High-resolution soft x-ray photoelectron study of density of states and thermoelectric properties of the Heusler-type alloys (Fe$_{2.3}$V$_{1.3}$)$_{100-y}$Al$_y$


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I. INTRODUCTION

The Heusler-type ($L_2_1$-type) intermetallic compound Fe$_2$VAl and related off-stoichiometric alloys, such as (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-y}$Al$_y$ and Fe$_{2-x}$V$_{1+y}$Al, have attracted much attention because of their fascinating electrical, magnetic, and transport properties from not only interest in basic science but also potential application for thermoelectric materials.$^{1-4}$ The stoichiometric compound Fe$_2$VAl shows a semiconductor-like resistivity behavior over a wide temperature range between 2 K and 1200 K, the enhancement of the effective electron mass at low temperatures, and a marginally magnetic nature between the ferromagnetic and nonmagnetic (or paramagnetic) states, which is reminiscent of the heavy fermion system.$^{1,12}$ On the other hand, the off-stoichiometric alloys exhibit remarkable enhancement of their Seebeck coefficient (thermoelectric power).$^{3,5}$

Most band structure calculations have predicted that Fe$_2$VAl is a nonmagnetic semimetal with a pronounced pseudogap of 0.5 eV width right at the Fermi level $E_F$. The semimetallic electronic structure has been supported indirectly by a nuclear magnetic resonance study, revealing a semiconducting gap of 0.27 eV at high temperatures and a low density of carriers,$^{13}$ and by an optical conductivity measurement, indicating a 0.2 eV wide optical gap with a small Drude-like contribution for Fe$_2$VAl.$^{14}$ The density of carriers estimated from the optical conductivity data is consistent with the results of the Hall effect measurement.$^{15}$ On the basis of the predicted semimetallic band structure, the origin of the fascinating low-temperature properties of Fe$_2$VAl has been discussed in terms of the spin fluctuations$^{1,6,7}$ or the excitonic correlations.$^8$

The enhancement of the Seebeck coefficient in (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-y}$Al$_y$ has been qualitatively explained also in terms of the semimetallic band structure predicted for Fe$_2$VAl in a rigid-band picture,$^3$ but not in Fe$_{2-x}$V$_{1+y}$Al.$^5$ Since the Seebeck coefficient $S$ at temperature $T$ may be given in terms of the density of states $N(E)$ by

$$ S = -\frac{\pi^2 k_B^2}{3e} T \left[ \frac{1}{N(E)} \frac{\partial N(E)}{\partial E} \right]_{E=E_F}, $$

the predicted band structure with the sharp pseudogap at $E_F$ may bring the enhancement of the Seebeck coefficient accompanied by the change in its sign, which depends on the energy location of $E_F$ relative to the minimum of the pseudogap. For (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-y}$Al$_y$, the increase $\Delta y$ in the Al content $y$ from the stoichiometric one, i.e., $y=25.0$, may lead...
to the decrease in the number of the valence electrons $\Delta n = -0.16 \Delta y$, and hence the Seebeck coefficient would be enhanced with the positive sign for $\Delta y > 0$ and with the negative sign for $\Delta y < 0$ in the rigid-band model, which is indeed observed. However, the thermoelectric power of Fe$_{2-x}$V$_{1+x}$Al becomes negative (positive) with the V content $x$ increased (decreased), which is inconsistent with the rigid-band model and implies the remarkable modification of the electronic structure. In fact, several experimental and theoretical investigations have suggested that the electronic structure of Fe$_2$VAl may be strongly affected by the chemical deviation, in particular, in the 3$d$ transition elements, and by the structural modification, such as an antisite defect, i.e., an Fe atom occupying at the nominal V site in the Heusler structure of Fe$_2$VAl, for instance. The evolution of the 3$d$-derived midgap states due to the antisite defects has been recently predicted by a supercell approach, expected to bring the unusual low-temperature properties.

It is important to study their electronic structures directly by the photoelectron spectroscopy in order to clarify the mechanism of the fascinating transport properties of Fe$_2$VAl and related Heusler-type alloys. In the early photoelectron measurements, a clear Fermi edge with large intensity was observed even at the high-excitation photon energy. Recently, however, we have successfully obtained the spectra representing the bulk electronic structure with use of the high-resolution soft x-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (HRXPS) for clean surfaces prepared by in situ fracturing specimens instead of scraping them, which adequately preserves the bulk electronic structure and suppresses the surface effects. The Fe and V $L_{2,3}$ x-ray absorption spectra also reveal sharp and clear features for the in situ fractured specimens of Fe$_2$VAl in contrast to the scraped ones.

