

Direct Catalytic Reduction of SO₂ by CH₄ over Fe-Mn Catalysts Prepared by Granulation of Ferromanganese Nodules

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Abstract

The chemical, textural, structural and strength properties of ferromanganese nodules and granulated Fe-Mn catalysts containing such nodules were studied. It was found that the granulated catalysts have a developed pore structure, which is close to that of the starting material, and surpass the starting material in strength parameters. The catalysts were tested in desulfurization by methane at a stoichiometric ratio SO₂/CH₄ = 2. The testing showed that Fe-Mn catalysts with the oxide or sulfide form of active components are active in desulfurization by methane and can selectively reduce SO₂ with a conversion above 80%.

1. Introduction

Sulfur dioxide, which is emitted to the atmosphere mostly as a component of flue gases from steam power plants, is a hazardous atmospheric pollutant producing a strong detrimental effect on the environment and human health [1-3]. Due to environmental problems and the necessity of balancing supply and demand in the power industry, great research efforts have been made worldwide to develop clean and efficient power-generating technologies.

The main ways of reducing SO₂ emission to the atmosphere are sorption methods [4-9], catalytic oxidation to sulfur trioxide leading to sulfuric acid [10-13], and selective catalytic reduction to elementary sulfur [13-15]. Each of desulfurization methods has its technological niche. The choice of a particular method is determined by various criteria, first of all by the efficiency of cleaning as well as technical and economic indices of the process (capital and current costs) affecting the prime cost of the end product (for steam power plants, the cost of generated thermal and electrical energy).

Most promising are the methods of catalytic reduction of sulfur dioxide to elementary sulfur with the use of various reductants (CO, H₂, CH₄, synthesis gas) because they enable the single-step conversion of sulfur dioxide to elementary sulfur. Desulfurization by methane or natural gas is the most appropri-

ate process for cleaning of highly concentrated gas mixtures since natural gas is a readily available and inexpensive reductant.

The main reaction of SO₂ reduction by methane can be presented as



where [S] denotes different states of sulfur (S₁, S₂, ... S₈) in the gas phase. According to thermodynamic calculations, most probable is the existence of sulfur as diatomic molecule at a temperature above 600 °C [16].

Selective catalytic reduction of SO₂ by methane is performed on different type catalysts: aluminum oxide [17], sulfides of Mo and transition metals [18, 19], modified cerium oxide [13, 20, 21].

This work aims to estimate the possibility of using inexpensive and non-hazardous natural materials containing oxide or hydroxide compounds of transition metals as the catalysts for selective catalytic reduction of SO₂ by methane. In this connection, of great interest are the shelf ferromanganese nodules (FMNs), whose rich deposits have been found in the water areas of Russian seas. 50% of the ore component of such nodules is constituted by complex composites of Mn and Fe hydroxides and oxides [22]. However, the application of natural materials for cleaning of flue gases on industrial scale depends on the strength of such catalysts.

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Our work is devoted to the development of granulated catalysts containing ferromanganese nodules and investigation of their physicochemical properties and activity in selective catalytic reduction of SO₂ by methane.

2. Experimental

2.1. Materials

SO₂ sorbents were prepared using the granulated and powdered material "Ore of ferromanganese nodules from the Gulf of Finland", Specs 0731-001-50855050-2005.

2.2. Catalyst preparation

The catalysts were prepared as cylinders by extrusion of a plastic pulp consisting of FMN powder with a binder. The starting components were mixed in a Z-shaped mixer and then formed using a pneumatic instrument through a spinneret 4 mm in diameter. Wet extrudates were cut to fragments, air-dried for a day, and calcined at 500 °C for 4 h. Two types of the catalysts containing 80 wt.% of FMNs and 20 wt.% of a binder were prepared. In the case of Fe-Mn(Al) catalyst, aluminum hydroxide sol served as a binder, while for Fe-Mn(Ca-M) catalyst a wet Ca-montmorillonite paste was used. For preparation of the catalysts starting components were mixed subject to their moisture content: 17 wt.% in FMNs, 70 wt.% in aluminum hydroxide sol, 60 wt.% in Ca-M. The following geometry was employed: a diameter of 3.5 mm and a length of 5-10 mm. A photo of the catalysts is displayed in Fig. 1.



