

Heterostructured Bi₂S₃–Bi₂O₃ Nanosheets with a Built-In Electric Field for Improved Sodium Storage

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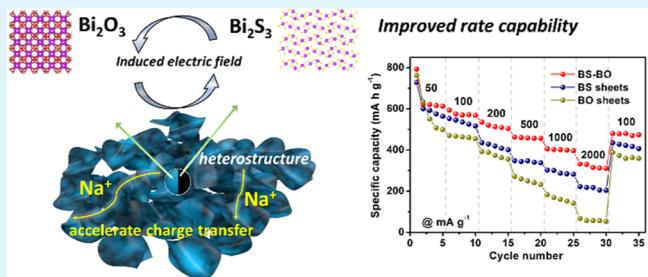
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Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: Constructing novel heterostructures has great potential in tuning the physical/chemical properties of functional materials for electronics, catalysis, as well as energy conversion and storage. In this work, heterostructured Bi₂S₃–Bi₂O₃ nanosheets (BS–BO) have been prepared through an easy water-bath approach. The formation of such unique BS–BO heterostructures was achieved through a controllable thioacetamide-directed surfactant-assisted reaction process. Bi₂O₃ sheets and Bi₂S₃ sheets can be also prepared through simply modifying the synthetic recipe. When employed as the sodium-ion battery anode material, the resultant BS–BO displays a reversible capacity of ~630 mA h g⁻¹ at 100 mA g⁻¹. In addition, the BS–BO demonstrates improved rate capability and enhanced cycle stability compared to its Bi₂O₃ sheets and Bi₂S₃ sheets counterparts. The improved electrochemical performance can be ascribed to the built-in electric field in the BS–BO heterostructure, which effectively facilitates the charge transport. This work would shed light on the construction of novel heterostructures for high-performance sodium-ion batteries and other energy-related devices.

KEYWORDS: Bi₂S₃–Bi₂O₃ nanosheets, heterostructure, built-in electric field, sodium-ion batteries, anode



INTRODUCTION

The demand for low-cost, high-efficiency energy storage technologies is greatly increasing to utilize renewable energy resources and reduce environmental pollution. Rechargeable lithium-ion batteries (LIBs) are undoubtedly one of the most successful candidates among various energy storage devices.^{1–3} Recently, sodium-ion batteries (SIBs) are emerging as a promising alternative to commercial LIBs because of the abundant, inexpensive sodium resources and their similar redox chemistry to LIBs.⁴ Nevertheless, because the ionic radius of Na⁺ ions is much larger (102 pm) than that of Li⁺ ions (76 pm), most investigated electrode materials suffer from huge volume expansion during sodiation/de-sodiation processes, resulting in low specific capacity and limited cycle life.^{5–8} Hence, the pursuit of SIB electrode materials with high specific capacity and stable cycling performance remains a major challenge.

Metal chalcogenides, such as Fe₃S₄,⁹ FeSe₂,¹⁰ Sb₂S₃,¹¹ and Sb₂Se₃,¹² have attracted considerable attention in sodium storage because of their high specific capacity and intriguing layered structure. Bi₂S₃ is a well-known layered p-type semiconductor with a band gap of approximately 1.3 eV, and it displays enormous potential in thermoelectrics,^{13,14} photo-

catalysis,^{15–18} photodetectors,^{19–21} as well as electrochemical energy conversion and storage.^{22–24} For sodium storage, Bi₂S₃ is capable to display gravimetric and volumetric capacities of 625 mA h g⁻¹ and 4250 mA h cm⁻³, respectively.^{25,26} Bi₂O₃ is also a typical layered semiconductor with a band gap of 2.8 eV (n-type semiconductor).²⁷ For sodium storage, the Bi₂O₃ possesses a high theoretical capacity of 690 mA h g⁻¹.^{28,29} Despite their high theoretical capacities, the sodium storage performances of Bi₂O₃ and Bi₂S₃ are usually unsatisfactory. For instance, the Bi₂O₃/C composite displayed a short life span of only 20 cycles.²⁹ The Bi₂O₃@rGO nanocomposite exhibited a capacity retention of 70.2% after 200 cycles.³⁰ The binder-free and flexible Bi₂O₃/C delivered a specific capacity of 430 mA h g⁻¹ after 200 cycles.³¹ The Bi₂S₃@CNT nanocomposite delivered a capacity of only 84.8 mA h g⁻¹ after 60 cycles at 60 mA g⁻¹.³² Further enhancement of the sodium storage performance of Bi-based anodes still remains a great challenge.

