Third-Order Optical Nonlinearity of Au-Ag core-Shell Nanoparticle at 532 nm

Thresiamma George¹, Ramachandran K²

¹Department of Science and Humanities, Holy Kings College of Engineering and Technology, Ernakulam, Kerala, 686667, India
²Department of Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Holy Kings College of Engineering and Technology, Ernakulam, Kerala, 686667, India

Abstract: Au-Ag core-shell nanoparticles in aqueous solution for the various molar ratio of Au and Ag has been synthesized using simple chemical reduction method. The TEM image of the Au-Ag nanoparticles sample gives the confirmation of core-shell structure. The average particle size of Au-Ag core-shell is 10 nm. The Au-Ag colloidal core-shell nanoparticle samples characterized by UV-VIS absorbance and Z-scan technique. The nonlinear refractive index (n₂), the nonlinear absorption coefficient (β), and third order susceptibility (χ(3)) have calculated for an increase in molar ratio of Au and Ag. The results show that concentration of the reactants can directly affect and alter the nonlinear parameters. As a photons application is a concern, Au-Ag core-shell nanoparticles optical limiting behavior is also observed. As expected, the sample which has higher nonlinearity shows quickly saturated for input intensity.

Keywords: Au-Ag core-shell nanoparticles, Z-scan technique, Nanophotonics, Optical limiting.