In this paper, we will report results of the HRXPS measurement for the Heusler-type alloys, stoichiometric Fe$_2$VAl and slightly off-stoichiometric (Fe$_{2y}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-x}$Al$_x$, and discuss their electronic structure and thermoelectric power.

II. EXPERIMENTAL

The Heusler-type Fe$_2$VAl and (Fe$_{2y}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-x}$Al$_x$ alloys were prepared by repeated arc-melting of appropriate mixtures of 99.99% pure Fe and Al, and 99.9% pure V in an argon atmosphere and subsequent homogenization at 1273 K for more than 48 hr in vacuum. Specimens were cut from the ingots with a SiC blade saw to a size of $2 \times 2 \times 5$ mm$^3$, and annealed in an evacuated quartz capsule at 1273 K for 1 hr and at 673 K for 4 hr for the $L_2$ ordering followed by furnace cooling. Chemical composition was determined within the accuracy of ±0.2 at. % by inductively coupled argon plasma atomic-emission spectroscopy. Their single-phase Heusler-type $L_2$ structure was confirmed with use of X-ray-diffraction analysis and transmission electron microscopy.

The photoelectron measurement was carried out at the high-resolution photoelectron spectroscopy station of the beamline BL25SU of an 8 GeV electron storage ring, SPring-8 at the Japan Synchrotron Radiation Research Institute. The HRXPS spectra were measured at 20 K with a total energy resolution of 0.10 eV at $h\omega = 900$ eV by use of highly monochromatic soft x-ray from a twin helical undulator and a high-resolution hemispherical analyzer (SIENTA SES200). The angle between the incident-exciting photon beam and the lens axis of the electron analyzer was 45°. The angle acceptance of the analyzer was set to about ±8°. The excitation photon energy was chosen because the higher output intensity was obtained with the better energy resolution and the photoionization cross sections for the s and p electrons become comparable to those for transition metals d electrons. The origin of the binding energy, the Fermi energy $E_F$, was determined by measuring the Fermi edges of the Au film evaporated onto a sample holding plate or the scraped surface of a Pd metal plate attached on the sample holder. The Au 4f lines were also frequently measured for the rapid calibration and confirmation of the excitation energy.

Clean surfaces of the polycrystalline specimens were prepared for photoelectron measurement by in situ fracturing the specimens with a knife edge at 20 K under a pressure of $4 \times 10^{-9}$ Pa, and they were confirmed by measuring the photoelectron spectra in a wide energy range, particularly, in a region of the O 1$s$ and V 2$p$ lines. As an example, some of the spectra in the range of the O 1$s$ and V 2$p$ lines are presented in Fig. 1 for the fractured surface of Fe$_2$VAl. We note no oxygen contamination just after fracturing but a little oxygen adsorption or oxidization in 4 hr after the fracture. This oxygen contamination is found to result in the spectral change in the valence band; the intensity of the $d$ band around the Fermi level decreases relatively, whereas the bands around the binding energy $E_b \approx 4$–5 eV increase. However, the spectral profile near the Fermi level, below $E_b \approx 2$ eV, is not affected in a several-hour measurement. Thus we will present the spectra taken within a few hours after fracturing the specimens and discuss them hereafter.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Typical valence-band photoelectron spectra recorded at the normal emission for the fractured surfaces of Fe$_2$VAl are shown in Fig. 2 in comparison to a theoretical spectrum, which is obtained by convolution of a predicted total density of states (DOS) with the Fermi-Dirac distribution function at 20 K and a 0.1 eV wide Gaussian function. Here, we sub-
FIG. 2. Valence-band photoelectron spectrum of Fe$_2$VAI. The background because of the secondary electrons was subtracted from the experimental photoelectron spectrum. Theoretical density of states (DOS), convoluted with the Fermi-Dirac distribution function at 20 K and a 0.1 eV wide Gaussian function, is also shown for comparison.

These fine structures and pseudogap have not been observed in either the spectrum for the scraped surface measured at the high-excitation photon energy$^{25,29}$ nor those recorded on the lower photon energy excitation, e.g., $\hbar \omega \approx 63$ eV.$^1$ This is probably because of the high sensitivity of the electronic structure of Fe$_2$VAI to the structural modification (such as the surface itself, the antisite defect, and the strain), which might be induced by scraping, and because of the high surface sensitivity of the photoelectron spectroscopy with the low photon energy excitation.$^{30}$ As for the surface effects, in fact, the spectra recorded at the high detection angle from the surface normal, i.e., with the shallow probing depth, indicate the enhancement of the spectral weight from $E_F$ = 1 eV to $E_F$. However, their contribution to the normal emission spectra is estimated to be $\sim 10\%$ at most,$^{24}$ and will not affect the discussion below so much.

