Development and Testing of Thermosensitive Poly(NIPAm-AA)/Nano-SiO_2 Composite Blocking Agent for Shale Gas Drilling Operations

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ABSTRACT

Nanotechnology has already contributed significantly to technological advances in energy industry and has the potential to revolutionize the drilling industry. Traditional blocking agents are difficult to form effective mud cake to prevent liquid penetration due to extremely low permeability and tiny pore throat of shales, while nanoscale particles can block shale pore and throat to prevent liquid into formation, thus maintaining wellbore stability and protecting the reservoir. The surface of nano SiO_2 particles was modified by silane coupling agent KH570 under ultrasound to introduce vinyl functional group. Through the radical graft copolymerization of thermosensitive monomer N-isopropylacrylamide (NIPAm) and hydrophilic monomer acrylic acid (AA) onto the modified surface of SiO_2 nano particles at 80℃, a series of thermosensitive poly(NIPAm-AA)/nano-SiO_2 composite blocking agents with different lower critical solution temperature (LCST) values were prepared by adjusting the mole ratio between NIPAm and AA and were characterized by FT-IR, TEM and TG. The temperature response behavior was studied by light transmittance test and the sealing performance was studied by the pressure transmission test with Longmaxi Formation shale samples. Laboratory investigation showed that the blocking agents with sensitive temperature response behavior had obvious LCST value which arises with the increase of hydrophilic monomer AA. If the temperature was higher than the LCST value of the products the blocking agents played a dual role of physical plugging and chemical inhibition, slowing down pressure transmission remarkably. The surface of shale sealed by the new products presented a hydrophobic property, completely cutting off the water invasion.

Keywords: nanocomposite, shale gas, thermosensitive intelligent polymer, drilling fluid, wellbore stability

1 INTRODUCTION

Shale gas formation is mainly composed of hard brittle shale, mainly illite and illite smectite mixed layer. For hard brittle shales, pore pressure transmission is the primary cause of wellbore instability. Therefore, the key to maintain wellbore stability is to prevent the transmission of pore pressure [1]. In order to prevent the transmission of pore pressure, an effective sealing of the micropore and microfissure is required. The surface of nano SiO_2 particles was modified by silane coupling agent KH570 under ultrasound to introduce vinyl functional group. Then the thermo-sensitive intelligent polymer NIPAm was modified to the surface of SiO_2 nanoparticles, and got thermo-sensitive smart nanoparticles. With the change of temperature, the hydrophilicity and hydrophobicity of nanoparticles surface will change accordingly. Moreover, we can adjust the phase transition temperature of NIPAm by the introduction of hydrophilic monomer and hydrophobic monomer, getting intelligent nanoparticles with different phase transition temperature to adapt to shale formations of different temperature.

2 SYNTHESIS OF THERMO-SENSITIVE NANO PLUGGING AGENT

In brief, 16.23 mmol SiO_2 nanoparticles and 1.02 mmol KH570 were dissolved into 60 mL isopropanol dispersing medium, and adjusted pH value to 7 by adding 1 mol/L NaOH. Then the mixture was ultrasonically dispersed for 30 min. After the above steps, this mixed solution was stirred vigorously and heated up to 85ºC, polymerized for 1.5 hours under consecutive ultrasonic shaking. The obtained product was centrifuged at 10000 r/min for 30 min and was washed several times by absolute ethyl alcohol to eliminate the unreacted monomer. After centrifugation, the sedimentation was collected, dried at 60ºC, and ground to fine powders. The product was abbreviated as KH570-nano-SiO_2. NIPAm and AA in a certain mole ratio (no AA, 90/10, 80/20, 70/30) were dissolved into the mixed solvent of H_2O/THF, with the volume ratio of H_2O/THF to be 2:1, a certain amount of KH570-nano-SiO_2 nanoparticles were also added. Then the mixture was ultrasonically dispersed for 30 min. A certain amount of $K_2S_2O_8$ was added dropwise and heated up to 80ºC and deoxygenated with N_2 for 9 hours. The obtained product was centrifuged at 10000 r/min for 30 min and was washed several times by absolute ethyl alcohol to eliminate the unreacted monomer. After centrifugation, the sedimentation was collected, dried at 90ºC, and ground to fine powders for characterization. The product was abbreviated as SD-SEAL.