1. Introduction

The expected outgrowth of the long-standing research about nonlinear optical materials leads to the importance in various fields such as optical communication, signal processing, computing, holographic recording, optical information storage and optical limiting applications. The emerging technology of photonics has drawn lots of interest in searching for nonlinear optical materials. To find the appropriateness of any optical material for a variety of photonic applications, it requires knowing the optical characteristics such as nonlinearity, its significance and response time spectrum. There are varieties of experimental techniques for determining the features of any nonlinear material. Since the development of nanotechnology, synthesis of nanoparticles has received much consideration due to the feasibility of improvement in the nonlinear optical properties for usage in photonic devices application. Recently, CdS-coated Ag nanoparticle has been synthesized using the reverse micelle technique and studied the nonlinear optical response [1]. When covering of the nanoparticle on the material can provide the much higher value of third-order optical nonlinearity also has been investigated [2] for bismuthate glasses doped with silver nanoparticles. The cause behind high refractive index of bismuthate glass, surface plasmon resonance (SPR) of Ag nanoparticles is increased to 1400 nm. The UV-VIS absorption peak show red shift when increasing Ag nanocubes size [4-3] has been reported, but the linear and nonlinear optical properties have improved. Year by year nanotechnology growing fast enough, the exploitation of nanostructured materials [4] needed to study in all possible ways. Recently this field has provided solutions for many technological challenges, e.g., solar cell, medicine, water treatment [5]. When pulse laser excitation based nonlinear study of metal colloid been reported, but same time there have been some nonlinear studies that have investigated using CW laser excitation [6-8]. To study nonlinear characteristic study of material, Z-scan is a very easy method. The Z-scan technique which was anticipated by Sheik-Bahae [9,10] is a modest and sensitive single-beam method for determination of the third-order nonlinear optical coefficients. This approach also supports to find the sign of nonlinear refractive index [11]. When look into the nonlinear study using Z-scan Method, one could observe numerous work in the last 20 years. Using CW 632 nm illumination [12], Jia et al. studied the nonlinear optical properties of gold and silver colloidal solution by Z-scan. When looking deep into the nonlinear study of the nanoparticle, bimetallic nanoparticles are of broad interest because they lead to many interesting size-dependent electrical, chemical, and optical properties. They are of particular importance in the field of catalysis since they often show better catalytic properties than their monometallic counterparts. Gold is very suitable as an alloying metal due to its relatively low reactivity. Recently, bimetallic Au/Ag core–shell nanoparticles have been synthesized by biological methodologies using Neem leaf broth which show that the rates of reduction of the metal ions by Neem leaf extract are much faster than chemical methods [13]. Bimetallic silver and gold nanoparticles, a core–shell type structure, have been prepared by NaBH₄ chemical reduction method has been reported [14]. Also, researchers have been published about the gold-coated silver, and silver-coated gold composite nanoparticles are prepared by a seeding growth method to study their SERS-active properties [15]. The structure of Au–Ag is either a core–shell or an alloy phase, depending on the preparation conditions. The high surface-to-volume ratios of nanoparticles lead to dramatic changes in their properties. As the size and the dimension of particles are reduced, their electronic properties change drastically because the density of states and the spatial length scale of the electronic motion reduce with decreasing size. Alloy nanoparticles, on the other hand, have mainly been studied because of their catalytic effects. Depending on the synthesis method, the resulting bimetallic particles can exhibit either alloy behavior or core–shell system behavior. The alloy nanoparticles homogeneously distributed over the whole volume on an atomic scale; however, the core–shell...
nanoparticles constitute the core of the structure, and the other one the external shell. Bimetallic nanoparticles can be prepared by simultaneous reduction or by progressive reduction of two metal ions in the presence of suitable stabilization strategies such as steric hindrance and static electronic repulsive force. The above reduction methods may obtain a particle structure of homogeneous alloy, while the latter are for the production of core–shell structure particles. Au and Ag have very similar lattice constants and are completely miscible over the entire composition range. Hence, single-phase alloys can achieve with any desired composition. Plasmonic nanoparticles may even be designed as "core-shell," with a dielectric core and a metallic shell. By the specific figuration of parameters like core diameter and shell thickness, the absorption spectrum of these particles is widely tunable. Researchers reported detailed review on nonlinear optical mechanisms of the inorganic nanostructures for optical limiting applications [16]. An optical limiter is a device that strongly attenuates optical beam to a threshold level of high intensity while shows linear transmittance at low power. The key factor about a typical optical limiter the material should have high optical nonlinearity, and decreasing transmittance with increasing input irradiance to facilitate the transmitted energy never exceed the damage threshold for the optical sensor [17]. Recently, broadband optical limiting has been reported [18] for nanostructured films of silicon carbide β-SiC (3C) using the ns laser radiation in VIS-NIR spectral range. Also, Graphene Oxide (GO), Ag@TiO2 core-shells and GO-Ag@TiO2 compounds synthesized and it is for optical limiting application [19]. In the present work, Au-Ag core-shell nanoparticles are synthesized, and TEM image of the sample of Au-Ag nanoparticles sample gives the confirmation of core-shell structure. The average particle size of Au-Ag core-shell is 10nm. The Au-Ag core-shell nanoparticles samples are optically characterized by UV-VIS absorbance and Z-Scan technique. Under CW 532nm excitation, Z-scan measurements showed that the Au-Ag nanoparticles exhibited large thermal induced refractive index n2. Due to the large nonlinear refractive index of the Au-Ag core-shell structure was exploited for the optical limiting application. In the present manuscript, section 2 illustrate about the analytical methodology of Z-Scan measurement and followed by the method of optical limiting in a very short manner. Section 3, 4 gives the synthesis and optical, nonlinear characteristics studies of Au-Ag nanoparticles. In Section 5 provides the detailed discussion about the experimental finding and optical limiting studies.

2. Methodology

The nonlinear polarization when the applied field E(t) is monochromatic and is given by [20]

\[ P^{(3)}(t) = \frac{1}{4} \chi^{(3)} E^2 \cos(3\omega t) + \frac{1}{4} \chi^{(3)} E^2 \alpha t \]  

(1)

The first term in equation (1) describes a response at frequency 3\omega due to the interaction of applied field at frequency \omega. This frequency \omega leads to the process of third-harmonic generation. The second term in equation (1) describes a nonlinear contribution to the polarization at the frequency of the incident field. This term hence leads to a non-linear contribution to the refractive index experienced by a wave at frequency \omega. The phenomena of the self–focusing of an intense Gaussian beam in the nonlinear medium is considered as the starting point for Z-scan analysis which was improved by Sheik-Bahae. It is assumed that a Gaussian TEM00 beam is incident on a thin nonlinear medium and traveling in the +z direction, (i.e., L << ZR, where ZR is the Raleigh range of the beam in air). In general, for a cubic nonlinearity, the index of refraction n is expressed regarding nonlinear indices n1 (esu) or n2 (m2/W) expressed as

\[ n = n_0 + \frac{n_2}{2} |E|^2 = n_0 + n_2 |E|^2 \]  

