

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROBLEMS IN THE FIELD OF HIGH POLYMER MODIFICATION BY POLYMERIZABLE OLIGOMERS

Alfred A. Berlin, Semion M. Mezhevikovskii

Institute of Chemical Physics, Academy of Science USSR,
USSR, 117334, Moscow, Vorobyevskoe Shaussee, 2b

Abstract - The exploratory problems of modification of high polymers with polymerizable oligoesteracrylates (OEA) and modern state of the art are reviewed. Various aspects of compatibility, phase equilibrium and rheology properties of polymer - oligomer compounds are considered. Probable mechanisms of OEA transformations taking place in polymer matrix during polymerization, as well as structure and properties of microheterogeneous composites formed are discussed. A number of examples illustrating the effect of mix components on the mechanical and processing properties of polymer - oligomer systems are given. Major possible ways of exploration of heterogeneous three-dimensional polymerization (copolymerization) in nonequilibrium viscous media are compared.

The present-day stage of development of the "science of polymers" (1), in its applied aspect particularly, "polymer study of materials", is characterized rather by a search for rational ways of polymer material production providing the maximum realization of the properties of already tested in practice large-tonnage polymers, than by working out new methods of synthesis of new polymers, as was the case, for instance, in 30-50-ies.

For these purpose physical and chemical modification of polymers holds the greatest promise.

Among different aspects of polymer modifications, which have been recently developed, the so-called principle of "time plasticization" (2) is of great practical and scientific interest. This not very felicitous but adopted term in scientific and engineering literature serves for indicating the approach based on applying polymerizable oligomers (PO) as modifiers. It allows one to solve simultaneously several important problems: to intensify the treatment of polymers and to regulate the properties of end products.

The principal essence of this method is that a liquid and low-melting polymerizable oligomer introduced into a linear polymer serves first as a plasticizer, facilitating thus the treatment of the polymer-oligomer mixture, and then at the stage of molding the sample is consolidated (hence, the term "time") and changes to a cross-linked polymer which is related with the initial polymer substrate by chemical and (or) physical forces. It is this fact that defines the new properties of modified polymers. It should be noted that, since the reactivity of functional groups and their number, and also the dimension and nature of the oligomer block can be predetermined a priori, there arises a possibility of regulating the properties of intermediate and end products of the system.

Thus method of linear polymer modification has readily gained wide application in practice for production of glues (3, 4), rubbers (5-10), adhesive for reinforced plastics (11-13), dielectric compounds (14, 15), films and covers (16), construction plastics (17, 18) and of other polymer materials (19, 24) possessing the complex of new properties. However, for some time the choice of components has been based on an empirical approach. Systematic investigations of structures and properties of the initial polymer-oligomer mixture and of regularities of the component conversion in the process of hardening have started later (25-33). The experience gained so far makes it possible to generalize the main stages of work which should be done in this field and formulate several general problems, their statement being necessary for elucidating the interrelation between the structure of polymer-oligomer systems and their properties. Some of these approaches are

presented in the diagram (Fig. 1). It seems that they are of a general sense for investigating the polymer modification.

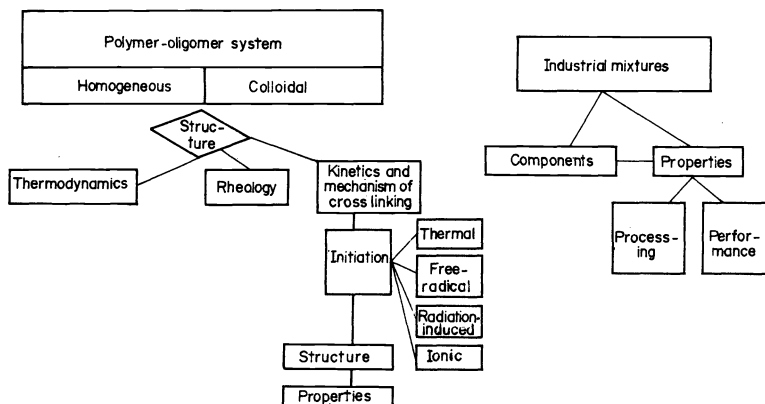


Fig. 1. Diagram of polymer-oligomer systems exploration

On mixing (see Note a) a polymer with an oligomer homogeneous or colloid systems may be formed. They may be nonequilibrium or pseudoequilibrium (taking account of the high times of relaxation). Therefore, it is required that thermodynamic characteristics of the system should be known, and first of all diagrams of phase state, rates of diffusion, heats of mixing, solution, equilibrium constants and so on.

The structure of polymer-oligomer mixtures, as a result of thermo-dynamic functions of the system and its colloidal-chemical state, defines both rheology and kinetics of further hardening.

In a most general case the hardening is reduced to concurrent processes of three-dimensional homo- and inoculation PO polymerization in a very viscous polymeric medium.

A radical difference of the PO transformations in the polymer matrix from their block-homopolymerization investigated in detail (25) is that the process from the beginning proceeds in a highly-viscous medium under conditions of nonequilibrium microheterogeneous separation. Polymerization fixates nonhomogeneity. The structure and properties of the hardened material depend thus on the characteristics specifying the degree of withdrawal of the system from the state of equilibrium.

With polymerization of semifunctional oligomers in polymeric media there arise the same problems of kinetics and topology of lattice formation, as those with the PO block-polymerization, but complicated by the presence of another phase.

A most important problem is the study of the processes occurring in real multi-component polymer-oligomer systems. It consists in the effect of fillers, in case they are necessary, plasticizers, inhibitors, antioxidants, antiscorchings and so on.

These are some primary scientific problems, their systematic study and solution being indispensable for the development of physical-chemical foundations of the oligomer-polymer principle of high polymer modification.

Though information is available in literature on application of different classes of PO (see Note b), epoxy, allyl, vinyl, diene, urethane containing,

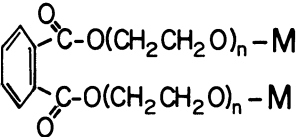
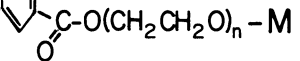
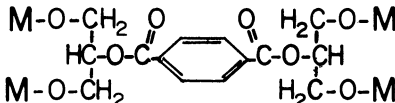
Note a. The method of mixing the components affects the properties and requires a particular consideration.