The detailed valence band spectra near $E_F$ for (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-y}$Al$_y$ are presented in Figs. 3(a), the main $d$ bands, and 3(b) the Fermi edges. Here, these spectra are normalized at the peak of the Main $d$ bands at $E_F$ $\sim$ 0.7 eV.

FIG. 3. Detailed valence-band photoelectron spectra of (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-y}$Al$_y$. (a) the main $d$-bands and (b) the Fermi edges.

We have applied another reasonable normalization procedure using the integrated intensity of the whole valence band up to $E_F$ $\sim$ 11 eV, confirming the same results as obtained with the normalization procedure at the peak. In Fig. 3(a), up and down arrows indicate the energy positions of the peak and dip of the $d$ bands, respectively, and vertical bars represent the $d$-band edges in the low-binding energy side, at which the intensities of the $d$ bands become half of their peaks. These peaks, dips, and edges of the $d$ bands show that the main $d$ bands are shifted toward the low-binding energy side as the Al content $y$ is increased. Furthermore, a shoulder structure at $E_F$ (the Fermi edge) is clearly recognized for $y$ = 23.8 and 25.0 but not for $y$ = 25.8, and the intensity at $E_F$ shows a minimum at $y$ = 25.0, as shown in Fig. 3(b). Since the increase in the Al content $y$ means the decrease in the number of the valence electrons, the observed shift of the main $d$ bands and the spectral change near $E_F$ qualitatively agree with those predicted in the rigid-band picture with the theoretical DOS for Fe$_2$VAI. This gives further evidence for the existence of the pseudogap.

The density of states at the Fermi energy $N(E_F)$, i.e., the spectral intensity at $E_F$, relative to that for $y$ = 25.0 and the band shift $\Delta E_F$ estimated from the $d$-band edges (vertical bars), are summarized in Table I.

Then we will estimate the thermoelectric power of the (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-y}$Al$_y$ alloy from the present spectroscopic data, in particular, the spectral intensity at $E_F$, $N(E_F)$, and the band shift $\Delta E_F$, using Eq. (1) within the rigid-band picture. In this picture, the deviation in the Al content $y$ would change the number of the valence electrons $n$ and, hence, the Fermi energy position $E_F(y)$ without altering the density of states $N(E_F)$. Since we have only three data points as listed in Table I.
TABLE I. Relative density of states at the Fermi energy $N(E_F)$ and $d$ band shift $\Delta E_b$ for (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-x}$Al$_x$. $\rho_y$ is the resistivity at 4.2 K for (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-x}$Al$_x$. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>y (%)</th>
<th>23.8</th>
<th>24.3</th>
<th>25.0</th>
<th>25.5</th>
<th>25.8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$N(E_F)$</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta E_b$(eV)</td>
<td>-0.032</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\rho_y(\mu\Omega cm)$</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>2600</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\rho_y=25.0/\rho_y$</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$Reference 3.

I, we have further assumed a quadratic relation for DOS versus energy $E(=\Delta E_b)$ for Fe$_2$VAl as

$$N(E) = aE^2 + bE + c,$$

(2)

which is drawn by a broken curve with large solid diamonds in Fig. 4. In this figure we have also shown the photoelectron spectra by shifting them so that the $d$-band edges for $y \neq 25.0$ may coincide with that for Fe$_2$VAl of $y=25.0$, because the abscissa of the figure, the electron energy $E$, has been defined and denoted by the binding energy for Fe$_2$VAl. The Fermi energy positions of the spectra are represented by vertical lines. A minimum just below $E_F$ or peak at $E_F$ anticipated in the spectrum for $y=23.8$ in the rigid-band picture is indiscernible probably because of the insufficient instrumental energy resolution of 0.1 eV. Thus the absolute values of the Seebeck coefficients $S_y(T)$ at temperature $T$ for (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-y}$Al$_y$ can be estimated as

$$S_y(T) = -\frac{\pi^2 k_B^2 T}{3 e} \frac{2aE_F(y) + b}{aE_F(y)^2 + bE_F(y) + c},$$

(3)

where $E_F(y)=-\Delta E_b(y)$. Estimated Seebeck coefficients at 300 K (closed circles) are shown in Fig. 5 together with those obtained by thermolectric measurement$^3$ (open circles) and predicted from Eq. (1) with a theoretical DOS$^11$ (open squares). They agree remarkably well with both the experimental and predicted ones in spite of this rough estimation.$^3$1

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FIG. 4. Assumed density of states $N(E)$ near the Fermi level of Fe$_2$VAl. The (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-y}$Al$_y$ photoelectron spectra are also shown by shifting them so that the $d$-band edges for $y \neq 25.0$ may coincide with that for $y=25.0$, i.e., Fe$_2$VAl.