Fig. 1. A photo of the granulated samples of the catalyst containing FMNs: Fe-Mn(Al) on the left and Fe-Mn(Ca-M) on the right.

3. Methods

3.1. Investigation of the chemical composition

Elemental composition of the samples was found by X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy on a VRA-30

analyzer with the Cr anode of X-ray tube. Measurements were made with granules of the test sample supplemented with boric acid or cellulose. The arithmetic mean of two parallel measurements with the admissible divergence less than 2% was taken as the result of analysis.

3.2. Investigation of the phase composition

Phase composition of the samples was revealed by the analysis of diffraction patterns obtained on an HZG-4 diffractometer with monochromatic Cu K_α source. The detected phases were identified using the JCPDS radiographic database.

3.3. Specific surface area and pore volume measurements

Pore structure of the samples was examined by the low-temperature nitrogen adsorption using an ASAP-2400 (Micromeritics, USA) instrument at the liquid nitrogen temperature, 77 K, after pretreatment of the samples at 150 °C and a residual pressure below 0.001 mm Hg. A standard pretreatment by the BET and Barrett-Joyner-Halenda (BJH) methods was carried out.

3.4. Bulk density measurements

To estimate bulk density, a dried sample was placed in a 100 cm³ measuring vessel and consolidated by shaking down. After that, weight of the sample in this volume was estimated. Bulk density (ρ), expressed in g/cm³, was calculated by the formula: $\rho = m/V$, where m is the sample weight, g; and V is the sample volume, cm³.

3.5. Mechanical strength measurements

Mechanical strength was measured using an MP-9C instrument under static conditions. The method is based on measuring the breaking force applied to the generatrix of each granule of the catalyst sample between two parallel planes. At least 30 granules of the sample were selected for testing.

3.6. Moisture capacity measurements

To measure moisture capacity with respect to water, a sample of mass m_0 was placed in a capped glass weighing bottle and poured with distilled water so that the water level was 1 cm above the granules. In 30 min, water was decanted from the granules. The granules were placed on a plastic sieve and blasted with compressed air to remove excess moisture. The sample impregnated with water (m_1) was weighed

and moisture capacity was calculated by the formula

$$V_{\Sigma}(\text{water}) = (m_1 - m_0)/m_0$$

3.7. Estimation of total moisture content

Total moisture content was found by calcination of the starting sample with a mass m_0 at 800 °C. After calcination, the calcined sample (m_1) was weighed and total moisture content was calculated by the formula $\sum_{\text{moist}} = (m_0 - m_1)/m_0$

3.8. Estimation of activity in SO₂ reduction by methane

The experiments were carried out with the catalysts of size 0.5-1.0 mm. A 1 cm³ catalyst sample was mounted in a reactor. The reaction mixture containing SO₂ and CH₄ was fed to the reactor inlet. The required initial concentrations of reactants, flow rate and SO₂/CH₄ ratio were specified at room temperature of the reactor. According to the reaction equation (1), a stoichiometric ratio SO₂/CH₄ = 2/1 was chosen for the experiments.

Experiments for estimating the catalytic activity in SO₂ reduction by methane were performed under the following conditions: volume of the loaded catalyst sample – 1 cm³, weight hourly space velocity – 1200 h⁻¹, initial concentration of SO₂ – 67 vol.%, SO₂/CH₄ = 2/1, temperature range – 600-900 °C.

The concentrations of SO₂ and CH₄ were controlled by measuring the concentrations of substances by a gas chromatograph.

After establishing the required initial concentrations of reactants and flow rate, temperature of the reactor was raised to 600 °C and composition of the gas mixture at the reactor outlet was analyzed until stationary concentrations of the reaction products were obtained. After that, the reactor temperature was increased to 900 °C at a 50 °C step. Composition of the reaction products was analyzed at each temperature of the reactor until stationary concentrations were reached.

The concentrations of reactants and reaction products obtained in the experiments were used to calculate the SO₂ and CH₄ conversions, selectivity for the formation of elementary sulfur, hydrogen sulfide and COS as well as the yields of elementary sulfur, hydrogen sulfide and COS. The formation of CS₂ as the reaction product was not observed in the experiments; so, selectivity for elementary sulfur was calculated only from the concentrations of SO₂, H₂S and COS.