Note b. The results of elastomer modification by polycondensation oligomers are summarized in the monograph (34). The problems of elastification of stiff-chain polymers with oligomer bearing elastic blocks are considered in the review (35).

organosilicon and other PO, for modification of high polymer properties (see, for instance (37-41), this paper deals mainly with modification of high polymers by oligoesteracrylates (OEA). There are two reasons for such a choice:

1) From a number of considerations OEA, including chemical, economical, toxicological and other reasons (for detail see (36), are most promising; 2) in this field the work with OEA is most widely presented in the world literature.

Table indicates the some formulas and basic properties of OEA which have been used in the paper. As can be seen, the application of OEA assumes wide variations in functionality, in the nature and length of the oligomer block, in viscosity and so on.

No.	OEA	F	η , cp	Mol.Wt.	
1	Tetramethylene- α, ω -dimethacrylate	$M-O-(CH_2)_4-O-M$	4	4,7	226
2	Trioxiethylene- α, ω -dimethacrylate	$M-O-(CH_2CH_2O)_3-M$	4	7,9	286
3	α, ω -Methacryl-bis- ethyleneglycol-phtalate	 $n = 1$	4	40	390
4	α, ω -Methacryl-bis-tri- ethyleneglycol-phtalate	 $n = 3$	4	130,5	566
5	α, ω -Dimethakryl-(1,3)- (bis-glycerol)-2-phtalate		8	1815	586
6	α -Trimethacryl- ω - methacrylpentaerythritol- dimethacrylpentaerythritol- (dimethacrylpentaerythritol)- adipate	$M-O-CH_2$ $M-O-\underset{\text{CH}_2}{\overset{\text{O}}{\parallel}}-CH_2-O$ $M-O-CH_2$ [$\overset{\text{O}}{\parallel} (CH_2)_4 \overset{\text{O}}{\parallel} C-O-CH_2 \sim$] $n = 1$	12	$11 \cdot 10^3$	788
7	α -Trimethacryl- ω - methacrylpentaerythritol- dimethacrylpentaerythritol- -di(dimethacrylpenta- erythritol)-adipate	H_2C-O-M $\sim \underset{\text{C-CH}_2\text{O}}{\overset{\text{H}_2\text{C-O-M}}{\text{C}}}]_n M$ H_2C-O-M $n = 2$	16	$19 \cdot 10^3$	1172

$M = \sim \underset{\text{CH}_3}{\overset{\text{O}}{\parallel}} C - C = CH_2$

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the recent achievements in the field of the OEA polymer modification in the framework of the diagram considered above (Fig. 1).

Compatibility and phase equilibrium

Polymer-oligomer mixtures are, as a rule, thermodynamically incompatible, since they are not capable to form stable one-phase systems at any ratio of components.

Thermodynamic incompatibility and high viscosity of polymer-oligomer compositions predetermine nonequilibrium and "kinetic" nature of their properties. However, not each of the recorded properties (naturally in the framework of accuracy of the experiment and measurement conditions) responds to the degree of the system withdrawal from the equilibrium state. For instance, as has been shown in papers (42, 43), the holdup time of the mixture of cis-polyisoprene with tri-oxethylene, -dimethacrylate for 30 days at a room temperature does not affect its rheological properties. On the other hand, it is possible to change the character of the concentration dependence of system viscosity by reasoning the composition at a high temperature (44).

The kinetics of the PO chemical transformations in a polymeric medium is particularly sensible to the time prehistory (74). This indicates that polymer-oligomer compositions are in a nonequilibrium state. Consequently,

there arises a new problem, which has not been practically studied as yet, the equilibrium state in viscoliquid polymer-oligomer media.

In a number of papers a certain relationship between the chemical nature of components and different characteristics defining the compatibility limits has been observed.

It has been established, for instance, that the wider the branching of the PO molecules, the higher the value of the Huggins constant for the component data (45). It has been obtained that the more polymer and oligomer differ in polarity, or the more the oligomer block length is, the less are the concentrations which cause the inflection of the "optical characteristics of the mixture - oligomer concentration" curve (15). Polar rubbers are shown to swell better in OEA than nonpolar ones (45, 48). These data, however, do not allow us to estimate quantitatively solubility limits in such systems and to relate them with structure parameters and physical-chemical properties of the composition.

The results of research performed on the mixture of polyisoprene rubber SKI-3 and butadiene-acrylonitrile rubber SKN-18 with α , ω -dimethacrylate by the method of sorption show (50) that the free energies of mixing (Δg_x) under definite values of the component relations change signs, become positive, and, consequently, the system with such concentrations of oligomer becomes heterogeneous (Fig. 2).

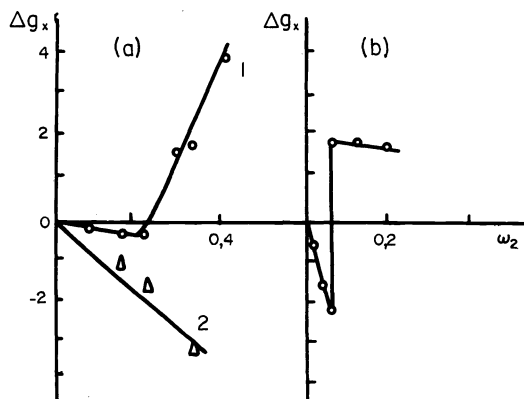


Fig. 2. Concentration dependence of mixing free-energy (Δg_x) for tri-(oxyethylene)- α , ω -dimethacrylate/rubber systems: (a) butadiene-acrylonitrile rubber: SKN-18(1), SKN-26(2); (b) isoprene rubber

A detailed investigation conducted by the microinterference method of compatibility of some flexible- and stiff-chain polymers with oligomers: n-alkanes, n-methylene-dimethacrylates, n-oxyethylene-dimethacrylates and corresponding glycols has shown (51-52) that the phase state of the system depends first of all on the nature of the functional group. For instance, oxyethylene glycols with $n = 2 - 13$ do not coincide with the investigated polymers (polyisoprene, butadiene-nitrile rubbers, PVC), and oxyethylene-dimethylacrylates turned out to be partially consistent. The upper critical temperatures of solution (UCTS) and asymmetry in the component concentration are typical of the phase state diagrams for all these systems. The positions of binodals change depending on the oligomer molecular mass, on the nature of the oligomer block, on the polymer polarity (Fig. 3).

Fig. 4. presents diagrams of states of cis-polyisoprene with "n"-alkanes and "n"-methylene- α , ω -dimethylacrylates in the form of peculiar binodals. Usual dependence is observed for the non-polar component mixture (35), a decrease in solubility with increasing the oligomer polymerization rate, and for a mixture of the components, differing in polarity, a paradoxical situation takes place - with an increase in the length of the methylene block in the OEA chain, i.e., with increasing the oligomer molecular mass, the areas of the total component compatibility also grow.

