The structure of the C₄ cluster radical

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(Received 9 November 1990; accepted 10 December 1990)

Within the family of small carbon clusters, C₄ has received a particularly notable amount of attention. Beginning with the extended Hückel calculations of Pitzer and Clementi in 1958, many ab initio calculations have addressed the structures and energetics of the two most stable isomers. The most sophisticated calculations now agree that the bicyclic rhombus (1A₂) structure and the linear triplet (3Σ⁻) structures are approximately isoenergetic.

Prior to 1988, the only experimental information available for C₄ consisted of an EPR and optical study of triplet C₄ isolated in rare gas matrices. However, four important experiments have appeared in the past two years. Yang et al. have measured the photoelectron spectrum of C₄ and have found evidence for the linear triplet isomer. Algranati et al. have reported the observation of the rhombic isomer in a Coulomb explosion experiment of photodetached C₄. Shen and Graham reported a definitive assignment of the ν₃(σ₂) vibration of the triplet isomer in a matrix infrared experiment. The most surprising new result is that of Cheung and Graham, who presented evidence from new EPR measurements that the triplet state of C₄ is actually slightly bent. This is not supported by any of the ab initio calculations.

In this letter, we report the measurement of the ν₃(σ₂) fundamental vibration–rotation band of jet-cooled 3Σ⁻ C₄ through diode laser absorption spectroscopy. In this first high resolution study of the C₄ cluster, we find no evidence for nonlinearity.

The diode laser apparatus used in recent studies of C₃ (Ref. 19), C₇ (Refs. 20 and 21), and C₉ (Ref. 22) has been described in several recent publications. In brief, carbon clusters are generated by KrF excimer laser ablation of a rotating, translating graphite rod placed in the throat of a pulsed, planar, argon jet. The expanding carrier gas/carbon cluster mixture intersects 10 passes of a diode laser beam over a 15 μs time interval. The diode laser is focused onto a HgCdTe detector and the diode laser power is monitored by gated integration of the preamplified, filtered detector output. The diode laser is stepped in ca. 20 MHz frequency intervals every 80–100 shots, and the absorption signal is averaged over a 300 shot time constant. Immediately following the measurement of an absorption line, absolute and relative frequency calibrations are performed by measuring the absorption spectrum of NH₃ or H₂O and the fringe spectrum of an air-spaced, temperature-stabilized germanium etalon. The measurements have a frequency precision of ca. 0.002 cm⁻¹.

Guided by the IR spectrum of matrix-isolated C₄ reported by Shen and Graham, much of the region between 1540–1560 cm⁻¹ was searched. Twelve rovibrational lines assignable to a single vibrational band of a linear triplet molecule were observed. The calculated stick spectrum, along with typical data, are presented in Fig. 1. The frequencies and their respective assignments are presented in Table I. Derived spectroscopic constants and relevant ab initio predictions are presented in Table II. The band was assigned to C₄ based on the following: 1) the fitted spectroscopic constants are in excellent agreement with theory; 2) the measured band origin is in excellent agreement with both theory and matrix data (corrected for a matrix shift); 3) the chemistry of this absorber with respect to added impurities in the Ar carrier gas is consistent with that of other bare carbon clusters.

The lowest state of linear C₄ is 3Σ⁻; consequently, except for the lowest J states, each rovibrational transition should actually be a sum of three separate transitions corresponding to J=N+1, N, and N−1 states, where N is the rotational quantum number, J is the spin plus rotation quantum number, and 1 is the electron spin (S) for a triplet molecule. The magnitude of the triplet splitting will be determined by the spin–rotation constant (γ) and the spin–spin constant (δ). The values of these terms have been measured by Graham et al. to be 0.0006(2) cm⁻¹ and 0.128(3) cm⁻¹, respectively. Assuming similar upper and lower state spin splitting constants, only the R(2), P(2) and P(4) splittings are calculated to be greater than the resolution of our spectrometer (ca. 100 MHz). Only in the case of the P(4) transition was our sensitivity sufficient to detect separated spin components, and this partially resolved transition is shown in Fig. 1. Although no components of either the R(0) or P(2) lines were observed, the measured spin splitting of the P(4) line is sufficient for unambiguous assignment of the spectrum.

