Spin and lattice dynamics in multiferroic BiFeO$_3$

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BiFeO$_3$ is a room temperature multiferroic material with great application potentials. The G-type antiferromagnetic (AFM) order in this material is weakly coupled to the ferroelectric polar order, resulting in a cycloid spin structure with long wavelength modulations ($\sim 62$ nm). There has also been growing interest on couplings between the dynamical properties as well. For example, a “magneto-optical” resonance has been proposed theoretically, and extra modes below the lowest lying optic phonon energies have been observed in Raman measurements. A full understanding of both the spin and lattice dynamics in BiFeO$_3$ is highly desired.

With inelastic neutron scattering, we have been able to systematically map out the complete three-dimensional spin-waves in this system. In addition, low energy ($\sim<$20 meV) phonons have also been studied. Here we would like to present our work on both the magnetic and lattice dynamics in this system for a large temperature range between 10K and 700K.

The sample being used is a cylindrical single crystal sample which weighs about 3.5 g. The experiments have been performed using ARCS and HYSPEC time-of-flight spectrometers at SNS. The magnetic excitations are measured on ARCS with incident energies of 40 and 120 meV to cover the full dispersion. The low energy phonons are measured on HYSPEC with incident energy of 20 meV.

In Fig.1, magnetic excitations measured along different crystallographic directions are shown. At low temperatures, the spin-waves are well-defined coherent modes. We can use a simple Heisenberg spin Hamiltonian, taking into account the first, second and third nearest neighbor exchange interactions ($J_1$, $J_2$, and $J_3$) to model the spin-waves. The exchange parameters can be obtained from the modeling. Warming up the sample resulting in a reduction of the effective exchange parameter and the life-time of the spin-
wave excitations. When the system is heated above the Neel temperature ($T_N=640$ K), the spin-waves become heavily damped and broad in space as well. In addition, our analysis on the the magnetic form factor suggests that a strong hybridization between the Fe and O orbitals needs to be taken into account when the magnetic response is considered. Even as a good insulator, the electrons responsible for the magnetic moments are not restricted at the Fe sites, and the local magnetic moment could extend well beyond the typical ionic radius of Fe$^{3+}$ into the adjacent O$^2-$ sites.

We were also able to measure low energy phonons in BiFeO$_3$. The phonon excitations in different zones are summarized in Fig.2. The three acoustic phonon modes (TA$_1$, propagating along [010], polarized along [100]; TA$_2$, propagating along [1,-1,0], polarized along [110]; and LA, propagating along [100], polarized along [100]), and the lowest lying optic modes are mapped around a number of Bragg peaks. The measured phonon dispersions and the intensities after removing the Bose-factor do not show any significant variation with temperature within measurement errors. A clear broadening of the transverse acoustic mode is observed near the zone-boundary when heating toward $T_N$, suggesting a possible coupling between the lattice dynamics and the antiferromagnetic order in the system.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Financial support from Office of Basic Energy Sciences, U.S. Department of Energy under contract No. DE-AC02-98CH10886 and DE-AC02-05CH11231; the Scientific User Facilities Division, Office of Basic Energy Sciences, U.S. Department of Energy; and the Mitsubishi Foundation are acknowledged.

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