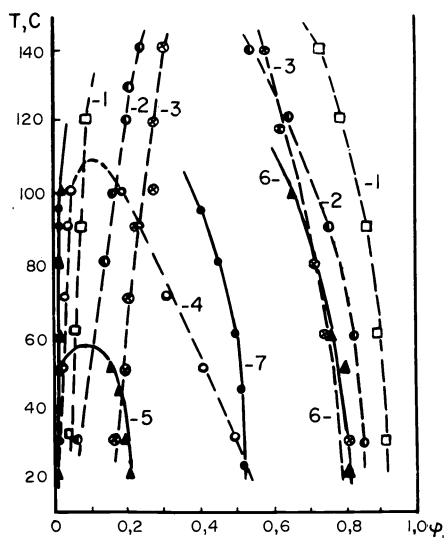


Fig. 3. Phase diagrams for OEA/rubber systems: 1-4 - *cis*-polyisoprene; 5, 6 - SKN-26; 7 - SKN-40; 1 - OEA-3; 2 - OEA-5; 3 - OEA-4; 4 - OEA-1; 5 - OEA-2 (cf. table I); 6, 7-13 - oxyethylene- α, ω -dimethacrylate

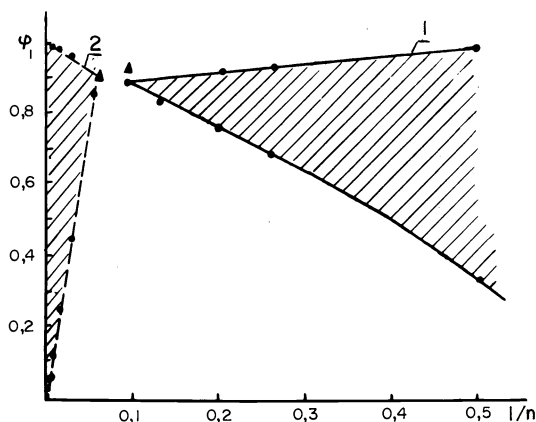


Fig. 4. Phase diagram of *cis*-polyisoprene compounded with *n*-methylene- α, ω -dimethacrylates (1) and *n*-alkanes (2) at 50°C: ● - observed; ▲ - calculated

This effect turned out to be typical only for the oligomers whose oligomer block and end groups differed in nature. Apparently in such a way the system "compensates" the contribution of polar methacryl end groups to the interaction parameter χ . In the framework of the Flory-Huggins-Scott theory with allowance made for additive contribution of recurrent chains and separate fragments of molecule (according to Van-Krevelen (54)) to the solubility parameters the empirical dependence has been obtained:

$$1/X_I = 67,2 (V/RT)(10 + n/8 + n)^2 (\phi_1' - \phi_1'')$$

where ϕ_1' and ϕ_1'' are the limiting solubilities (volume fractions) of oligomers with the rate of polymerization X_I and polymer, respectively, V is the molar volume of a monometric chain, and n is the number of units of the oligomer block. This oligomer block length, with which the polar end groups do not affect the compatibility of components.

While analyzing the data on solubility of polymer-oligomer systems it should be stressed that the methods applied by different authors for estimating the limits of the component compatibility do not always provide unambiguous results, since each method has its limits. For instance, the values of critical concentration (C_{cr}) at which the system becomes heterogeneous, for the *cis*-polybutadiene (SKD) α, ω -dimethacrylate-bis-triethyleneglycol-(phthalate) mixture, obtained by measurement of optical density (46, 47) and by interference method (52), coincide but differ from the C_{cr} obtained by swelling (48). The temperature dependences of C_{cr} also differ.

Regulation of phase equilibrium conditions is of great practical importance. It has been shown recently that the component compatibility can be varied by small additions of detergents (56). On introducing 1-2% of nonionogenic detergent the value of the limiting swelling of nonpolar rubbers in OEA does not change practically (Fig. 5), but C_{cr} determined from the system optical density (Fig. 6) increases by 2-3 times. This exterior contradiction resulting from the comparison of the experimental data (Figs. 5 and 6) can be easily eliminated with regard to the following facts: 1) usual optical methods "by transillumination" record the particles of ≥ 1000 Å in diameter, 2) in the presence of a detergent the surface tension in these systems decreases (96). Therefore, one may assume that with conservation of the total amount of OEA in polymer in the presence of detergents, the latter, diminishing the surface tension at the oligomer-polymer interface,

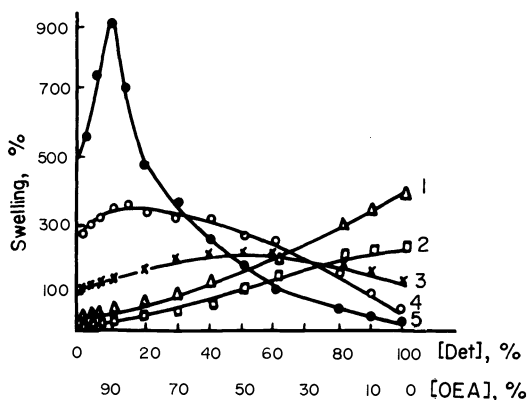


Fig. 5. Influence of OEA-2/detergent ratio on the ultimate swelling value of polyisoprene (1), cis-polybutadiene (2) and butadiene-acrylonitrile copolymers SKN-18 (3), SKN-26 (4), CKN-40 (5)

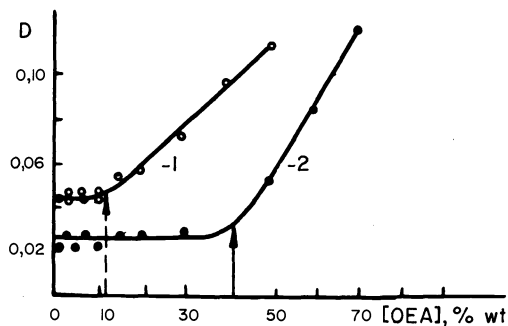


Fig. 6. Optical density (D) of cis-polyisoprene/OEA-6 system vs. OEA content in the presence (1) and absence (2) of detergent

favour a decrease of the particle dimension of the liquid phase and influence its distribution in a unit volume of the polymer, i.e., a purely colloidal effect takes place. Whereas the change in the particle dimension leads, as is known, to the change of physical-mechanical characteristics (35, 47).

