

Polymerization-Induced Phase Separation Using Hydrogen-Bonded Supramolecular Polymers

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ABSTRACT: The concept of polymerization-induced phase separation with hydrogen-bonded supramolecular polymers was investigated by the photopolymerization of films containing mixtures of supramolecular polymer **1a** or **1b** and varying amounts of monoacrylate and diacrylate with UV-A (320–400 nm) radiation (5 W/cm²) for 0.3 s. The extent of the phase separation after photopolymerization was determined by differential scanning calorimetry and scanning electron microscopy, which showed that film 1 containing no diacrylate is macrophase-separated, while films 2 and 3 containing 17.0 or 42.5% diacrylate are microphase-separated. Increasing the amount of diacrylates has a strong influence on the morphology development, as it decreases the length scale of the phase separation by shortening the time available before vitrification sets in—in this way decreasing the crystallinity of the supramolecular phase. Tensile tests and DMTA measurements showed that the mechanical properties of the films containing the hydrogen-bonded supramolecular polymers are comparable to those films containing covalent high molecular weight polymers.

Introduction

Supramolecular polymers are a relatively new class of polymers in which repeating units are connected by noncovalent interactions.¹ In the past decade, following the development of strong hydrogen-bonding dimers,^{2–4} several research groups have applied these dimers for the formation of hydrogen-bonded supramolecular polymers.^{5–9} Within our group, hydrogen-bonded supramolecular polymers were developed on the basis of the self-complementary quadruple hydrogen-bonding ureido-pyrimidinone group (Figure 1).^{10–13} The high dimerization constant ($6 \times 10^7 \text{ M}^{-1}$ in chloroform)^{14,15} makes it possible to obtain materials with a high degree of polymerization.

It was shown that functionalization of telechelic oligomers with ureido-pyrimidinone groups results in a spectacular improvement of the material properties.¹³ These and other supramolecular materials^{16,17} show pronounced viscoelastic behavior, and because of the reversibility of the bonds between the repeat units, they respond to environmental changes. As a result, the viscosity in bulk and in solution highly depends on temperature and concentration.¹¹

One application where the reversibility of supramolecular polymers might be advantageous is in polymerization-induced phase separation (PIPS), as schematically shown in Figure 2.¹⁸ In PIPS, a polymer is dissolved in a reactive monomer, which is subsequently polymerized to cause phase separation, resulting in two polymeric phases with certain morphology. PIPS is used to produce multiphase composite materials like polymeric dispersed liquid crystals (PDLCs)^{19–21} and high

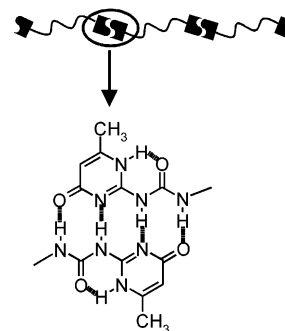


Figure 1. Self-complementary quadruple hydrogen-bonding ureido-pyrimidinone group in a supramolecular polymer.

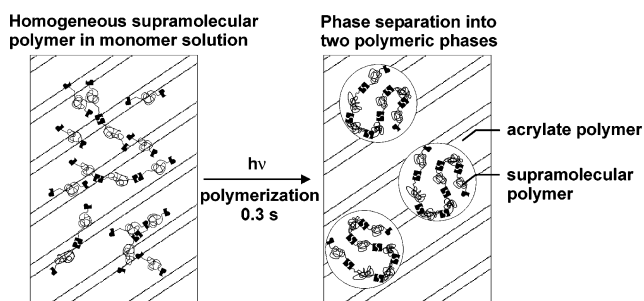


Figure 2. Schematic representation of PIPS using hydrogen-bonded supramolecular polymers.

impact polystyrene.²² By using this principle in the production of polymeric materials, the use of solvent is avoided, and it is fast and clean.²³

The rate of phase separation in PIPS is generally limited by the mobility of the dissolved polymer.^{24–27} For conventional polymers, the most important mechanism for stress relaxation is reptation, described by de Gennes²⁸ and by Doi and Edwards.^{29–32} Supramolecular polymers, however, can relax via the additional mech-