Constructing heterostructures composed of at least two components with different band gaps has great potential in

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tuning the physical/chemical properties of functional materials.^{33–36} Because of the unique interface effect, many advantages have been realized in heterostructures in various energy storage devices. Of particular note is the fact that Guo et al. proposed a conceptual model of SnS/SnO₂ heterostructures with built-in electric fields and thus boosted charge transfer capability.³⁷ Using an ultrathin Bi₂MoO₆ nanosheet as an example, the same group interpreted the electric-field effect based on density functional theory (DFT) calculations.³⁸ Recently, Yu et al. confirmed that unbalanced charge distribution would occur within crystals and induce built-in electric fields, leading to boosted lithium-ion transfer dynamics.³⁹ Herein, inspired by the built-in electric field effect and enhanced charge transfer in heterostructured materials, we designed Bi₂S₃–Bi₂O₃ (BS–BO) heterostructures and explored them in SIB application. Detailed characterizations demonstrated that the formation of such unique BS–BO heterostructures was achieved through a controllable thioacetamide (TAA)-directed surfactant-assisted reaction process. Bi₂O₃ sheets and Bi₂S₃ sheets can also be prepared by simply modifying the synthetic recipe. The BS–BO, as an anode for SIBs, delivers a reversible capacity of 630 mA h g⁻¹ at 100 mA g⁻¹. Besides, the BS–BO also demonstrates better cycling stability and rate capability compared with the Bi₂O₃ sheet and Bi₂S₃ sheet counterparts. The improved sodium storage performance makes the BS–BO heterostructures a promising anode for SIBs, and the facile synthetic approach also provides new insights into the construction of novel heterostructures.

EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

Synthetic Procedures. For the synthesis of BS–BO heterostructures, 0.243 g of Bi(NO₃)₃·5H₂O and 0.125 mL of HNO₃ (14 M) were first added into 5 mL of deionized water, leading to the formation of a milky suspension. Then, a sulfurization agent solution was prepared by dissolving 0.125 g of hexadecyl trimethyl ammonium bromide (CTAB) and 0.075 g of TAA in 60 mL of deionized water through ultrasonication. The abovementioned milky suspension was added into the sulfurization solution dropwise with constant stirring. The mixture was incubated at 30 °C for 3 h. The final product was collected by centrifugation and thoroughly washed with deionized water and ethanol three times. The synthesis of Bi₂S₃ sheets is similar to that of BS–BO heterostructures except that a higher amount of TAA (0.375 g) was used. If no TAA was used in the synthesis, Bi₂O₃ sheets were obtained through the incubation of milky suspension at 30 °C for 3 h.

Characterization. Field-emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM) images were collected with a JEOL-7100F microscope. X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns were obtained with a D8 ADVANCE X-ray diffractometer using Cu K α radiation ($\lambda = 1.5418 \text{ \AA}$). Transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and high-resolution TEM (HRTEM) images were recorded by using a JEM-2100F STEM/EDS microscope. The Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) instrument used was a Nicolet 60-SXB spectrometer. X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) measurements were conducted using a VG MultiLab 2000 instrument. CHNS element analysis was conducted on a Vario EL cube Elementar.

Electrochemical Measurements. The sodium storage behaviors were characterized by an assembly of CR2016 coin cells. The working electrodes were prepared by mixing the as-prepared products, carboxyl methyl cellulose, and acetylene black at a weight ratio of 80:10:10. The slurry was casted onto an aluminum (Al) foil and completely dried in a vacuum oven at 70 °C overnight. The average mass loading was about 1.3 mg cm⁻². A sodium metal foil was utilized as the counter electrode and the reference electrode; a glass fiber membrane was used as the separator. The electrolyte was a solution of 1 M trifluoromethanesulfonate (NaCF₃SO₃) in diethyleneglycol dimethylether. Galvanostatic

discharge–charge tests were conducted on a multichannel battery testing system (LAND CT2001A) at a potential range of 0.01–3.0 V versus Na⁺/Na. Cyclic voltammetry (CV) was tested with an Autolab CHI760E electrochemical workstation. Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) measurements were performed on an Autolab PGSTAT 302N electrochemical workstation over the frequency range of 100 kHz–0.01 Hz. All abovementioned measurements were performed on at room temperature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Microstructure and Morphology Characterization.

The schematic illustration for the construction of various nanostructures is briefly depicted in Figure 1. First, Bi₂O₃

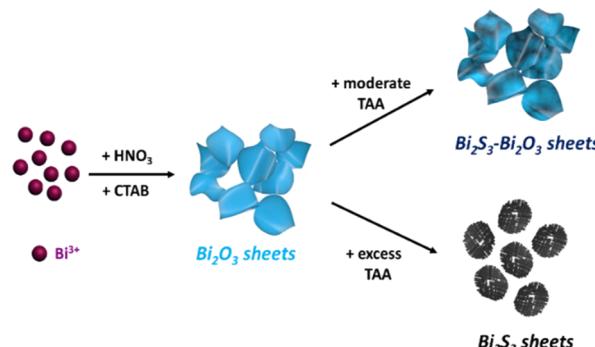


Figure 1. Schematic illustration of the synthesis process of Bi₂O₃ sheets, BS–BO heterostructured sheets, and Bi₂S₃ sheets.

sheets are synthesized through a facile water-bath process at room temperature. For the synthesis of BS–BO heterostructures, TAA is utilized as the sulfurization agent and the Bi₂O₃ sheet is used as the precursor. The BS–BO heterostructured sheets can be achieved by using an appropriate amount of sulfurization agent and suitable sulfurization time. When an excess amount of sulfurization agents is employed, the Bi₂O₃ sheets transform into Bi₂S₃ sheets completely.