Rheological properties

Until recently the viscosity of the polymer-oligomer mixture has been considered to decrease directly with the amount of liquid component, and the low-molecular and oligomer plasticizers have not been assumed to differ in action (57, 58).

The investigation of rheology of polymer-oligomer mixtures in a wide range of velocities ($\lg \dot{\gamma}$) and tensions ($\lg \tau$) of the displacement shows that the process of flowing of such compositions is much more complicated, than this is presented in (57), and is much defined by specific characteristics of the oligomer component.

The character of the viscosity variation of such systems depends on $\dot{\gamma}$ and τ , on the OEA nature and concentration, on the polymer molecular mass, on the time and temperature prehistory of the system.

Most completely investigated is the rheological behaviour of mixtures of cis-polyisoprene and cis-polybutadiene with OEA with different structures (42-44, 59-64). As can be seen from Fig. 7 the branched OEA exert only a plastizing action upon cis-polyisoprene in the whole range of concentrations investigated and in a wide range of τ .

Unusual dependences are observed for linear oligomers (Fig. 7). For them in a mixture with nonpolar rubbers there are three conditional regions of concentrations where their influence upon the elastomer-oligomer system viscosity is different. With OEA doses 0.5-1.0% η increases. In the range of 1.5-3.0% (the range depends on the OEA and polymer nature, on the method of obtaining a sample, on the test temperature and so on) the mixture viscosity drastically decreases and, at least, with further increase of the oligomer dose viscosity monotonously decreases with the OEA concentration.

Such an unusual character of the elastomer viscosity dependence on the liquid oligomer concentration is observed for different groups of polydispersed polybutadiene and polyisoprene. An unexpected growth of viscosity in these experiments is of greatest interest. The relative value of the effect $K_A = \eta/\eta_0$, where η_0 and η are the effective viscosity of the initial rubber and that in the presence of the predetermined amount of OEA, respectively, depends on the compatibility of components, on the rubber MMD, on the temperature and shift regimes of the experiment and so on (55).

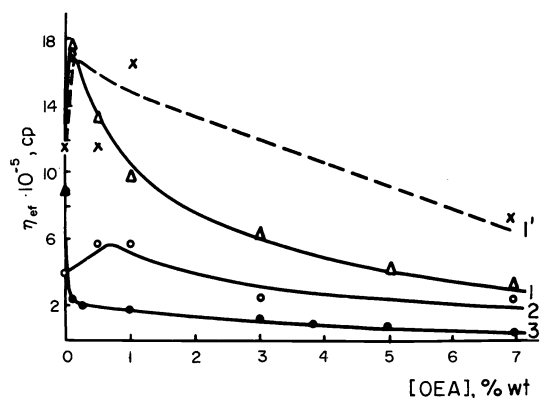


Fig. 7. Concentration dependence of η_{ef} for cis-polyisoprene/OEA mix at 110°C and $\lg\tau = 4.9$ N/sq.m: 1, 1' - OEA-2; 2 - OEA-5; 3 - OEA-7 (cf. table I) 1-3 - sample preparation by calendering; 1' - from solution

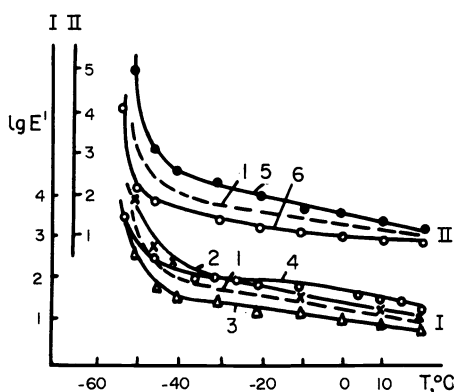


Fig. 8. Temperature dependence of $\lg E'$ (compressive modulus) for cis-polyisoprene (1) and its compounds with n-oxyethylene- α, ω -dimethacrylates at $n = 1$ (2, 3), 2 (4), 3 (5, 6). OEA content: 0.1 (2, 5) and 0.3 (6) % wt, respectively

The natural supposition that the anomalous growth of the mixture viscosity on introducing a liquid PO into viscous rubber is the consequence of the chemical interaction of components which, in principle, may take place in the process of mixing and flowing the composition, has been experimentally verified and rejected (61).

This phenomenon has been hypothetically explained (61, 73) in colloidal-chemical terms in the framework of the Frenkel-Eyring theory. It should be stressed that the antiplasticization effect, which for the last ten years has been a matter of great interest to researchers in all the worlds (see, for instance (43, 77, 83)), has been first discovered for a visco-liquid state of polymers in the series of experiments mentioned above. Moreover, while studying the relaxation behaviour of polymer-oligomer mixtures in a wide temperature range by dielectric and mechanical methods (71), it has been shown that one and the same system can be antiplasticized both in glass-like and in highly-elastic states (Fig. 8). It is supposed that the observed retardation of segmental motions in polymer-oligomer systems may be the result of different phenomena - solvation of oligomer molecules by macrochains and (or) a decrease in the free volume, and compaction of molecular packing of the system and so on.

From the above complex of the experimental data two conclusions seem to be most general:

- 1) one and the same substance, linear oligoesteracrylate, depending on concentration, causes manifestation of three different mechanisms of polymer plasticization known at present as "antiplasticization", "interstructural (interbundle) plasticization" and plasticization itself;
- 2) antiplasticization can be displayed in glass-like, highly-elastic and viscoliquid states.

The peculiarity observed in the oligomer compound action seems to be important for realizing in practice the oligomer-polymer modification method. For instance, the mixtures of linear and branched OEA display nonadditivity of properties (59), which made it assume "synergims" of the oligomer action.

Specific properties of an oligomer state, in particular, a tendency of OEA for association and formation of structure-arranged regions in a liquid state (25, 28), are displayed when employing mixtures of oligomer and low-molecular plasticizers (62, 65). For instance, as small γ the viscosity of the triple system PCV - OEA-dioctylphthalate (DOP) varies antibatately with the

OEA viscosity, and at high $\dot{\gamma}$, when the above-molecular oligomer structure is disturbed, the viscosity of the system is proportional to the viscosity of a liquid phase (Fig. 9).