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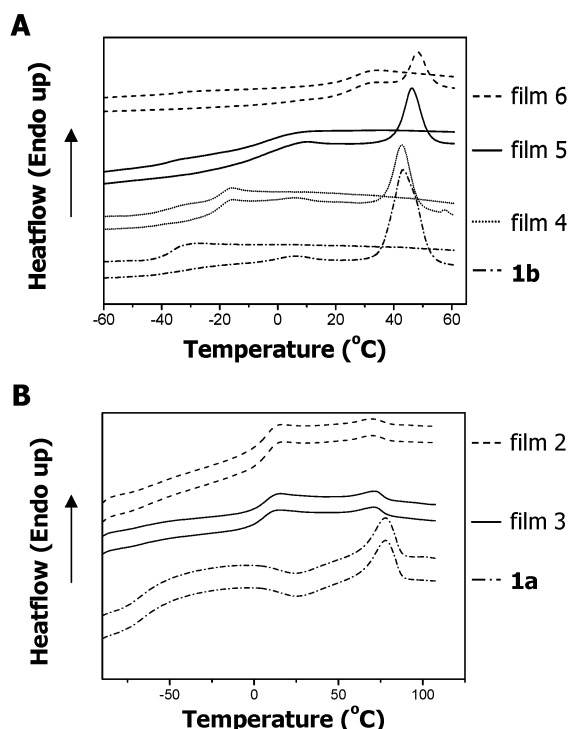


Figure 5. DSC thermograms of (A) first and second heating runs of films 4–6 and pure **1b** and (B) first and second heating runs of films 2, 3, and pure **1a**.

ing amounts of diacrylate from $\sim 2 \mu\text{m}$, to $\sim 200 \text{ nm}$, to $< 100 \text{ nm}$ in films 4, 5, and 6, respectively. This observation can be explained by the higher rate of reaction of diacrylates compared to monoacrylates, which causes an earlier onset of gelation and earlier vitrification.³⁵ Moreover, the length scale on which phase separation takes place is influenced by the time available for diffusion of the supramolecular phase before it is trapped in the acrylate network. Thus, the increasing amount of diacrylates decreases the length scale of the phase separation by shortening the time available before vitrification sets in.

Further investigation of the extent of phase separation for films 2–6 was performed by differential scanning calorimetry (DSC). In the thermograms (Figure 5) the second heating runs contain both the T_g 's of the acrylate phase and the supramolecular phase, and in the first heating runs a melting peak of the supramolecular phase is observed in all films. These melting points are similar to those of materials **1a** and **1b** with T_m 74.5 and 42.8 °C, respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that film 5, which contains no diacrylates, is macrophase-separated, while films 5 and 6 containing 17.0 and 42.5% diacrylate, respectively, are microphase-separated.

When the areas (ΔH) below the melting peak around 45 °C are compared ($\Delta H = 2.7, 6.5, 8.0$, and 32.9 J/g for films 6, 5, 4, and **1b**, respectively), it is clear that the crystallinity of the supramolecular **1b** phase decreases with increasing amount of diacrylates. The decrease in the crystallinity of the supramolecular polymer phase with increasing amounts of diacrylates confirms the observations with SEM (vide supra) that the length scale of phase separation is influenced by the amount of diacrylate.

The mechanical properties of films 1, 7, and 8 were studied. Films 7 and 8 contain a reactive urethane

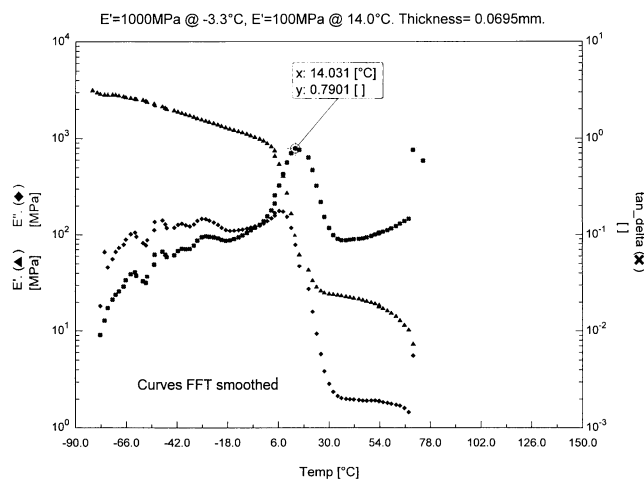


Figure 6. DMTA curves of film 1 containing **1a** measured at 1 Hz.