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FIG. 5. Seebeck coefficients at 300 K (PES; closed circles) estimated from the present photoelectron spectra of (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-y}$Al$_y$. The coefficients obtained by thermolectric measurement (EXP; open circles) and those evaluated from a theoretical density of states (DOS; open squares) are also shown for comparison.

Observed band shift $\Delta E_b$ is, however, much smaller than expected in the rigid-band model; change in the Al content from $y=23.8$ to 25.8 would cause $-0.5$ eV shift in the model, whereas the observed shift is $0.09-0.14$ eV, the latter of which was estimated by the $d$-band peaks and dips in Fig. 3(a). The $d$-band edge for Fe$_2$VAl is also located at the lower-binding energy by $-0.1$ eV than theoretically expected, as seen in Fig. 2. Furthermore, the present spectroscopic data are qualitatively compatible but quantitatively inconsistent with the dependence of the resistivity $\rho$ at low temperatures on the Al content $y$; the spectral intensity at $E_F$ is not so much enhanced for $y \neq 25.0$ as the electric conductivity $\rho_y=25.0/\rho_y$ listed in Table I.

The small $d$-band shift and the spectral change near $E_F$ may be ascribed to the partial destroy of the pseudogap by the substitution or depletion of Al atoms. According to a theoretical study,$^9$ the pseudogap arises from the hybridization between Al and the transition metals in the BiF$_3$ structure. On the other hand, the antisite defects would form magnetic clusters and bring the transition-metal 3d-derived electronic states within the pseudogap,$^{7,12,17}$ which may lead to the low-temperature anomalies in the thermal, magnetic, and electronic transport properties. Relatively large intensity at $E_F$ for Fe$_2$VAl also suggests the existence of such midgap states for the present Fe$_2$VAl specimens (the nominal V content $x=0$ in Fe$_{2-x}$V$_{1+x}$Al), since the recent study for Fe$_{2-x}$V$_{1+x}$Al indicates the drastic reduction in both the low-temperature resistivity and the magnetization at $x=0.02,18$ implying the antisite defects included least at this V content. In (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-y}$Al$_y$, although the sites of excess Al or the transition metals are not known yet, it seems that the sp states of the excess Al for $y>25.0$ and the d states of the excess Fe and V for $y<25.0$ act as less-effective scatterers than the d states of the Fe or V antisite defects and bring the metallic nature to the valence bands of (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-y}$Al$_y$.

The rigid-band-like behavior in (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-y}$Al$_y$ implies the small modification of their electronic structures. Indeed the theoretical investigations show that the electronic states near $E_F$ in Fe$_2$VAl consist of the Fe and V 3d states with minor Al contribution.$^5-10,17$ The present results suggest
that the substitution of the sp-valent elements for Al, such as Fe$_{2-x}$V$_{1+y}$Si$_x$, may not so much affect the electronic structure near $E_F$ in contrast to the substitution of the transition metal elements for Fe or V, such as in Fe$_{2-x}$V$_{1+y}$Al. The HRXPS study for Fe$_{2-x}$V$_{1+y}$Al and Fe$_2$VAI$_{1-y}$Si$_x$ will be reported elsewhere.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

We have investigated the HRXPS valence-band spectra of the Heusler-type (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-x}$Al$_x$ alloys and found the correlation between their thermoelectric properties and electronic structures near $E_F$. The existence of the pseudogap across $E_F$ and its rigid-band-like behavior in (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-x}$Al$_x$ are experimentally confirmed, and their thermoelectric powers semiquantitatively explained. The sharp pseudogap may bring the semiconductorlike resistivity behavior at high temperatures as well. The small modification of the electronic structure in the off-stoichiometric (Fe$_{2/3}$V$_{1/3}$)$_{100-x}$Al$_x$ alloys may arise from the lower contribution of Al to the electronic states near $E_F$ in contrast to the off-stoichiometric alloys, such as Fe$_{2-x}$V$_{1+y}$Al. It is also found that the spectral intensity at $E_F$ is relatively large in Fe$_2$VAI, suggesting the appearance of the midgap (pseudogap) states because of the imperfection in a real Fe$_2$VAI alloy.

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additional feature around $E_h = 9.5$ eV and no fine structures due
to its low energy resolution and surface preparation of the Ar sputtering.

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