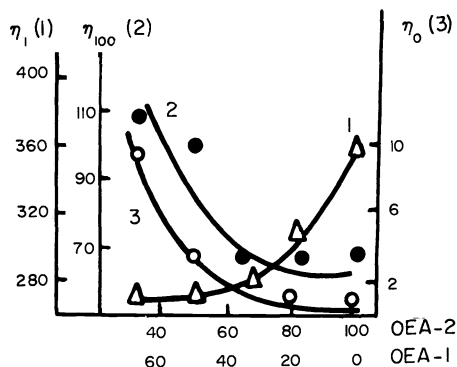


Fig. 9. Influence of OEA-2/OEA-7 ratio on the η_1 (1) and η_{100} (2) of PVC/OEA/DOP plastisol system and on η_0 (3) of plasticizer mixture. η_1 and η_{100} are viscosity numbers measured at $\dot{\gamma} = 1$ and $\dot{\gamma} = 100 \text{ sec}^{-1}$, respectively

The structural association of oligomers causing thixotropy, aside from OEA, is also typical for oligouretanes (66), oligouretaneepoxies (67) and for other structural-regular oligomers.

On the mechanism of PO transform in a polymer medium

The PO polymerization kinetics is not yet practically studied (68, 69).

The absence of systematic investigations on the PO polymerization kinetics in highly-viscous media is apparently connected with the experimental difficulties arising when attempts are made to take account of the nonequilibrium character of polymer-oligomer systems.

Fig. 10 (74) presents kinetic curves of the α, ω -dimethacrylatebutylene-glycol polymerization in polyisoprene medium with different exposure times (the time was recorded from the moment of production until the polymerization beginning). Samples were obtained by the limiting swelling of rubber in OEA (for six hours at a normal temperature) and were stored under conditions of a limited oxygen access. It can be seen that the initial velocities (V_0) and transformation depths (α) first grow, and then (approximately in 10-15 days) reach the limiting value.

However, in case the samples are stored for 30 days (therefore, the kinetic characteristics are not already sensitive to the time prehistory), and then dipped again into OEA for 6 hours (naturally, the weight of the sample is not changed, since it has been obtained earlier by limiting swelling, and for the time of storing no sweating has been observed), the character of kinetic curves is defined not by the total holding time (30 days plus additional exposure time), but only by the time counted off the reiterative swelling, and it coincides with the initial one.

Probably in the process of the polymer-oligomer mixture storing there occurs redistribution of the disperse liquid phase of OEA in a polymer. The OEA particles, having tendency to agglomeration, enlarge and for 10 days the system achieves a quasiequilibrium state, and when the external conditions change, for instance, the sample is again placed in a liquid OEA or when temperature is changed, the equilibrium displaces again. This viewpoint can be proved by the experimental data obtained by Barrier et al (32). They have shown (Fig. 11) that in the tetra (oxyethylene)- α, ω -dimethacrylate-PVC system, as temperature elevates from 20 to 90°C, the equilibrium adsorption increases from 7 to 60%, but with decreasing temperature in the opposite course description is almost negligible: only 5-8% of the liquid phase is lost. Consequently, variation of the external conditions (for instance, a decrease in temperature) for equilibrium polymer-oligomer systems does not lead to syneresis of a liquid, which is usually observed in jellies (70), but only the disperse phase is redistributed in dimensions in a polymer

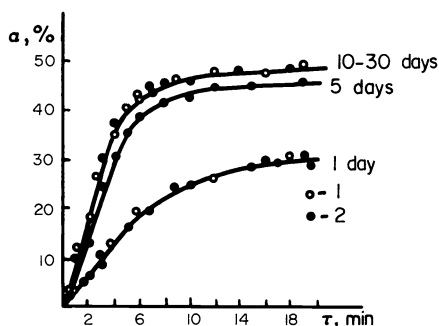


Fig. 10. Kinetics curves of "OEA/cis-polyisoprene matrix" polymerization at 107°C and various exposure times. Samples were prepared by swelling of the rubber in OEA at 20°C till ultimate weight gain (36.5% vol. , over 6 h): 1 - first swelling; 2 - re-swelling after 30 days exposure

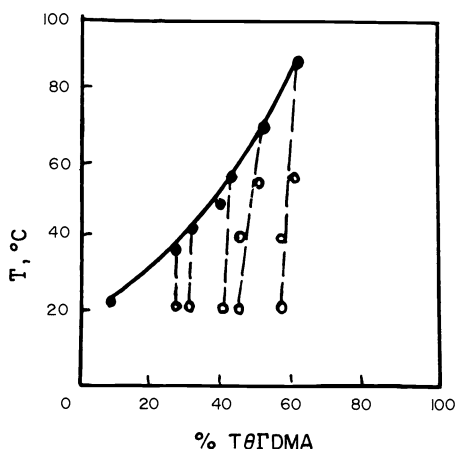


Fig. 11. Temperature dependence of adsorption (●) and desorption (○) of tetraoxyethylene dimethacrylate on the PVC

volume. While investigating polymerization of α, ω -dimethacrylate-bis-(triethyleneglycol) phthalate in the matrix of cis-polyisoprene induced by azo-bis-butyronitrile of isobutyric acid (ABN), the original velocities of polymerization have been shown to increase with the OEA in the mixture. It is interesting to note that with an increase of the OEA concentration the E_{ef} decrease and approach the value of E_{ef} of the OEA block-polymerization (55). This makes it possible to suppose that in this system under conditions investigated an increase of the phase stratification facilitates the OEA polymerization. The role of an initiator of the PO polymerization in polymer media is rather essential (80). As follows from the data shown in Fig. 12, the effective constant of the OEA transformation rate in the butadiene-nitrile rubber medium changes by several orders of magnitude as a result of substitution of initiating systems, as Altax or of Altax-dithiomorpholine mixture with, e.g., dicumyl peroxide or hexachlor-p-xylene.

It should be noted that inhibitors of radical processes (for instance, Neozone D) diminish the OEA polymerization rate. This refers both to peroxide and to non-peroxide types of initiators (79, 80).