(2)

Where \( n_0 \) is the linear index of refraction, \( E \) is the peak electric field (cgs), and I denotes the irradiance (MKS) of the laser beam within the sample. The quantity \( n_2 \), \( n_3 \) are related through the conversion formula

\[ n_2 (\text{esu}) = \frac{c^2}{4\pi} n_2 (\text{m}^2/\text{W}) \]  

(3)

where \( c \) (m/s) is the speed of light in vacuum.

Assuming a TEM00 Gaussian beam of waist radius \( \omega_0 \) traveling in the z+ direction, the magnitude of the electric field \( E \) can be written as,

\[ |E(r, Z, t)| = |E_0(t)| \frac{\omega_0}{\omega(z)} \exp \left[ -\frac{r^2}{\omega(z)^2} \right] \]  

(4)

Where \( \omega(z) = \omega_0 \left[ 1 + \frac{z}{Z_R} \right] \) is the beam radius at \( z \), \( Z_R = \frac{\omega_0^2}{\lambda} \) is the diffraction length of the beam (Rayleigh range), \( k = 2\pi / \lambda \) is the wave vector, and \( \lambda \) is the laser wavelength, all in free space. \( E_0 \) denotes the radiation electric field at the focus and contains the temporal envelope of the laser pulse. If the sample length is small enough such that changes in the beam diameter within the sample due to either diffraction or nonlinear refraction can be neglected, the medium is regarded as thin. For such an assumption, the amplitude and nonlinear phase change \( \Delta \phi \) of the electric field within the sample are given by,

\[ \frac{\partial \Delta \phi}{\partial z} = -\alpha (I) \]  

(5)

And

\[ \frac{\partial I}{\partial z} = -\alpha (I) I \]  

(6)

Where \( Z' \) is the propagation depth in the sample and \( \alpha (I) \) includes the linear and nonlinear absorption terms. Equations (5) and (6) are solved to give the phase shift \( \Delta \phi \) at the exit surface of the sample, which simply follows the radial variation of the incident irradiance at a given position of the sample \( z \):

\[ \Delta \phi (Z, r, t) = \frac{\Delta \phi (Z', r)}{1 + \frac{Z'^2}{Z_R^2}} \]  

(7)

The on-axis phase shift at the focus is defined as

\[ \Delta \phi_0 (t) = k \Delta n_0 (L_{\text{eff}}) \]  

(8)

where \( L_{\text{eff}} = (1 - e^{-\alpha L}) / \alpha \), with \( L \) the sample length and \( \alpha \) the linear absorption coefficient.

\[ L_{\text{eff}} \rightarrow L \text{ for } \alpha L << 1 \text{ and } L_{\text{eff}} \rightarrow 1/\alpha \text{ for } \alpha L >> 1. \]

Here \( \Delta n_0 = n_2 L_0 (t) \) with \( L_0 (t) \) being the on-axis irradiance at focus (i.e. \( z = 0 \)). One can ignore the Fresnel reflection losses

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such that \( I_a(t) \) is the irradiance within the sample. The change in the refractive index can be evaluated by use of the difference in the peak-valley normalized transmittance \( T_p - T_v \), which is given by,

\[
\Delta T_p - v = 0.406(1 - S)^{0.25} |\Delta \phi_0|
\]

Where \( S \) is the aperture linear transmittance (\( S = 0.4 \))) and \( |\Delta \phi_0| \) is the on-axis phase shift. The nonlinear refractive index \( n_2 \) is given by [21],

\[
n_2 = \frac{\lambda \Delta \phi_0}{2 \pi c \epsilon_0 f_0^2} \text{cm}^2/\text{W}
\]

The nonlinear absorption coefficient \( (\beta) \) is given by [47],

\[
\beta = \frac{2 \pi \Delta \alpha}{\lambda c \epsilon_0 f_0^2} \text{cm}^2/\text{W}
\]