A further test of the open shell nature of this cluster was done by measuring the effect of a 100–200 G (inhomogeneous) magnetic field on the P(6) absorption line. The P(6) line was observed to broaden from a zero-field linewidth of 120 MHz to about 200 MHz in the presence of the field.

Since spin splittings were observed for only one rovibrational transition, the rotational constants B*, B', D', and the band origin ν₃ were extracted by a least squares fit of the center frequency of the observed transitions to the energy expression

\[ E_{\text{avr}} = \nu + 1/2 \nu_3 + B_e(N(N+1)) - D_g(N(N+1))^2. \]  

(1)

The ground-state centrifugal distortion constant D* was not statistically significant, and thus was fixed at 0.0 for the final fit. For the P(4) line, splittings were calculated from the Schlapp expressions for a 3Σ⁻ molecule

\[ E_{\text{avr}}(J=N+1) = E_{\nu_3} - [2\lambda(N+1)/2(N+3)] + \gamma(N+1). \]  

(2)
Fig. 1. Fitted rovibrational stick spectrum and experimental data of the $v_4(\sigma_g)$ antisymmetric stretch fundamental of the $\Sigma_g^+$ isomer of C$_4$. The rotational temperature of C$_4$ is estimated to be near 30 K.

$E_{v\nu}(J=N) = E_{\nu\nu}$ (3)

$E_{v\nu}(J=N - 1) = E_{\nu\nu} - [2\Delta N/(2N - 1)] - \gamma N$ (4)

with spin splitting parameters taken from Ref. 14. The deviations of the calculated from the observed transitions presented in Table I show a systematically larger error for low N. This is most likely due to a broadening of the low N lines from unresolved spin multiplets.

Is the triplet form of C$_4$ linear?

Cheung and Graham$^{17}$ recently proposed that triplet C$_4$ is actually slightly bent, at least when isolated in an argon matrix at 12 K. This conclusion was reached on the basis of resolving doublet structures in the EPR spectrum of $^{12}$C$_4$, which were interpreted as evidence of inequivalent x and y axes in the molecule. Experiments were conducted to test for inequivalent matrix sites and H atom interactions, and it was concluded that neither phenomena was the cause for the splitting.

Table I. Observed frequencies (cm$^{-1}$) assigned to the $v_4(\sigma_g)$ antisymmetric stretch fundamental of C$_4$. The standard deviation of the fit was 0.0036 cm$^{-1}$. Parenthetical values are calculated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>R(N)</th>
<th>obs-calc (x 10$^{-3}$)</th>
<th>P(N)</th>
<th>obs-calc (x 10$^{-3}$)</th>
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<td>-3.7</td>
<td>(1548.2740)</td>
<td>-3.7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>1553.7153</td>
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We find no evidence for a bent structure in the present study, and, indeed, the results presented here strongly support ab initio predictions of a linear, cumulenic cluster with a $\Sigma_g^+$ ground state. Although it is not possible to completely rule out a bent structure from these experiments, it is possible to place an upper limit on how bent the cluster can be. If C$_4$ were bent by greater than about 6°, the K = 1 + 1 transition would originate less than 40 cm$^{-1}$ above the ground state, resulting in a second set of P- and R-branch transitions slightly displaced from those reported in Table I. The strongest of these transitions would be observable with a signal to noise of at least 3 to 1. Scans which were sufficiently thorough to detect such transitions were performed through the frequency region 1540–1560 cm$^{-1}$, and no lines other than those listed in Table I were observed. It thus seems likely that the nonlinearity of triplet C$_4$ reported by Cheung and Graham is due to the matrix environment. Cheung and Graham do point out that other triplet radicals, notably SiCO and SiNN,$^{24}$ are bent in an argon matrix while the unperturbed, gas phase structure is linear.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by grants from the NASA Innovative Science Grants Program (Grant No. NAGW.1022) and by the ONR Cluster Program (Grant No. N004-90-J-1368). J.R.H. is supported by the NASA SETI foundation. We thank Dr. Jan Martin for sending us his results prior to publication. We would also like to thank Dr. Sherwood Chang and Dr. Jill Tartar for their continued interest in this project.

1For an excellent review on this subject, see W. Weltner, Jr. and R. J. Van Zee, Chem. Rev. 89, 1713 (1989).
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Letters to the Editor