

Interactive comment on “Experimental determination of the temperature dependence of water activities for a selection of aqueous organic solutions” by G. Ganbavale et al.

G. Ganbavale et al.

gouri.ganbavale@env.ethz.ch

Received and published: 18 August 2014

The paper is novel in bringing together different methods for deriving temperature dependent water activities. Deriving the data is difficult clearly as multiple factors have to be taken into account (the potential for viscous solutions for example). The authors have clearly thought about detailed considerations on presentation of the results. The paper should certainly be published after some minor points are addressed.

We thank Referee 1 for the careful reading of the manuscript and the helpful suggestions and comments. Below are detailed answers to the reviewer comments with the

C6004

locations of the incorporated changes in the revised manuscript.

Specific Comments:

Page 12674, line 9 ‘does not depend on the specific nature of the solute’. This seems a little circular as this study shows the specific nature of the solute does influence the change in water activity and thus one needs to know the composition to predict this?

Koop et al. (2000) claimed that homogeneous ice nucleation in aqueous solutions does not depend on the specific nature of the solute but only on water activity. So far, no system was found that disproved this water activity criterion for homogeneous ice nucleation. On the other hand, water activity as a function of temperature depends on the specific nature of solute and is the scope of this paper. To validate the water activity criterion for homogeneous ice nucleation given by Koop et al., the relationship between solution composition and water activity has to be known. One objective of this study was to acquire additional data for such a validation.

Section 4.1 A potential problem which doesn’t seem to be considered is the loss of semi-volatile gases from the suspended particle techniques. I would presume that, whilst the drop to temperatures relevant for homogeneous freezing might decrease the volatility of the organics sufficiently enough, how do you cover a wide enough range of vapour pressures (or volatility) and ensure this does not pose a problem?

The applicability of single particle techniques for water activity measurements is indeed limited by the volatility of the substances under investigation. Vapor pressure of semivolatile substances strongly decreases with decreasing temperature, which enlarges the range of substances that can be investigated at low temperature. Since in our electrodynamic balance particles are injected under ambient conditions (room temperature and laboratory relative humidity) particles may totally evaporate before the (low) measurement temperature is reached. Modification of the setup for direct injection at low temperature would extend the range of substances that can be investigated. We added the following sentence to the manuscript (page 12690, line 21): “The appli-

C6005

cability of single particle techniques for water activity measurements is limited by the volatility of the substances under investigation. The range of substances that may be investigated is enlarged at low temperature since vapor pressure strongly decreases with decreasing temperature. To take full advantage of this, injection of particles should occur at the measurement temperature to avoid complete evaporation before the measurement temperature is reached.”

Section 4.2 The discussion of hydrogen bonding is very interesting, but it would benefit from a rationale right at the start rather than the end. Line 1 page 12693 the authors mention a ‘close loop miscibility gap’. It would be very helpful to expand this slightly as it is not 100% clear, nor are the ‘elevated temperatures’ discussed.

We modified the manuscript according to the referee’s suggestions: We added the following statement to the beginning of section 4.2 (page 12691, line 22): “This section is intended to interpret the strong change of water activity with decreasing temperature observed for some investigated substances. In this context we discuss changes in hydrogen bonding, which play an important role. Hydrogen bonding increases with decreasing temperature and might become more influential at low temperature”.

We changed the sentence on pages 12692-12693: “This interplay of entropic and enthalpy contributions to the Gibbs energy leads to a closed loop miscibility gap at elevated temperature (353.15–523.15K) for aqueous PEG solutions with PEG molecular weights of 2200 g mol⁻¹ and higher (e.g., Dormidontova, 2004; Kjellander and Florin, 1981; Zobrist et al., 2003).”

Figures 2 – 4. The difference between the bulk and total pressure derived water activity seem to differ most at intermediate water:organic mass ratios. Is this expected based on the appropriate interactions in solution and how does it relate to the potential error in both methods? Would it be possible to show how current group contribution methods perform on these graphs? Presently it is not clear how ‘bad’ they are.

This does not seem to be the case for all investigated systems. For the aqueous 1,4-

C6006

butanediol solutions shown in Figure 2, the agreement at intermediate water:organic mass ratios is rather better than at low ones. We consider the bulk measurements as more reliable than the total gas phase pressure measurements, since the temperature dependence of the total gas phase pressure measurements vary quite strongly between similar solution concentrations. Unfortunately, we do not know why this is the case and were not able to improve the reproducibility of these measurements. We have published a companion paper in ACPD (G. Ganbavale, A. Zuend, C. Marcolli, and T. Peter: Improved AIOMFAC model parameterisation of the temperature dependence of activity coefficients for aqueous organic mixtures, Atmos. Chem. Phys. Discuss., 14, 16907–16995, 2014) that presents a new, improved parameterisation of the temperature dependence of activity coefficients in the AIOMFAC (Aerosol Inorganic–Organic Mixtures Functional groups Activity Coefficients) model applicable for aqueous as well as water-free organic solutions.