3 CHARACTERIZATION AND PROPERTISE

The molecular structure of SD-SEAL was characterized by infrared spectra which were recorded by a Nicolet 6,700 FT-IR spectrometer (NEXUS, USA), scanning from 400 to 4,000 cm^{-1} with a resolution of 4 cm^{-1} in transmission by using KBr pellets. The KBr pellets were prepared by

pressing mixtures of 1 mg of powder SD-SEAL and 100 mg of KBr. Transmission electron microscopy (TEM) measurements were acquired with the JEM-2100UHR electron microscope at an accelerating voltage of 200 kV and equipped with a Gatan-832 CCD digital camera. Sample dispersions in water were dropped onto the carbon-coated copper grids and dried in air. Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) measurements were acquired with the Hitachi S-4800 field emission scanning electron microscope (Japan). Thermo gravimetric analysis (TGA) of the SD-SEAL was performed on a SDT Q600 instrument (TA Instrument, USA). The sample was heated at a rate of 20ºC/min in nitrogen flow of 50 mL/min.

3.1 FT-IR

The FT-IR spectra of SiO_2 nanoparticles and KH570-nano-SiO_2 nanoparticles are shown in Fig. 1(a) and (b). The absorption band at 3,460 cm^{-1} was the associating vibration band of silanol groups and hydrogen bond indicating that there are a lot of OH- on the surface of SiO_2 nanoparticles. The wide absorption band at 3100-3450 cm^{-1} significantly weakened after the surface modification of SiO_2 nanoparticles, The new absorption bands at 2920 and 2851 cm^{-1} are the antisymmetric stretching vibration bands of the methyl and methylene from KH570, 1220 cm^{-1} is the vibration band of ester from KH570. 1108 cm^{-1} and 492 cm^{-1} are the stretching vibration band and bending vibration band of Si-O-Si, indicating that the condensation reaction between SiO_2 nanoparticles and silane coupling agent occurred, silane coupling agent was successfully grafted onto the surface of SiO_2 nanoparticles.

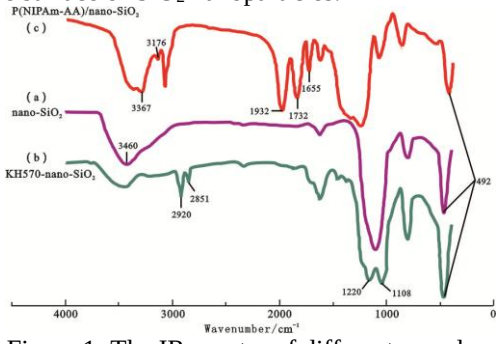
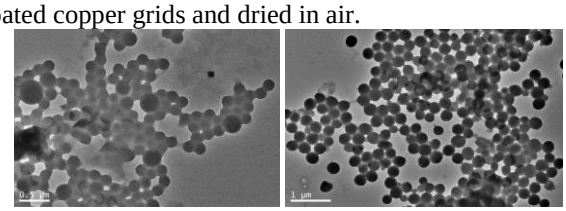


Figure 1: The IR spectra of different samples.

The FT-IR spectra of thermo-sensitive P(NIPAm-AA)/nano-SiO_2 is shown in Fig. 1(c). For P(NIPAm-AA)/nano-SiO_2, except for characteristic peaks from KH570-nano-SiO_2, the absorption bands at 3,367 and 3,176 cm^{-1} are N-H bond stretching vibration and absorption peaks. 1,742 cm^{-1} and 1,655cm^{-1} are the characteristic absorption peaks of amide I (C-O bond) and amide Ⅱ (N-H bond). 1,932 cm^{-1} is the association absorption peak of –COOH. Since the product was extracted with acetone, the homopolymers of AA and NIPAm were not included in the product, but the characteristic absorption bands of NIPAm AA and KH570-nano-SiO_2 are obviously observed in the FT-IR spectra. So there are chemical bonds between KH570-nano-SiO_2 and P(NIPAm-AA) polymer chains rather than a simple physical compound. Namely, under the reaction conditions copolymerization reaction took place among KH570-nano-SiO_2 nanoparticles, AA and NIPAm.