The balance on carbon was taken into account to find the value of coefficient k , which reflects changes in the gas mixture volume during the reaction:

$$k = \frac{C_{CH_4}^o}{C_{CH_4} + C_{CO_2} + C_{COS}}$$

The coefficient k and concentrations of reaction products were used to obtain the volumetric velocities of reaction products at the reactor outlet:

$$V = \frac{k \cdot V_o \cdot C}{100}$$

The outlet velocities of S₂ and H₂O were calculated from material balance of the system on sulfur:

$$V_{SO_2}^o = V_{SO_2} + V_{H_2S} + V_{COS} + 2V_{S_2}$$

and on oxygen:

$$2V_{SO_2}^o = 2V_{SO_2} + 2V_{CO_2} + V_{COS} + V_{H_2O}$$

Flow rates of individual components and the total flow rate were employed to estimate the concentrations of reaction products in the gas mixture at the reactor outlet.

The following expressions were used to calculate main parameters of the catalytic process:

a) conversion of SO₂

$$X_{SO_2} = \frac{V_{SO_2}^o - V_{SO_2}}{V_{SO_2}^o} \cdot 100\% \quad \text{where}$$

$V_{SO_2}^o$ – volumetric velocity of SO₂ at the reactor inlet, cm³/min

V_{SO_2} – volumetric velocity of SO₂ at the reactor outlet, cm³/min

b) conversion of CH₄

$$X_{CH_4} = \frac{V_{CH_4}^o - V_{CH_4}}{V_{CH_4}^o} \cdot 100\% \quad \text{where}$$

$V_{CH_4}^o$ – volumetric velocity of CH₄ at the reactor inlet, cm³/min

V_{CH_4} – volumetric velocity of CH₄ at the reactor outlet, cm³/min

c) selectivity for the formation of H₂S, %

$$S_{H_2S} = \frac{V_{H_2S}}{V_{SO_2}^o - V_{SO_2}} \cdot 100\% \quad \text{where}$$

V_{H_2S} – volumetric velocity of H₂S at the reactor outlet, cm³/min

$V_{SO_2}^o$ – volumetric velocity of SO₂ at the reactor inlet, cm³/min

V_{SO_2} – volumetric velocity of SO₂ at the reactor outlet, cm³/min

d) selectivity for the formation of COS

$$S_{COS} = \frac{V_{COS}}{V_{SO_2}^o - V_{SO_2}} \cdot 100\% \quad \text{where}$$

V_{COS} – volumetric velocity of COS at the reactor outlet, cm³/min

$V_{SO_2}^o$ – volumetric velocity of SO₂ at the reactor inlet, cm³/min

V_{SO_2} – volumetric velocity of SO₂ at the reactor outlet, cm³/min

e) selectivity for the formation of elementary sulfur

$$S_{S_2} = \frac{V_{SO_2}^o - V_{SO_2} - V_{H_2S} - V_{COS}}{V_{SO_2}^o - V_{SO_2}} \cdot 100\% \quad \text{where}$$

$V_{SO_2}^o$ – volumetric velocity of SO₂ at the reactor inlet, cm³/min

V_{SO_2} – volumetric velocity of SO₂ at the reactor outlet, cm³/min

V_{H_2S} – volumetric velocity of H₂S at the reactor outlet, cm³/min

V_{COS} – volumetric velocity of COS at the reactor outlet, cm³/min

f) the yield of elementary sulfur

$$Y_{S_2} = \frac{X_{SO_2} \cdot S_{S_2}}{100} \quad \text{where}$$

X_{SO_2} – conversion of SO₂, %

S_{S_2} – selectivity for the formation of elementary sulfur, %

g) the yield of hydrogen sulfide

$$Y_{H_2S} = \frac{X_{SO_2} \cdot S_{H_2S}}{100}$$

X_{SO_2} – conversion of SO₂, %

S_{H_2S} – selectivity for the formation of hydrogen sulfide, %

h) the yield of COS

$$Y_{COS} = \frac{X_{SO_2} \cdot S_{COS}}{100}$$

V_{SO_2} – conversion of SO₂, %

S_{COS} – selectivity for the formation of COS, %

The experimental data obtained were presented as the conversions of SO₂ and CH₄ and the yields of elementary sulfur, H₂S and COS versus temperature.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Properties of the catalysts