The data presented are certainly insufficient for correct generalizations. They indicate only the fact the concepts of the mechanism of the process formulated in (25, 58, 79) require additional substantiations and probably elucidations. The following should be taken into account:

- 1) polymerization kinetics depends on the degree of the system withdrawal from the state of equilibrium (28, 74);
- 2) rates and depths of the PO polymerization depend on the nature of the components, their relation and on the conditions of the process realization. They may be higher or lower than those in the block-polymerization (64);
- 3) Chemical interaction of components (copolymerization) may take place or none of it may occur;
- 4) Chemical transformations of OEA in polymer media may be apparently realized through the stage of β -polymer (or β -copolymer) (25, 28, 30, 31);

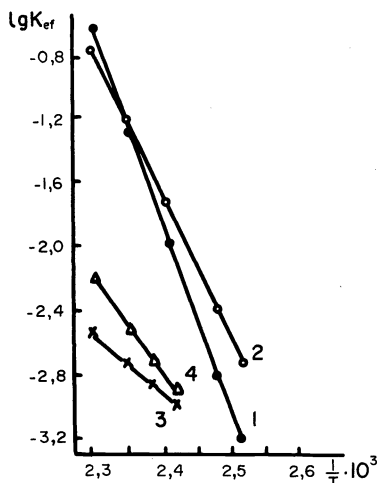


Fig. 12. Temperature dependence of effective rate constant of OEA-2 conversion (K_{ef}) during SKN-26 matrix polymerization in the presence of various initiators (OEA content 30% wt):

1 - dicumyl peroxide (0.5% wt); 2 - paraxylol hexachloride (0.75% wt); 3 - atlax (6.0% wt); 4 - atlax (4.0% wt) + dihiomorpholine (2.0% wt)

5) the field of molecular forces acting at the polymer-oligomer interface may produce an orientation effect on the liquid phase and conduce thus the structure arrangement of the cured system (62, 82).

In the last few years many papers have been published in which the properties of polymer-oligomer systems cured by different initiation methods are considered. The problems of radiation initiation of rubber-oligomer systems are studied in detail in monograph (72).

In chemical initiation employed are organic (7) and inorganic (41) peroxides, peroxide rubbers (58), oligomer mono- and semifunctional peroxides (92), activators of sulfur vulcanization (81), metal salts and oxides (45, 80) and so on.

Though the ideas on the mechanism of transformations in polymer-oligomer systems remain controversial, one may assume the following diagram of the processes in action. When in the primary polymer there are reaction groups or atoms participating in the kinetic chain transfer, two limiting versions are possible: a) under condition of the component molecular distribution PO serves for transverse cross-linking forming a sparse vulcanization lattice (very much incredible case); b) three-dimensional graft copolymerization takes place: an aggregate of a cross-linking homopolymer is chemically connected (by one or several bonds) with the polymer matrix.

When a linear polymer has no active centres participating in the chain transfer, the following limiting versions are possible: a) a cross-linked homopolymer synthesized in the process of initiated polymerization serves as an inactive or slightly active filler; b) a cross-linked homopolymer immobilizes macromolecules of a linear high polymer and a clathratized structure of the "snake in a cage" type is formed, or, if the polymer is cross-linked independently, it is "net in a net" type. Some fragments of the structures formed are presented in Fig. 13. In real systems all types of processes are likely to realize. Their relation depends on particular conditions.

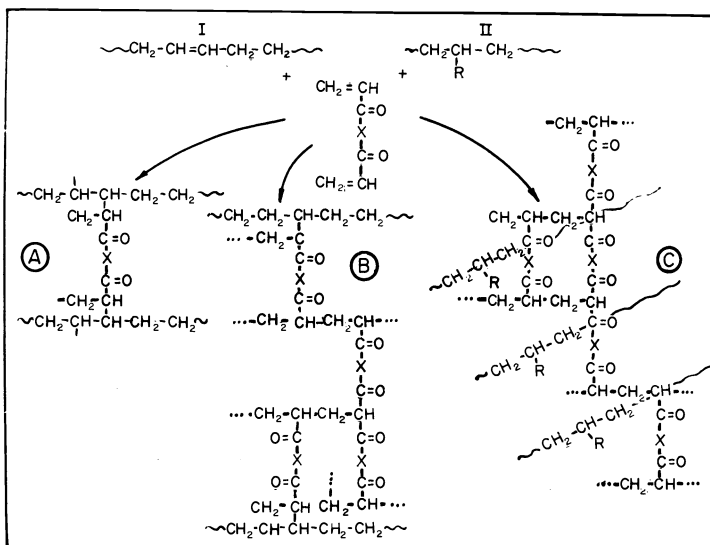


Fig. 13. A number of OEA transformations which are possible in reactive (1) and inactive (2) polymer matrix: A - cross-linking; B - three-dimensional graft polymerization; C - "snake in the cage" structure; X - oligomer block

Structure of polymer-oligomer composites

It may be taken proved (27, 29, 35) that cured polymer-oligomer composites are microheterogeneous systems with cross-linked polymers serving as a disperse phase. Though the processes of the component mixing and their curing often proceed under different conditions (and, of source, it should affect system equilibrium), fast PO gelation fixes the particle distribution laid in a visco-liquid blank. Dimensions of disperse particles in such systems and their distribution have been determined by the methods of optical, electron and X-ray spectroscopy (46-48). A comparison of distribution in visco-liquid and cured composites shows that it does not change significantly in polymerization (48).

The investigation of the structure of the radiation-cured PVC-tetra (oxyethylene) α, ω -dimethacrylate mixture made it possible (32) to reveal multiple transitions of t_g (mechanical losses) and refer them both to individual PVC and poly-(OEA) structures, and to intermediate PVC microphases, enriched with poly-(OEA) and to microphases of the three-dimensional polyesteracrylate containing PVC.

The influence of polymer on the cured OEA structure and also of oligomer on the polymer phase structure was discovered.

The IR-spectral examination of gel-fractions of the cured PVC-OEA-DOP system shows (62) that in the presence of a polymer matrix an interplanar interaction of oligomer of oligoether blocks takes place which leads to an additional ordering of the composite structure fixed by polymerization. Moreover, very interesting data have obtained in (62, 80, 82). X-ray diffraction patterns bear evidence of the fact that as a result of the OEA curing in the PVC matrix, long-range order elements appear in the system which are present neither in the initial products, not in cured ones and nor in their mechanical mixtures (62).

The results of electron-microscopic investigations of the amorphous butadiene-nitrile rubber structure have shown that industrial of OEA into them and subsequent cross-linking results in the formation of the spheroidal and fibrillar type supermolecular aggregates (80).

If the above experimental data are proved to be valid for other systems, this will indicate unambiguously that it is possible to reorganize the polymer structure in the process of modification and its fixation by three-dimensional polymerization.

In the last few years some papers have been published which indicate a possibility of regulating the structure of polymer-oligomer systems at a supermolecular level by magnetic force fields in the process of curing or by using additives of reactive SAC (82).