3.2 TEM

In order to remove the electrolyte ions of product, we took a small amount of KH570-nano-SiO_2, thermo-sensitive nano plugging agent SD-SEAL in dialysis bag for dialysis. Sample dispersions in water were dropped onto the carbon-coated copper grids and dried in air.



(a) KH570-nano-SiO_2 (b) SD-SEAL

Fig. 2. The TEM image of different samples.

The TEM image of KH570-nano-SiO_2 nanoparticles is presented in Fig. 2(a). KH570-nano-SiO_2 is a hydrophobic nanoparticles, which has poor dispersion in aqueous solution. Irregular shape, uneven particle size, and sticky agglomeration was observed. The TEM image of SD-SEAL is presented in Fig. 2(b). SD-SEAL has good dispersion in aqueous solution with regular shape (mainly spherical) and uniform particle size (about 250 nm). Black spheres are visible in the middle of the SD-DEAL particles, and the surface is covered with a thick gray polymer shell, indicating that thermo-sensitive polymer chain P(NIPAm-AA) had been successfully coated on the surface of KH570-nano-SiO_2 nanoparticles and a product with core-shell structure was obtained.

3.3 TGA

The thermal decomposition behaviors of SD-SEALwere studied by TGA (Fig. 3). The mass loss curve indicated two major stages. The first stage of mass loss occurs around 200 ℃ corresponding the evaporation of a small amount of adsorbed water and solvent. The second stage is the decomposition of SD-SEALstructures around 380 ℃, indicating that the newly-synthesized thermo-sensitive P(NIPAm-AA)/nano-SiO_2 nanoparticles are high temperature resistant.

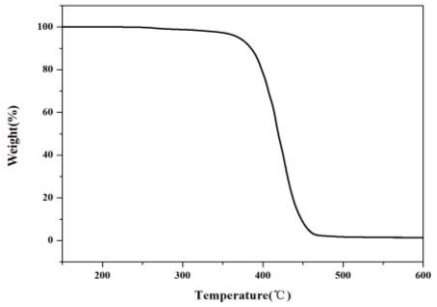


Fig. 3. The TG curves of SD-SEAL.

3.4 Temperature responsive behaviors

There are a lot of methods to measure the temperature sensitivity of smart polymer. Determining the transmittance of the polymer at different temperatures is the most simple and common method [2]. When the outside temperature is lower than its LCST value, the smart polymer has a strong hydrophilic property, its water solution is almost transparent, and the transmittance is high. However, when the outside temperature is higher than its LCST value, the hydrophilicity of smart polymer will be changed into hydrophobicity. At this time, micro phase separation will take place, and turbidity will been seen in the mixture, the transmittance is almost zero. Protract the curve of transmittance as a function of temperature, the temperature value corresponding to the inflection point of the curve is the LCST value of the polymer. The temperature responsive behavior of thermo-sensitive nano polymer microspheres intelligent plugging agents with different LCST values were determined by UV VIS spectrophotometer (UV-1,750, SHIMADZU International Trading Co., Ltd.). Laboratory investigation (Fig. 4) showed that SD-SEAL with sensitive temperature response behavior had obvious LCST values, which increase with the increase of hydrophilic monomer AA. Different plugging agents corresponding to NIPAm and AA in a certain mole ratio (no AA, 90/10, 80/20, 70/30) had different LCST values corresponding to 53°C, 63°C, 81°C, 93°C.

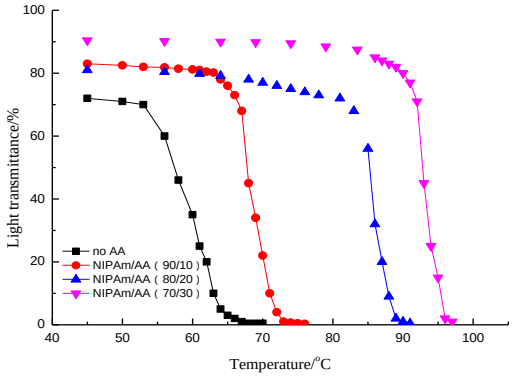


Fig. 4. Transmittance as a function of temperature for nano plugging agent.