Experimentally determined nonlinear refractive index \( n_2 \) and nonlinear absorption coefficient \( \beta \) can be used in finding the real and imaginary parts of the third-order nonlinear optical susceptibility \( \chi^{(3)} \) according to the following relations [21].

\[
Re(\chi^{(3)}) (\text{a.s.u.}) = 10^{-4} \epsilon_0 c^2 n_2^3 \left( \frac{\text{cm}^2}{\text{W}} \right)
\]

\[
Im(\chi^{(3)}) (\text{a.s.u.}) = 10^{-2} \epsilon_0 c^2 n_2^3 \frac{\lambda}{4 \pi} \beta \left( \frac{\text{cm}}{\text{W}} \right)
\]

Where \( \epsilon_0 \) is the vacuum dielectric constant, \( c \) is the vacuum speed of light, \( n_2 \) is the linear refractive index and \( \lambda \) is the laser wavelength. Using equations (12) and (13), \( \chi^{(3)} \) can be calculated. The absolute value of the third-order nonlinear optical susceptibility \( \chi^{(1)} \) is given by the relation [21].

\[
|\chi^{(3)}| = \left( [Re(\chi^{(3)})]^2 + [Im(\chi^{(3)})]^2 \right)^{0.5}
\]

The methodology behind optical limiting is a nonlinear optical process in which transmittance of a material decreases with increased incident light intensity. Optical limiters are one of the most important types of devices used to control the amplitude of high-intensity optical pulses. These devices operate by the intrinsic properties of the materials used for their fabrication. An ideal optical limiter has linear transmittance at low input intensities, but above the threshold power, its transmitted energy remains constant. Various nonlinear optical effects can be employed for the performance of optical limiting. Some of the mechanisms responsible for optical limiting are: 1) Reverse Saturable Absorption (RSA) which translates into increased optical absorption with increased incident optical intensity. 2) Nonlinear Refraction (due to molecular reorientation, electronic Kerr effect, excitation of free carriers, photorefraction, and optically induced heating in the material). 3) Induced Scattering (optically induced heating or plasma generation in the medium). 4) Thermal Blooming. 5) Multiphoton Absorption (e.g. Two-photon absorption). In general, materials that exhibit optical limiting behavior use these five mechanisms in any combination, although sometimes one or more processes are predominant in the material used.

### 3. Synthesis and Optical Characterizations

Many techniques, including chemical and physical means, have been developed to prepare metal nanoparticles, such as chemical reduction using a reducing agent. There are comfortable and convenient chemical methods that use dilute aqueous solutions and simple equipment. At first, Au - Ag alloy nanoparticle of molar ratio 1:1 has been prepared using simple chemical reduction method. In this process, silver nitrate \((\text{AgNO}_3)\) and chloroauric acid \((\text{HauCl}_4)\) is used for gold and silver nanoparticles. In the synthesis process, sodium citrate \((\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{O}_7\text{Na}_3)\) used as a capping agent and \(\text{NaBH}_4\) used as reducing agent. The absorption spectrum is collected using a Shimadzu model 2401 PC UV–VIS-NIR scanning spectrophotometer, over wavelengths from 300 to 1300 nm. The sample is measured against water as a reference. The absorbance peak for 1:1 is found to be 421 nm. Further Au: Ag nanoparticles of molar ratio 1:2, 1:3, 2:1, 3:1 has prepared in the same manner which is depicted in Fig. 1. By varying the concentration of the reactants such as Au, and Ag, the surface plasmon peaks exhibits a shift in the UV–VIS absorption spectrum.