Properties of cured polymer-oligomer systems

Apparently, the main advantage of the "time plasticization" principle over other methods of modification of polymer systems consists in the fact that it allows simultaneous realization of several types of chemical modification: to coincide block-polymerization with cross-linking and filling. In this case the filler is introduced not a priori, but it is synthesized in the process of the system chemical transformations. The formation of finely-dispersed cross-linked aggregates bound by covalent bonds with a polymer substrate allows production of materials with a complex of properties which can be achieved by no other approaches, or it is very difficult to do it. For instance, on the basis of the "time plasticization" principle heat-resistance rubbers have been obtained which combine low hysteresis losses and high moduli, elevated hardness with strength and endurance to dynamic alternating loads. This can be explained by the fact that an active filler chemically bound with rubber strengthens the system and decelerates the destructure processes which take place under deformation. Elastic polyether bonds favour fast relaxation of a growing gap overload at the top, when it meets a cross-linked filler particle, and decrease heat build-up in the fatigue process.

The number of transverse cross-linkings, microphase structure, strength and the character of bonds at the polymer-"filler" interface and so on can be regulated by varying the oligomer chemical structure, in particular, the number of reactive centers, the length and the nature of the oligomer block.

If the account is taken of the diversity of PO structures and the following from this fact practically unlimited possibilities of modifying the properties of a polymer material, then there evidently arises a necessity of development of a substantiated approach to the choice of components.

In this connection it would be very much useful to consider the polymer-oligomer systems in terms of the colloidal chemistry. Recently such an approach has been successfully developed as applied to polymer-polymer mixtures (75) and to metal alloys. The concept on the extreme variation of properties in the system transfer from a homogeneous state to a heterogeneous one has been substantiated for limitedly compatible polymer-oligomer systems (28, 46, 59).

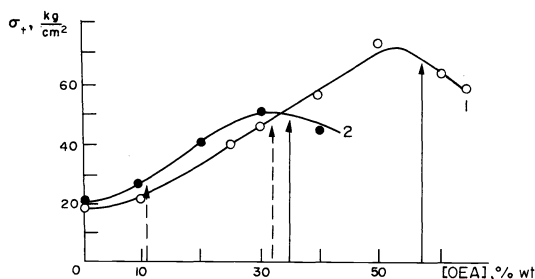


Fig. 14. σ_t versus OEA content for SKD vulcanizates: 1 - SKD + OEA-4; 2 - SKD + OEA-7; C_{cr} values at 20°C are denoted by dotted line, solid line corresponds to 150°C (vulcanization temperature)

Fig. 14 illustrates the extreme variation of the concentration dependence of the polybutadiene strength (σ_p) modified by OEA of different nature. The maximum values of σ_p practically coincide with C_{cr} of the corresponding oligomers in rubber at the vulcanization temperature. A comparison of the con-

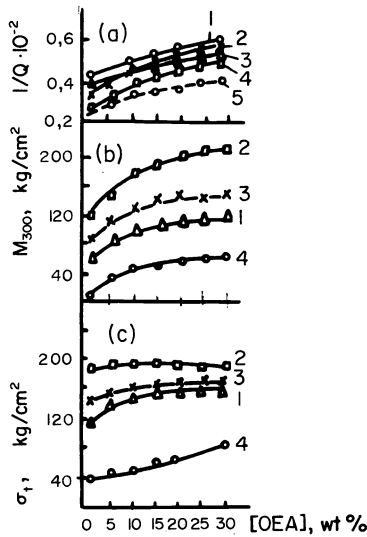


Fig. 15. Influence of OEA content on the mechanical properties $1/Q$ (a), M_{300} (b) and σ_T (c) of SKN-26 vulcanizates loaded with various fillers (45% wt):
1 - SiO_2 ; 2 - carbon black DG-100; 3 - carbon black PM-15; 4 - chalk; 5 - no filler

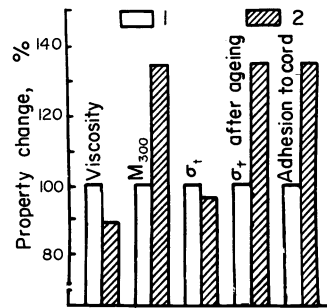


Fig. 16. Some comparable characteristics of commercial rubber compounds based on nonpolar rubber (1) and of OEA modified rubber (2)

in OEA slows down vulcanization and reduces the density of space cross-linking (58). Neozone D produces an inhibitory effect on the graft polymerization process only if the reaction is initiated by dicumyl peroxide. The initiator of the non-peroxide type (ABN, for instance) does not show any effect of an inhibitor (68). The traditional inhibitors used for stabilization of tyre rubbers (4010 A type, ED quinol) have been shown to decrease somehow the values of M_{300} (~by 10-15%) for rubbers modified by OEA, advance their relative and residual extension (~15-20%), but increase by 1.5-2 times the resistance to fatigue strength. This experimental fact proves the supposition (see in the foregoing) on the role of the microphase structure in the formation of the system properties.

In the last few years there appear papers in which the method of coefficient planning of the experiment is used for determining the optimum doses of different ingredients in multicomponent systems with PO.

For instance, in (84) variation of three factors is used (dosing of peroximon, Atlax) for developing the prescribing of rubber of the basis of chloroprene rubber which surpasses qualitatively by its technological and physical-mechanical properties the rubber without OEA, in which semiactive carbon black PGM-33 and reserpine being employed.

Fig. 16 shows comparative characteristics of one of the standard tyre rubber recipe based on a mixture of raw rubbers (SKD + BSK + SKI) and a rubber, similar to the former in composition and containing OEA, but corrected by the method of factor experiment (by varying six variables: dosing of sulfur, activator, initiator, filler, plasticizer and OEA). The complex of properties of the modified rubber is much better. Also such an important operation factor as wearability is improved (55).

Some technological properties of polymer-oligomer systems

1. Polyfunctional OEA in a number of cases turned out to be more efficient than tetrafunctional ones (see Note a) (25, 29, 45). However, due to high

Note a. According to the terminology adopted in (25), the OEA with two double bonds are tetrafunctional, i.e., in the process of polymerization each such multiple bond can give rise to two kinetic chains.

centration dependence with the results of morphological studies provides ground for a consideration that the maximum strength for these systems is achieved at a uniform distribution of polyetheracrylate particles of 0.1-1 μm in size in the polymer matrix. Such a distribution is achieved in the vicinity of the compatibility limit, when system passes from a homophase state to a heterophase one. An increase or a decrease of the oligomer concentration in mixture results in variation of the optimum distribution (it is shown in (47, 48, 76) that the size distribution depending on the nature and concentration of components may vary from 100 \AA to 15-20 μm) and in a decrease in strength.