The main driving force for the phase transition of thermo-sensitive nano sealing agents in aqueous solution is the hydrogen bond effect and hydrophobic effect. When temperature was lower than its LCST value, SD-SEAL had a high solubility in water, due to the more polar groups (-CONH- of NIPAm and -COOH of AA) on the molecular chain. These polar groups interact with the surrounding water molecules to form strong hydrogen bonds. Because of the effect of hydrogen bond and Van der Waals' force, the water molecules around the macromolecular chain would form solvation shell which was connected by hydrogen bond and its ordering degree was higher. So that SD-SEAL could be dissolved in water, and the molecular chain could be stretched and linear in water, showing the hydrophilic properties of the whole molecule. But when the solution temperature was above its LCST value, the hydrogen bonds formed between polar groups and water molecules were destroyed, also the solvation layers of the hydrophobic parts of the molecular chain were destroyed, leading an entropy increase of the dispersion system. The hydrophobic association of non-polar group isopropyl was dominant, showing hydrophobic properties of the whole molecule. Water molecules were expelled from the solvation layers causing phase transition. Therefore, with the increase of temperature the regularity of hydrogen bonds was destroyed, the molecules were changed from hydrophilic to hydrophobic [3].

3.5 Sealing performance evaluation

The pore pressure transmission test was used to measure the physical sealing performance by SD-SEAL nanoparticles on shale permeability using shale hydration measuring (SHM) device shown in Fig. 5 [4, 5]. During pore pressure transmission test, shale cores were subjected to hydraulic gradients when exposing to upstream and downstream fluids. Confining pressure and axial pressure were 5 MPa, upstream pressure was 2.1 MPa and initial downstream pressure was 1.0 MPa. Pore pressure can be tested by testing the variation of downstream pressure. Permeability of shale cores can be calculated using formula (1).

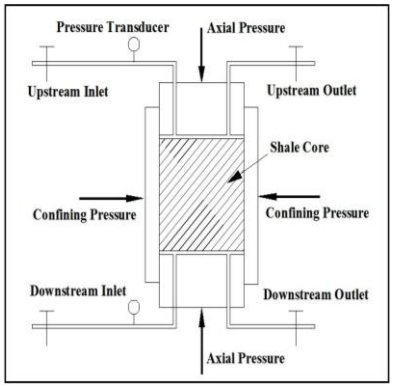
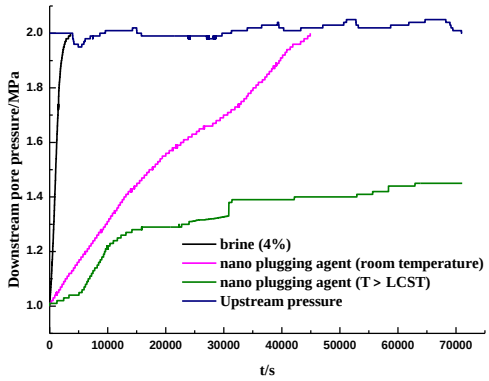


Fig. 5. Shale pressure penetration test apparatus schematic (Xu et al., 2005)

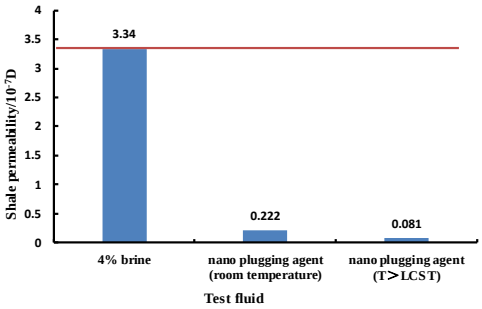
$$K = \frac{\mu\beta VL}{A}\frac{\ln\left(\frac{P_m - P_o}{P_m - P(L,t_2)}\right) - \ln\left(\frac{P_m - P_o}{P_m - P(L,t_1)}\right)}{t_2 - t_1} \quad (1)$$