Table 1 shows the main physicochemical characteristics of a dry FMN powder: chemical, phase and fractional composition, specific surface area (S_{BET}), and total moisture content (Σ_{moist}); physicochemical properties of the catalysts: bulk density (ρ_{bulk}), specific surface area (S_{BET}), pore volume (V_{pore}), moisture capacity (V_{Σ}), pore diameter (D), mechanical strength (P), and phase composition are indicated in Table 2.

The pore structure parameters of the catalysts are most important for the process efficiency because they determine the dispersion of active components on the surface and allow access of reactants to the active sites. The use of aluminum hydroxide as a binder in the catalyst synthesis makes it possible to obtain the Fe-Mn(Al) sample that has a high specific surface area and a developed pore structure. Therewith, specific surface area and moisture capacity of the Fe-Mn(Al) sample are close to the values characterizing the starting FMN powder that was calcined at 500 °C [23]; pore volume of this sample even surpasses the starting material (Figs. 2 and 3) due to the high developed pore structure of Al₂O₃ used as the binder of the catalyst. The Fe-Mn(Ca-M) catalyst, prepared with Ca-montmorillonite as a binder, has worse textural parameters than Fe-Mn(Al) but a higher mechanical strength.

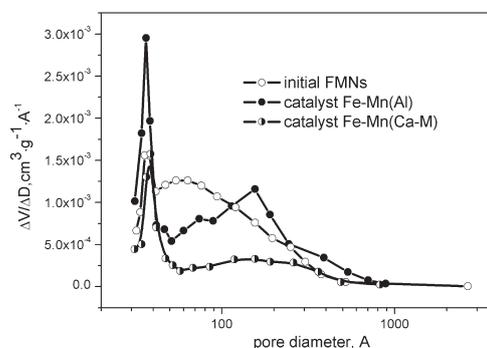


Fig. 2. The differential pore size distribution in the starting FMN powder and FMN catalysts.

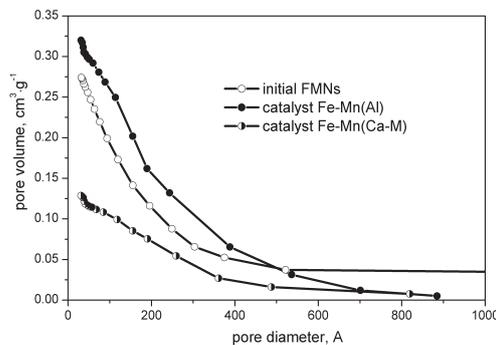


Fig. 3. The cumulative pore size distribution in the starting FMN powder and FMN catalysts.

Phase composition of the prepared catalysts is determined by chemical composition of the samples and calcination temperature. The both catalysts contain α -SiO₂, hematite and some unidentified crystalline phases, most likely oxides with a complex structure. Diffraction patterns of the samples differ due to the presence of different binders (Fig. 4). The Fe-Mn(Ca-M) sample contains the Ca-montmorillonite phase. Oxide compounds of aluminum were not found in the diffraction pattern of the Fe-Mn(Al) catalyst, which was prepared with aluminum hydroxide as a binder, due to superposition with the lines of other phases.

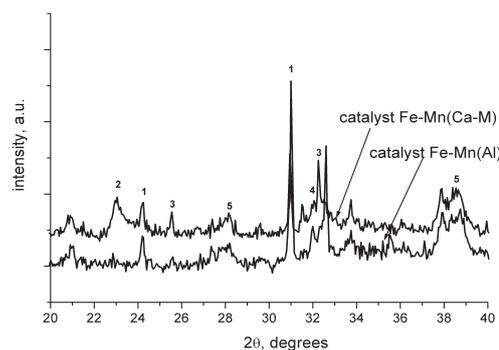


Fig. 4. The diffraction pattern of the catalysts containing FMNs. Phases: 1 – α -SiO₂; 2 – montmorillonite; 3 – F1; 4 – F2; 5 – Fe₂O₃.