However, this is only one side of the problem. There are other important features which define the properties of polymer-oligomer systems.

As is known (78), the optimum properties of cross-linked systems, in particular, of vulcanizers are achieved by combination of different type bonds, energetically stable transverse bonds defining the single completeness of the cross-linking, and liable bonds promoting resorption of stresses arising with the deformation of system in its local regions.

Apparently in the systems under consideration, particularly, when different PO compounds are used, the necessary complex of carbon-carbon, ether, ester and of other types of bonds is realized, which provides the required properties.

In addition to the above mentioned properties, the structure of the micro-phase as such is also very essential in the formation of properties of polymer-oligomer systems. So far no straightforward proofs have been developed about the cross-linking regularity effect inside the disperse particle on the properties of cured systems, however, a fast increase of dynamic strength of rubbers containing, besides OEA, monofunctional methacrylate derivatives as a third component (55, 56), furnish grounds to assume that the latter cause partial disintegration of the polyetheracrylate cross-linking. A certain violation of the cross-linking regularity should facilitate under cyclic stress mode resorption of the concentration of stresses. A similar effect is observed when not individual PO, but their compounds containing stiff and flexible oligomer blocks and also oligomer compounds, differing in functionality, are employed as modifiers.

And at last, the supermolecular structure of polymer-oligomer systems formed in the process of curing plays an essential role in the formation of properties of materials. This fact is evidenced by a comparison of the data on the crystallization of rubbers modified by OEA with their strength properties (79), by the results of microscopic studies with fatigue strength (80) and roentgenographic data with relaxation characteristics (62).

Therefore, the colloidal-chemical approach and the account taken for supermolecular organization of the structure formed in the process of curing of polymer-oligomer systems are probably required for predicting their properties.

The influence of the composition ingredients on the properties

The diversity of components employed in real systems and the absence of systematic investigations in this field make it so far impossible to formulate the general principles of composing recipes for obtaining mixtures with the gives properties.

The attempts, which are known (81), are interesting but they do not display all the complications arising in the systems under consideration.

It is worth mentioning some characteristic features which might be useful for making up some particular mixtures.

Fig. 15 (45) shows the values of σ_p and moduli at the 300% extension (M_{300}) of peroxide vulcanizers of SKN-26 rubber containing OEA and different type fillers. Although the degree of cross-linking increases with growth of OEA content and is independent on the filler nature p increases with the OEA concentration only in the case of inactive fillers, whereas the growth of M_{300} is independent of the type of a filler.

Fillers significantly affect the rheology of polymer-oligomer systems. For instance, at definite OEA ratios, a filler in triplex systems (SKI-OEA-carbon black), antithixotropy takes place (55).

Very contradictory is the influence of inhibitors on the properties of polymer-oligomer mixtures. An increase inaan inhibitor -hydroquinone) dose

viscosity of semifunctional oligomers there arise certain technological difficulties connected with transportation of such OEA in pipelines, with dosing, introduction into the mixture and with other processes. Therefore, besides physical and chemical reasons mentioned above, it would be very promising from the technological viewpoint to "dilute" viscous semifunctional OEA by less viscous tetra- and difunctional oligomers. The first papers in this field turned out to be very prospecting (45). The combinations of OEA with maleinate oligomers are known to be successfully used for creation of non-styrol adhesive for glass-plastics (13, 86), and their mixtures with oligoepoxides and reactive oligodienes for obtaining stable elastomers of "liquid rubbers" (87). The OEA-maleinate mixtures are also applied for PVC modification (88).

2. The capacity of OEA to increase noticeably the polymer adhesive properties is readily employed for producing valuable materials (4, 5, 89, 90). However, advances "adhesiveness" is not desirable at the stage of component mixing and formation of polymer-oligomer mixtures. To eliminate these "side" effects there exist a number of approaches available in literature (91).

3. The diversity of possibilities in principle of initiating the OEA transformation processes has been mentioned above. In practice, however, the "peroxide" initiation is best widespread. It should be noted that in some branches of industry introduction of monomer peroxides is not advantageous. Besides, the required effect is not always achieved with using individual peroxides (for instance, under conditions of inhibitory polymerization the peroxide-alternately-valent metal system is applied). And finally, the actual processes of extrusion, casting, extrusion, colandering, rolling and so on, in which OEA is used in combination with highly active initiators, can be fraught with premature cross-linking and with loss of casting properties of the system. Therefore, even though a number of papers have appeared on the use of initiators of the non-peroxide type (81), or of oligomer peroxide (92), it is better to pay attention to the development of systematic investigations in the field of polyreaction initiation in polymer-oligomer systems.

4. One of the most important virtues of the "time plasticization" principle is that it does not require any fundamental changes in the designs of mixing and processing equipment. Moreover, application of this method allows one to use efficiently the equipment traditional for this field without worsening the material properties. For instance, it has been shown in (93) that application of OEA made it possible to transfer the production of rubber mixtures on the basis of stiff nitrile rubbers from the method of open mixing (bending rolls) to that of one-stage enclosed mixing. Considerable economy has been gained both due to intensification of the mixing process and due to raising the level of manufacturing. The last is another important aspect of technological advantages of the polymer-oligomer principle. Unfortunately, there are no serious engineering and economic papers in this fields as yet.

5. Introduction of the "time plasticizer" mixture into the prescribing much extends the range of polymer compounds for multicomponent mixtures. Polymers of different nature, which have not earlier produced technically valuable mixtures, could have been "bound" now thanks to employing PO. It is this method that has been used for obtaining heat-resistant and wear-resistant covulcanizers of butadiene-nitrile and fluorine-containing rubbers (95, 99), frostproof covulcanizers of fluorine rubber and fluorinesiloxane elastomer (94), oilproof rubbers on the basis of SKEPT and different plastics - (96, 97, 98) and so on. However, the choice of components and creation of prescribings are still based on empirical approach and technological experience.

X X X

The modification of high polymers by polymerizable oligomers has thus developed into an independent scientific trend. Even though the mechanism of processes and the nature of the property variation in polymer-oligomer systems are still open to discussion, in the near future one should expect still advancing development of theoretical and applied work done in this field which would explain the mechanisms of reactions, create a theory of heterophase three-dimensional copolymerization in nonequilibrium viscous media and work out new technological procedures of obtaining polymer materials with a complex of valuable properties.

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