Where, K is the permeability of shale cores, μm^2; μ is the viscosity of fluids, mPa s; β is the static compression ratio of fluids, MPa^{-1}; V is the enclosed volume of downstream fluids, cm^3; L is the length of shale cores, cm; A is the cross-sectional area, cm^2; t is total experimental time, s; P_m is the upstream pressure, MPa; P_o is the pore pressure, MPa; P(L, t) is the real-time downstream pressure, MPa.

During the pore pressure transmission tests, the downstream fluid was 4wt% sodium chloride solution, and the upstream fluids were 4wt% sodium chloride solution, or 4wt% sodium chloride solution with 2wt% SD-SEAL. The sealing performance of SD-SEAL was tested at room temperature and temperature above its LCST value (Fig. 6).



(a) Pore pressure transmission test curves



(b) shale permeability

Fig. 6. Pressure transmission test of thermo-sensitive nano plugging agent

As can be seen in Fig. 6, the pressure transmission of brine was fast, and 6.5 min later the downstream pressure was almost equivalent to the upstream pressure. At room temperature, the thermo-sensitive nano plugging agent slowed down pressure transmission, reduced shale permeability remarkably. Under the action of pressure, nano particles were pressed into the micro pores and micro fractures of shale surface forming physical sealing layers. The shale permeability was reduced from 3.34×10^{-7} μm^2 to 0.222×10^{-7} μm^2. When the temperature is above its LCST value, the downstream pressure changed less, 4 hours later the pressure transmission curve was close to horizontal line after 4 hours. The effect of SD-SEAL slowing down pressure transmission and reducing shale permeability was much better. At this moment, the thermo-sensitive polymer of SD-SEAL surface was changed from hydrophilic to hydrophobic. A hydrophobic layer was formed on the shale surface having the effect of chemical inhibition. The shale permeability was reduced from 3.34×10^{-7} μm^2 to 0.081×10^{-7} μm^2. Therefore, when the temperature was higher than its LCST value, SD-SEAL played a dual role of physical plugging and chemical inhibition, which greatly improved the stability of shale.

3.6 Wettability tests

According to the wettability test results (Fig. 7), the surface of shale was complete water wetting before sealing. At room temperature the surface of shale was hydrophilic after sealing, the wetting angle was 40°. When the temperature was higher than its LCST value the surface of shale was hydrophobic, the wetting angle was 125°. Wettability tests further verified the results of pore pressure transmission tests.

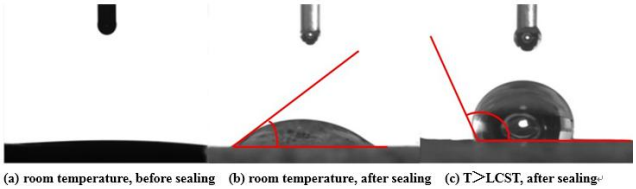


Fig. 7. Wettability test of sealing surface of shale

4 CONCLUSIONS

The surface of nano SiO_2 particles was modified by silane coupling agent KH570 under ultrasound to introduce vinyl functional group. Furthermore, through the radical graft copolymerization of thermo-sensitive monomer NIPAm and hydrophilic monomer AA onto the surface of KH570-nano-SiO_2 nanoparticles, a series of thermo-sensitive intelligent plugging agents SD-SEAL with different LCST values were prepared by adjusting the mole ratio between NIPAm and AA. SD-SEAL with sensitive temperature response behavior had obvious LCST value which arises with the increase of hydrophilic monomer AA. Different plugging agents corresponding to NIPAm and AA in a certain mole ratio (no AA, 90/10, 80/20, 70/30) had different LCST values corresponding to 53°C, 63°C, 81°C, 93°C. When the temperature was higher than its LCST value, SD-SEAL played a dual role of physical plugging and chemical inhibition, slowed down pressure transmission and reduced shale permeability remarkably, which greatly improved the stability of shale.

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