Section, page 12695, line 16. The authors state how a change in a_w by 0.025 can result in a change in rate coefficients by 6 orders of magnitude. On revisiting the description of the experimental methods, I find that the expected error in the gas phase pressure measurements, for example, is 0.015. Does this mean that the minimum error in J might be 3 orders of magnitude? In addition, in the text for figure 2, the ‘uncertainty of the method’ is noted to be 0.03? This is repeated in other figure captions.

We consider the error in the total gas phase pressure measurements is 0.03 in absolute a_w . The present study shows, that temperature dependence of water activity is indeed often strong and complex at lower temperatures typical of the upper troposphere. In the present situation, we consider the applicability of the water activity criterion (Koop et al., 2000) more reliable than extrapolation of water activity to lower temperatures for a given solution composition. We think that applying the water activity criterion to the homogeneous freezing curve measured by the DSC method leads to better prediction of water activity at homogeneous freezing temperatures than extrapolations from data acquired at higher temperatures.

C6007

We add the following sentence to the manuscript (page 12684, line 11): “We conservatively estimate the uncertainty in the water activity in organic solutions to be twice of that determined for pure water ice, namely ± 0.03 in absolute a_w , to account for possible artefacts by residual foaming and/or temperature gradients due to the glass beads.”

We correct the footnotes in tables 12, 13, 14, and 16 to: “* The accuracy of the water activity measurements is ± 0.03 (absolute range) in a_w .”

We change the footnotes in tables 3, 4, 5, 6 to: “* The accuracy of the water activity measurements is specified by the manufacturer as ± 0.015 (absolute range) in a_w .”

We change the footnotes in tables 7 and 8 to: “* The accuracy of the water activity measurements is specified by the manufacturer as ± 0.003 (absolute range) in a_w .”

Are the range of studied functionality enough to suit an improved thermodynamic model? It would be good to know how much more effort is needed to extend this list. It would also be useful for the authors to comment on whether interactions with inorganic components are needed in this regards. There are statements throughout the document as to the inorganic-organic interactions but i don't have a feel for the need for studying mixtures in this effect. Based on the experimental data from the total pressure measurements it seems this would be tricky. This makes the fitting of a group contribution method with highly resolved temperature data in regions which can be probed by the EDB all the more attractive.

We have published a companion paper in ACPD (see above) that presents a new, improved parameterisation of the temperature dependence of activity coefficients in the AIOMFAC model. For electrolyte-free organic and organic–water mixtures the AIOMFAC model uses a group-contribution approach based on UNIFAC. AIOMFAC contains a recently extended parameterization of organic-inorganic interactions, mainly based on room temperature data. Inorganic-organic interactions might be different at low temperatures but there is too little experimental data available that would make such a

C6008

parameterization feasible at this point. We refer in the revised manuscript to the companion paper by modifying the second section of the conclusions (page 12696, lines 14-24) the following way:

“More accurate a_w data at low temperatures are needed in the context of applications of homogeneous ice nucleation theory at upper tropospheric temperatures. The experiments presented in this study provide new equilibrium data sets useful for the development and improvement of thermodynamic activity coefficient models, such as UNIFAC (UNIQuac Functional group Activity Coefficients) and AIOMFAC (Aerosol Inorganic–Organic Mixtures Functional groups Activity Coefficients). For electrolyte-free organic and organic–water mixtures the AIOMFAC model uses a group-contribution approach based on UNIFAC. We present in a companion paper (Ganbavale et al., 2014) a new, improved parametrization of AIOMFAC that makes, in addition to published data, use of the data collected in this study. In turn, improved thermodynamic models can be used for more accurate predictions of the temperature dependence of activity coefficients of water and other solution constituents, as well as equilibrium compositions of multiphase systems for mixtures and environmental conditions, for which experimental data is unavailable.”

Please also note the supplement to this comment:

<http://www.atmos-chem-phys-discuss.net/14/C6004/2014/acpd-14-C6004-2014-supplement.pdf>

Interactive comment on Atmos. Chem. Phys. Discuss., 14, 12673, 2014.

C6009