Table 1

Characteristics of powdered ferromanganese nodules

Chemical composition, wt.%	Phase composition	Fractional composition	S _{BET} , m ² /g	P, kg/cm ²	Σ _{moist} 800 °C, %
MnO – 24.19	X-ray amorphous phase	100 - 200 μm	162	6	17
Fe ₂ O ₃ – 25.39		– 25 wt.%			
P ₂ O ₅ – 3.22		< 100 μm			
Na ₂ O – 2.14		– 75 wt.%			
MgO – 1.79					
Al ₂ O ₃ – 4.68					
SiO ₂ – 16.72					
K ₂ O – 1.40					
CaO – 2.10					
TiO ₂ – 0.07					

Table 2

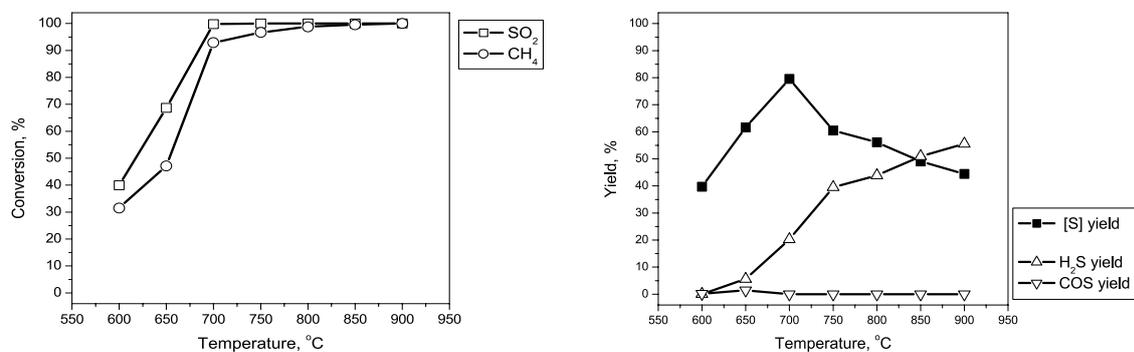
Physicochemical properties of the FMNs and catalysts containing FMNs

Sample	ρ _{bulk} , g/cm ³	S _{BET} , m ² /g	V _{pore} , cm ³ /g	V _Σ (water), cm ³ /g	D, Å	P, kg/cm ²	Phase composition
FMNs/500 °C	0.5	78	0.27	0.66	140	55	α -SiO ₂ ; highly dispersed hematite Fe ₂ O ₃ ; unidentified phases
Fe-Mn(Al)/500 °C	0.63	87	0.32	0.53	157	9.0	α -SiO ₂ ; highly dispersed hematite Fe ₂ O ₃ ; unidentified phases F1 with the maxima at 25.5 and 32.45° and F2 with a maximum at 31.95°
Fe-Mn(Ca-M)/500 °C	0.77	37	0.13	0.23	132	30.0	α -SiO ₂ ; highly dispersed hematite Fe ₂ O ₃ ; Ca-montmorillonite; unidentified phases F1 with the maxima at 25.5 and 32.45° and F2 with a maximum at 31.95°

4.2. Reduction of SO₂ by methane

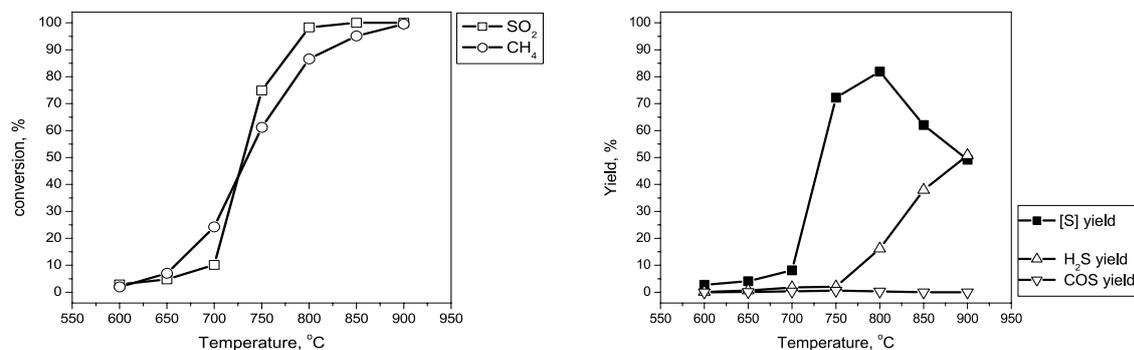
Testing was carried out with the catalysts calcined in air at 500 °C and then treated in H₂S at 400 °C for 2 h. To reveal the effect of preliminary sulfurization of the catalysts, the Fe-Mn(Al) sample was tested also in the oxide form.

