hypothesis that the high energy peaks are created by secondary ion emission.

Two-Dimensional PIC simulationss

To be able to study also the effect of self-bias a two-dimensional r-z PIC code is used to simulate a capacitively coupled rf discharge.

To realize an asymmetric discharge the size of the cathode is set smaller than the size of the anode. In an asymmetric discharge the high mobility of the electrons charges the cathode, which then gets a negative self-bias voltage. The self-bias voltage is implemented using experimental values as an dc-offset of the rf-voltage at the cathode.

To realize the parameters of the experiment, which uses electrode radii of a few centimeters. A cathode with a radius of 1.5 cm and an anode with a radius of 4.5 cm is used in the model and a grounded box is put around it. The electrode gap is about 2.5 cm. Due to the asymmetric distributions of the total currents to the walls and electrodes a negative self-bias voltage at the cathode according to the experimental values is added.

In figure (6) the negative ion number density is shown for pressures of 10 Pa and 6 Pa with an applied voltage of 400 V. One can see that the bulk region is deformed at the cathode side due to the self-bias voltage of 200 V leading to a reduced electron flux towards the cathode.

There is a higher flux of ions towards the cathode than to the anode due to the self-bias voltage. In a one-dimensional simulation the total ion flux towards the cathode and the cathode sheath width are underestimated, because no self-bias can exist. Still, the form of the number density distributions is nearly the same, which shows that a one-dimensional simulation is a good approximation near the center.

A special interest exists to study the energy distributions, especially of the negative ions, while applying the former model of SIE. Following the argumentation of the one-dimensional model the injected anions should not be able to stay in the discharge, due to the additional energy from the self-bias voltage.

The secondary negative ions, which do not collide or get

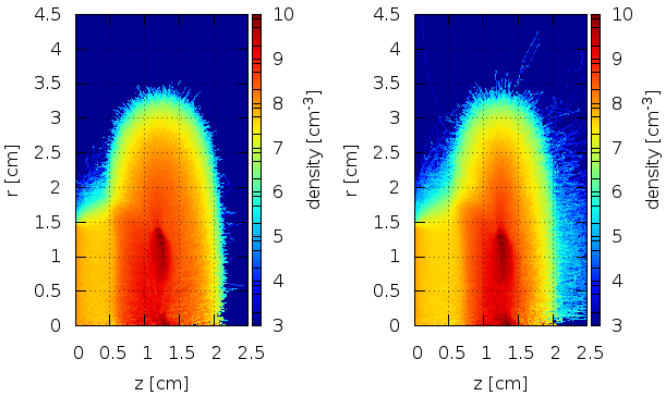

Fig. 6: Negative ion density distribution at 10 Pa (left) and 6 Pa (right).

detached in the bulk, obtain enough energy from the self-bias voltage to cross the anode sheath and impinge on the anode. This explains the discrepancy why the one-dimensional model, which is lacking this physics, is not able to explain the experiment.

Calculating the negative ion EDF at the grounded anode, one can compare the results with the experiment. In figure (7) the same high energetic peak shows up as in the experiment. This supports the idea that the observed high energetic peaks in the EDF of the negative ions at the anode are produced by surface effects at the powered cathode.

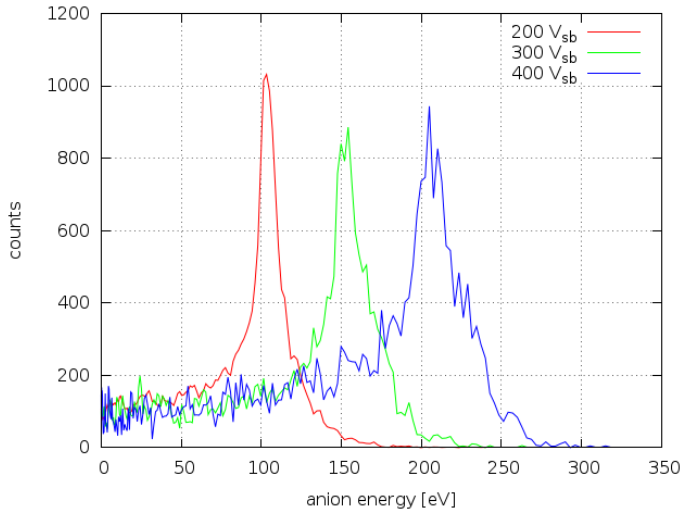

Fig. 7: Negative ion velocity distribution at the anode at 4 Pa and 800 V_{pp} with different self-bias voltages.

Summary

In this work 1D and 2D PIC-MCC models were used to simulate electronegative ccrf discharges with oxygen as process gas. The 1D simulations demonstrate the importance of elastic collisions for surface anions which leads to an energy loss and a continuous plateau in the energy distribution function. However, the 1D model lacks the possibility to study the influence of self-bias. Therefore, 2D simulations were done including the experimental self-bias and geometrical asymmetries. The results support the hypothesis that the high energy peak in the measured energy distribution function of negative ions at the grounded anode originates from secondary negative ions created at the surface.

In the future the 2D PIC simulation can be used to study further aspects of asymmetric electronegative discharges, e.g. introducing complex sputter models. This will also allow to apply it to industrial applications like etching for a more detailed microscopic description.

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