Table 2. DSC Results for Cured Films 2–6

film	acrylate phase				supramolecular phase			
	first heating run	second heating run	first heating run	second heating run	first heating run	second heating run	first heating run	second heating run
2	T_g	6.2 °C	T_g	6.2 °C	T_g	−62.2 °C	T_g	−62.2 °C
					T_m	71.7 °C	T_m	71.7 °C
3	T_g	6.9 °C	T_g	6.9 °C	T_g	−62.2 °C	T_g	−62.2 °C
					T_m	69.5 °C	T_m	69.5 °C
4	T_g	−20.3 °C	T_g	−20.8 °C	T_m	42.8, 6.1 °C	T_g	−33.3 °C
5	T_g	−1.5 °C	T_g	−1.5 °C	T_m	46.2 °C	T_g	−37.0 °C
6	T_g	25.9 °C	T_g	25.9 °C	T_m	48.3 °C	T_g	−33.8 °C

Table 3. DMTA and Tensile Tests on Cured Films 1, 7, and 8

film	tensile tests			DMTA	
	elongation at break (%)	tensile strength (MPa)	Young's modulus (MPa)	$T_g/\tan \delta$ (°C)	E_0 (MPa)
1	30.2	2.27	17.8	11.5	1.7
7	38.8	1.61	5.73	11.0	7.1
8	69.1	1.74	9.03	15/30	2.0

acrylate (UA) oligomer with the same molecular weight as **1a** or a high molecular weight acrylate copolymer (Acryloid), respectively. The mechanical properties of the three films were measured with dynamic mechanical thermal analysis (DMTA) and tensile tests; for the results see Table 3. A typical DMTA curve is shown in Figure 6.

From the mechanical tests, it can be concluded that films 1, 7, and 8 all have good mechanical properties despite the difference in the composition of the films. This shows that the hydrogen-bonded supramolecular polymer **1a** in film 6 behaves as a high molecular weight polymer and does not act as a low molecular weight softener, which would reduce the modulus. As expected, film 7 is not phase-separated due to the reactive end groups of the oligomers, which forms a network with acrylate phase, and this increase in cross-link density explains also the somewhat higher E_0 of film 7.

Conclusions

In summary, we have shown that the use of supramolecular polymers allows polymerization-induced phase separation (PIPS) with very short reaction times. Two separated polymer phases are formed simultaneously by performing a simple polymerization. Increasing the amount of diacrylates has a strong influence on the

morphology development, as it decreases the length scale of the phase separation by shortening the time available before vitrification sets in—in this way decreasing the crystallinity of the supramolecular phase. The mechanical properties of the films containing the supramolecular polymer are comparable to those films containing covalent high molecular weight polymers.

A study of the morphology development during PIPS has started where we are focusing on influence of the dynamic behavior of the supramolecular polymer toward the environment on the rate of phase separation and coarsening. For applications, it would be interesting to look at the possibility of self-stratification in films containing supramolecular polymers using PIPS. Although the formation of two polymeric phases in one polymerization step is advantageous, it also complicates the study of the morphology development because the phase-separation process is influenced by both the radical polymerization of the reactive solvent and the supramolecular polymerization.

Experimental Section

Synthesis of α,ω -Functionalized PolyTHF (1a). To a solution of polyTHF (**2a**) (20 g, 0.020 mol) in chloroform (150 mL), synthon (**3**)¹³ (12.31 g, 0.042 mol) and dibutyltin dilaurate (2 drops) were added. The mixture was refluxed for 3 h, resulting in a suspension. The suspension was filtered, and to the filtrate, silica and dibutyltin dilaurate (2 drops) were added. This mixture was refluxed overnight, after which the silica was filtered off. The solvent in the filtrate was removed under vacuum, and the remaining solid (white powder) was precipitated out of acetone (30 g, 95%). ¹H NMR (CDCl₃, 298 K): δ 13.1 (s, 1H, CH₃-C-NH), 11.9 (s, 1H, CH₂-O-(C=O)-NH), 10.1 (s, 1H, CH₂-NH-(C=O)-NH), 5.8 (s, 2H, CH=C-CH₃), 4.9 + 4.6 (s, 2H, NH-(C=O)-O), 4.1 (m, 4H, CH₂-O-(C=O)-NH), 3.4 (m, 64H, CH₂-O-CH₂), 3.3 (m, 4H, CH₂-NH-(C=O)-O), 3.2 (m, 4H, CH₂-NH-(C=O)-NH), 2.2 (s, 6H, CH₃-CH=C), 1.6 (m, 68H, O-CH₂-CH₂ + N-CH₂-CH₂), 1.4 (m, 4H, CH₂-CH₂-CH₂-CH₂-CH₂). ¹³C NMR (CDCl₃, 298 K): δ 173.36, 156.78, 154.92, 148.49, 106.89, 70.88, 70.82, 70.46, 64.70, 40.88, 39.84, 29.98, 29.54, 26.71, 26.43, 26.32, 26.15, 19.14. DSC (scanning rate 20 °C/min): T_m = 77.93 °C (ΔH = 12.6 J/(g °C)); T_g = -63.78 °C (ΔC_p = 0.38 J/(g °C)).