The catalytic characteristics of Fe-Mn(Al) samples in the oxide and sulfide form (the conversion of SO₂ and CH₄, the yield of main products of the reaction) and composition of the starting and final reaction mixtures are shown in Figs. 5 and 6. The catalytic properties of the sulfide form of Fe-Mn(Ca-M) sample are illustrated in Fig. 7.



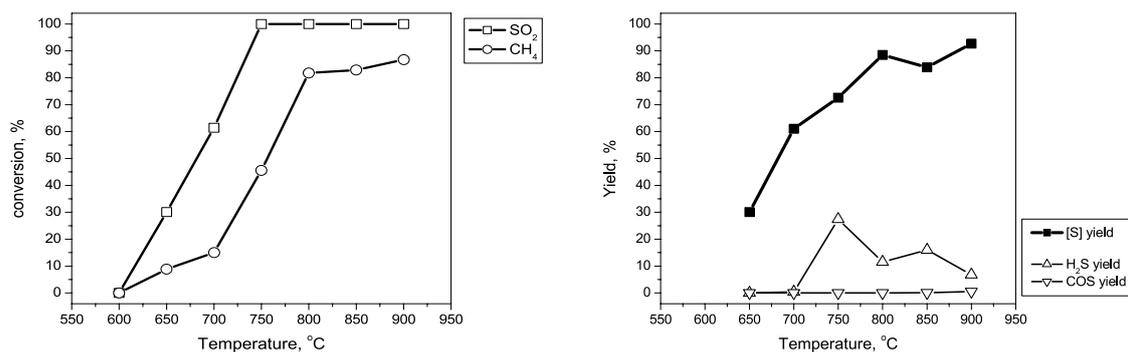
T, °C	Composition of the starting reaction mixture, vol.%		Composition of the mixture at the reactor outlet, vol.%						
	SO ₂	CH ₄	SO ₂	CH ₄	CO ₂	S ₂	H ₂ S	COS	H ₂ O
600	65.90	34.10	36.55	21.56	9.83	12.09	0.04	0.10	19.83
650	65.90	34.10	19.24	16.81	14.11	18.94	3.46	0.89	26.55
700	65.90	34.10	0.11	1.96	25.59	21.17	10.76	0	40.11
750	65.90	34.10	0	0.94	27.48	16.61	21.70	0	33.27
800	65.90	34.10	0	0.34	28.08	15.42	24.09	0	32.07
850	65.90	34.10	0	0.11	28.73	13.68	28.39	0	29.08
900	65.90	34.10	0	0	29.16	12.53	31.30	0	27.02

Fig. 5. Activity of the oxide form of Fe-Mn(Al) catalyst in SO₂ reduction by methane. GSHV – 1200 h⁻¹, SO₂/CH₄ = 2, volume of the sample – 1 cm³



T, °C	Composition of the starting reaction mixture, vol.%		Composition of the mixture at the reactor outlet, vol.%						
	SO ₂	CH ₄	SO ₂	CH ₄	CO ₂	S ₂	H ₂ S	COS	H ₂ O
600	68.47	31.53	66.37	30.86	0.61	0.95	0.06	0	1.16
650	68.47	31.53	63.50	28.61	2.07	1.36	0.39	0.07	3.89
700	68.47	31.53	55.37	21.50	6.70	2.51	1.06	0.18	12.69
750	66.92	33.08	14.69	11.20	17.33	21.09	1.21	0.34	34.14
800	66.92	33.08	0.96	3.72	23.94	23.04	9.07	0.16	39.12
850	66.92	33.08	0	1.39	26.94	17.79	21.74	0	32.14
900	66.92	33.08	0	0.15	28.53	14.26	29.49	0	27.57