**Figure 1:** UV–VIS absorbance of the sample for molar ratio 1:1, 1:2, 1:3, 2:1 and 3:1 are observed on Shimadzu model 2401 PC UV–VIS -NIR scanning spectrophotometer

The surface Plasmon absorbance peak for the molar ratio for 1:2 397 nm, for 1:3 molar ratio observing at 390.5 nm and other, for 2:1 has absorbance peak is at 403 nm and 3:1 are found to be 420 nm. To know about the structure of Au-Ag nanoparticles, the sample is allowed for imaging using HRTEM. High-resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM) is an imaging mode of the transmission electron microscope (TEM) that enables the imaging of the crystallographic structure of a sample at an atomic scale. The image of the Au-Ag nanoparticles sample is obtained from the HRTEM instrument with operating voltage of 200kV. The TEM image of the sample is depicted in figure 2.
4. Experimental results

The nonlinear optical measurements have been performed using a single beam Z-scan technique. The Z-scan experiments are carried out using continuous wave of SHG of Nd-YAG laser (COHERENT – Compass 215M diode-pumped laser) at a wavelength of 532 nm, which is focused by 3.5 cm focal length lens. The laser beam waist $\omega_0$ at the focus is measured to be 18.1 $\mu$m and the Rayleigh length $Z_R = 3.7$ mm. The Z-scan experiment is performed for Au-Ag nanoparticles, with intensity $I_0 = 9.314$ kW/cm$^2$ of Nd-YAG laser and it exhibited substantial nonlinearity in the wavelength 532 nm. The schematic diagram of single beam Z-scan technique set up is shown in Figures 3.

![Figure 3: Schematic diagram of Z-scan experiment](image)

A 1 mm wide optical cell (quartz cuvette) containing the Au-Ag nanoparticles in colloidal form are translated across the focal region along the axial direction, i.e. the direction of propagation of laser beam. The transmission of the beam through an aperture placed in the far field is measured using a photodetector (LM2, Coherent Inc.). The output is fed to the digital power meter (Field Master Gs-coherent). For an open aperture Z-scan, the aperture is removed, and a lens is used to collect the entire laser beam transmitted through the sample.

![Figure 4: Closed-aperture Z-scan curve of Au-Ag nanoparticles of a) molar ratio (1:1) molar ratio (1:2), molar ratio (1:3), molar ratio (2:1) and molar ratio (3:1)](image)

The closed aperture Z-scan is sensitive to both nonlinear absorption and nonlinear refraction. Such Z-scan trace is expected to have maximum transmittance (peak), followed by minimum transmittance (Valley), which corresponds to a negative nonlinearity i.e. self-defocusing. An inverse Z-scan curve (i.e., a valley followed by a peak) characterizes a positive nonlinearity i.e. self-focusing. Z-scan with a fully open aperture ($S = 1$) is insensitive to nonlinear refraction. Such Z-scan traces with no aperture are expected to be symmetric on the focus ($Z = 0$) where they have a minimum transmittance (e.g., two-photon or reverse saturation absorption) or maximum transmittance (e.g., saturation of absorption). The change in the refractive index can be evaluated by use of the difference in the peak-valley normalized transmittance $T_p - T_v$ (Eqn.9), from the figure 4, estimated the nonlinear refractive index, nonlinear
absorption coefficient, and third-order susceptibility is depicted in Table 1. The fractional change in the measured parameters shows that reactants concentration of the material can directly affect the nonlinearity.

Table 1: The measurement results of optical nonlinearity of the Au-Ag colloidal nanoparticles for molar ratio 1:1, 1:2, 1:3, 2:1 and 3:1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Au-Ag Molar ratio</th>
<th>Absorbance</th>
<th>$T_{p=5}$</th>
<th>$\Delta n_0$</th>
<th>$n_2 \times 10^{-8}$ cm$^2$/W</th>
<th>$\beta \times 10^{-3}$ cm$^2$/W</th>
<th>$X_{794} \times 10^{-6}$ c.s.u.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:01</td>
<td>1.4791</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>4.888</td>
<td>4.3176</td>
<td>1.467</td>
<td>2.7397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:02</td>
<td>1.8253</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>4.759</td>
<td>4.2048</td>
<td>1.428</td>
<td>2.6682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:03</td>
<td>1.347</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>5.838</td>
<td>3.8999</td>
<td>1.151</td>
<td>2.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:01</td>
<td>1.3351</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>5.253</td>
<td>4.6398</td>
<td>1.576</td>
<td>2.9442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:01</td>
<td>0.7753</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>4.4324</td>
<td>1.506</td>
<td>2.8126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Discussion

The synthesis of the Au-Ag nanoparticles via chemical reduction is a pretty easy method. The colors of the sample in solution indicate the presence of nanoparticle formation, and it can be confirmed through UV-VIS absorbance.