Synthesis of α,ω -Functionalized Polycarbonate (1b). To a solution of polycarbonate (**2b**) (9 g, 4.46 mmol) in chloroform (80 mL), synthon (**3**)¹³ (3.0 g, 10.2 mmol) and dibutyltin dilaurate (2 drops) were added. The mixture was refluxed during overnight, resulting in a suspension. The suspension was filtered, and to the filtrate, silica and dibutyltin dilaurate (2 drops) were added. This mixture was refluxed overnight, after which the silica was filtered off. The solvent in the filtrate was removed under vacuum, yielding a solid polymer film (9.9 g, 85%). ¹H NMR (CDCl₃, 298 K): δ 13.1 (s, 1H, CH₃-C-NH), 11.9 (s, 1H, CH₂-NH-(C=O)-NH), 10.1 (s, 1H, CH₂-NH-(C=O)-NH), 5.8 (s, 2H, CH=C-CH₃), 4.9 + 4.6 (s, 2H, NH-(C=O)-O), 4.1–3.9 (m, 30H, CH₂-O-(C=O)-O), 3.3 (m, 4H, CH₂-NH-(C=O)-O), 3.2 (s, 1H, CH₂-NH-(C=O)-NH), 2.2 (s, 6H, CH₃-CH=C), 1.6–1.7 (m, 34H, CH₂-CH₂-O-(C=O)-O + N-CH₂-CH₂), 1.5–1.4 (m, 34H, CH₂-CH₂-CH₂-CH₂-O-(C=O)-O + CH₂-CH₂-CH₂-CH₂-CH₂). ¹³C NMR (CDCl₃, 298 K): δ 173.31, 156.95, 156.74, 154.89, 148.48, 106.86, 70.79 (m), 64.67, 40.85, 39.95, 39.80, 29.96, 29.51, 26.70 (m), 19.14. DSC (scanning rate 20 °C/min): T_m = 43.1 °C (ΔH = 32.9 J/(g °C)), 5.6 °C (ΔH = 2.2 J/(g °C)); T_g = -36.99 °C (ΔC_p = 0.58 J/(g °C)).

UV-Curing Procedure. A typical UV-curable solution consists of 25–30 wt % of hydrogen-bonded polymer, 60 wt % of monoacrylate, 10–15 wt % of diacrylate, and 1% of photoinitiator (Irgacure 907). In an oven, this solution is heated at 80 °C until it is homogeneous. Then a 100 μ m film is (mechanically) drawn on a glass substrate and UV-cured under nitrogen with a Fusion F600 D-Bulb (I_0 = 5 W/cm²) with a

belt speed of 10.4 m/min, which is equivalent to an irradiation time of 0.3 s.

Characterization. The differential scanning calorimetry thermograms for films 1–3, 7, and 8 and polymers **1a** and **1b** were recorded on a Perkin-Elmer Pyris-1 under a nitrogen atmosphere with heating and cooling rates of 20 °C min⁻¹. Solution ¹H NMR and ¹³C NMR spectra were recorded on a Varian Gemini 300 or a Bruker AC 400 with TMS as internal reference. SEM studies on gold-sputtered samples were performed on a JEOL JSM-840A microscope at an acceleration voltage of 10 kV. Before the SEM measurements the samples were immersed for 10 min in chloroform, after which the samples were dried in the air overnight.

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