Fig. 6. Catalytic properties of the sulfide form of Fe-Mn(Al) sample in SO₂ reduction by methane. GSHV – 1200 h⁻¹, SO₂/CH₄ = 2, volume of the sample – 1 cm³



T, °C	Composition of the starting reaction mixture, vol.%		Composition of the mixture at the reactor outlet, vol.%						
	SO ₂	CH ₄	SO ₂	CH ₄	CO ₂	S ₂	H ₂ S	COS	H ₂ O
600	66.90	33.10	66.97	33.03	0	0	0	0	0.
650	66.90	33.10	48.83	21.52	3.04	10.52	0	0	6.09
700	66.90	33.10	28.90	31.53	5.56	22.87	0.33	0	10.80
750	66.90	33.10	0	20.56	17.23	27.73	20.94	0	13.53
800	66.90	33.10	0	5.15	23.15	25.32	6.57	0.03	39.78
850	66.90	33.10	0	4.88	23.59	24.18	9.22	0.06	38.07
900	66.90	33.10	0	3.61	23.33	25.51	3.73	0.29	43.53

Fig. 7. Catalytic properties of the sulfide form of Fe-Mn(Ca-M) sample in the reduction of SO₂ by methane. GSHV – 1200 h⁻¹, SO₂/CH₄ = 2, volume of the sample – 1 cm³.

As seen from Figs. 5-6, sulfurization of the Fe-Mn(Al) catalyst shifted the conversion curves of SO₂ and CH₄ to the high-temperature region. Thus, a 100% conversion of SO₂ on the oxide sample was achieved at 700 °C, and only at 850 °C in the case of sulfurized sample. It should be noted that a substantial amount of H₂S in the reaction products was observed at high conversions on both the oxide and sulfurized Fe-Mn(Al) samples. The formation of H₂S occurs on the sulfurized sample at temperatures above 750 °C, while on the oxide sample – at above 650 °C, when SO₂ conversion exceeds 80%. As the reaction temperature increases, so does the yield of H₂S, which reaches 50% at 900 °C on both samples. A decrease in selectivity for sulfur with increasing the reaction temperature can be related to the surface sulfurization of γ -Al₂O₃, which is used as a binder upon granulation of FMNs, as a result of its interaction with sulfur dioxide [24] and partial deactivation of the catalyst with respect to the target reaction or due to the promoting role of γ -Al₂O₃ in the reverse Claus reaction. A narrow temperature region associated with the optimal catalytic characteristics – a high conversion of SO₂ (80-100%) with more than 80% recovery of sulfur and a low content of H₂S in the reaction products – can be revealed for the catalysts. For the oxide sample, the optimal temperature of the reaction is 650–700 °C, whereas for the sulfurized sample, 750–800 °C.

The sulfurized Fe-Mn(Ca-M) sample showed good performance in the reduction of SO₂ by methane. On this sample, a 100% conversion of SO₂ is reached at 750 °C. Therewith, the yield of the reaction by-product H₂S decreases with increasing the reaction temperature.

5. Conclusions

The granulated catalysts were synthesized using ferromanganese nodules with a high total content of Fe and Mn oxides. The catalysts have a developed pore structure and high mechanical strength.

The catalysts were tested and their performance in direct reduction of sulfur dioxide by methane was analyzed. It was found that selectivity of the catalysts for elementary sulfur depends on their chemical composition. A low selectivity of the alumina-containing Fe-Mn(Al) catalyst is related to sulfurization of its surface due to the interaction of alumina with sulfur dioxide. In addition, Al₂O₃ is highly active toward the reverse Claus reaction, thus decreasing the efficiency of the entire catalytic system. For this catalyst, a narrow temperature region can be specified where optimal catalytic characteristics are reached, in particular, a high conversion of SO₂ (80-100%) with more than 80% recovery of sulfur and a low content of H₂S in the reaction products. For the catalyst with the oxide form of active components, the

optimal reaction temperature is 650–700 °C, while for the sulfurized sample, 750–800 °C.

The Fe-Mn(Ca-M) catalyst containing Ca-montmorillonite is more selective than Fe-Mn(Al) and provides a 100% removal of SO₂ with the sulfur recovery not lower than 90%.

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