A blue shift in the surface plasmon peaks is expected, when the molar concentration of Ag increases, as shown in figure 5 (a). However, scrutiny of the UV-VIS absorption peaks indicates in the case of molar ratio 1:3, there is an addition of absorption peak at a higher wavelength. It might be due to the improper monomerization of the Au-Ag alloy sample. Herein present manuscript, contain the HRTEM image for the molar ratio 1:1. In the same manner, if the molar ratio of the Au increases, the absorption peaks shift towards the right, redshift (see Fig 5(b)). However, the straightway there is no such indication, but careful examination of UV-VIS absorbance in the molar ratio 2:1, and 3:1 shows two absorption peaks, one corresponds to Au, and other may account for Au. When look into the second peak of the UV-VIS absorbance can able to say that the absorbance peak shift towards the right for an increase in Au concentration. Under CW 532nm excitation, Z-scan measurements showed that the Au-Ag colloidal nanoparticles exhibited substantial thermal induced refractive index ($n_2$). Due to the large nonlinear refractive index, it can be used for optical limiting. The experiment layout for optical limiting is shown in figure 8. Optical limiting measurements are performed using a CW laser beam of diode pumped neodymium-doped yttrium aluminum garnet (Nd: YAG) laser (Compag$^{TM}$ 215M-50) from (COHERENT) with an output power of 50mW at wavelength 532nm. Optical limiting based on nonlinear refraction is performed by keeping an aperture in front of the detector, which reduces the cross section of the beam entering the power meter. The beam is focused using a lens of focal length f=3.5 cm and pass through a 1mm path length sample cell (Quartz cuvette) contains the Au-Ag nanoparticles in aqueous solution. The beam is focused using a lens of focal length f=3.5 cm and pass through a 1mm path length sample cell (Quartz cuvette) contains the Au-Ag nanoparticles in aqueous solution.

![Figure 5: a) UV- VIS absorbance of the sample for an increase in a molar ratio of Ag, absorbance peaks are 421 nm (1:1), 396.5nm (1:2) and 392.5nm, 647 nm (1:3). b) UV-VIS absorbance of the sample for an increase in a molar ratio of Au, absorbance peaks are 421 nm (1:1), 402.5 nm, 495 nm (2:1) and 416 nm, 498 nm (3:1).](image)

![Figure 6: Experimental setup for optical limiting](image)
values are measured by the photodetector so that the characteristic curve of the output power as a function of input power can be obtained. The variable beam splitter is used to vary the power/intensity. The sample which has higher third order nonlinearity was promptly saturated with input power. But here there are no drastic nonlinearity differences between the five samples since the concentration of the reactants are small.

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Author Profile

Thresiamma George received the B.Sc. and M.Sc. degrees in Chemistry from the University of Kerala in 1976 and 1980, respectively. She received a doctoral degree in the field of nanocrystalline oxide materials from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. She has 34 years of teaching experience is UG and PG level of Chemistry. Her major interests are synthesis and characterization of metal nanoparticles. She is currently working as Head of the Department of Holy Kings College of Engineering and Technology in Science and Humanities department.

Ramachandran K received the B.Sc. and M.Sc. degrees in Physics from University of Calicut and Bharathiyar University in 2004 and 2006, respectively. He received M.Tech degree in Laser and electrooptical Engineering from Anna University Chennai in 2010, and He also received a doctoral degree in the field of fiber optics from Indian Institute of Information Technology design and manufacturing, Kancheepuram. During 2016-2017, he worked in Optical metrology lab, Division of Mechanical System Engineering, Jeonju, South Korea to study polarization induced off axis fringe for phase measurements. His major interests are optics, photonics and fiber optics. He is now with Holy Kings College of Engineering and Technology as Assistant Professor in the Department of Electrical and Electronics Engineering.