Figures 2a and S1 depict the XRD patterns of Bi₂O₃, BS–BO heterostructure, and Bi₂S₃. As shown in Figure 2a, all the diffraction peaks of the Bi₂O₃ precursor can be indexed to the cubic phase Bi₂O₃ (JCPDS 052-1007). The peaks exhibit broad full width at half maximum and weak intensity, implying the low-crystalline feature of Bi₂O₃. This result agrees well with previous literature that highly crystallized cubic phase Bi₂O₃ is difficult to be achieved at room temperature without further annealing.²⁸ After moderate sulfurization, the diffraction peaks for Bi₂O₃ still remain; meanwhile, new peaks belonging to the orthorhombic phase Bi₂S₃ (JCPDS 17-0320) appear. The XRD pattern of Bi₂S₃ is presented in Figure S1, confirming the successful synthesis of pure orthorhombic phase bismuth sulfide (JCPDS 17-0320). No obvious peaks from Bi₂O₃ can be observed, suggesting that the Bi₂O₃ is completely converted into Bi₂S₃ with an enough amount of the sulfurization agent.

The FTIR spectra of the Bi₂O₃ precursor and the BS–BO heterostructure are presented in Figure 2b. The bands detected at 533, 711, and 957 cm⁻¹ can be observed in both Bi₂O₃ and BS–BO. For BS–BO, the emerging new band at 619 cm⁻¹ can be assigned to Bi–S caused by the partial transformation to Bi₂S₃.^{35,40} It is worth mentioning that the bands located at 1384 and 1626 cm⁻¹ are attributed to C–OH and C–N stretching vibrations, respectively. These bands indicate the existence of CTAB species and H₂O absorbed on the surface of the final products.⁴¹

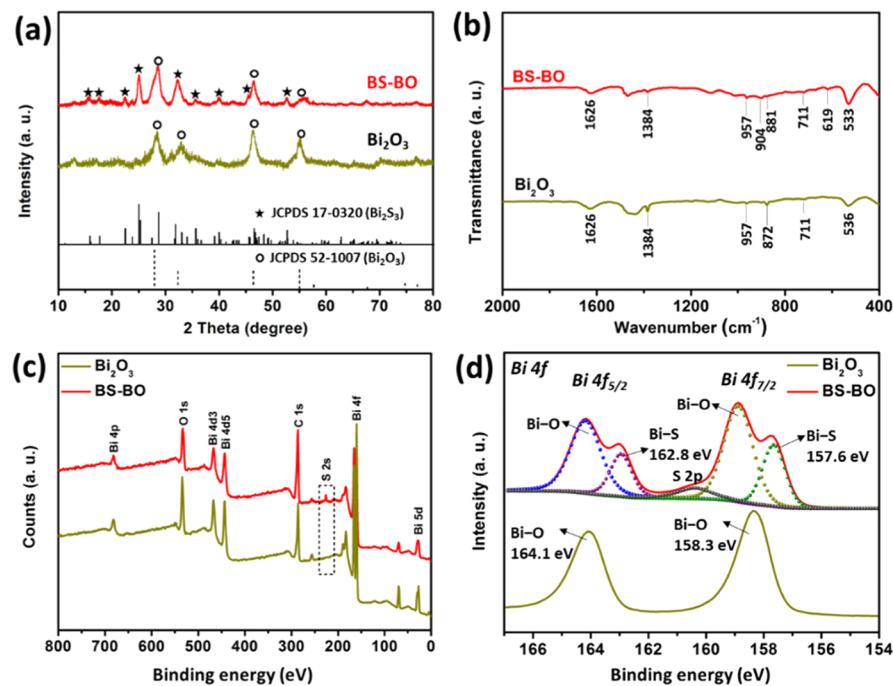


Figure 2. (a) XRD patterns of Bi_2O_3 sheets and BS-BO heterostructures. (b) FTIR spectra of Bi_2O_3 sheets and BS-BO heterostructures. (c) XPS survey spectra of Bi_2O_3 sheets and BS-BO heterostructures. (d) High-resolution Bi 4f XPS spectra of Bi_2O_3 sheets and BS-BO heterostructures.

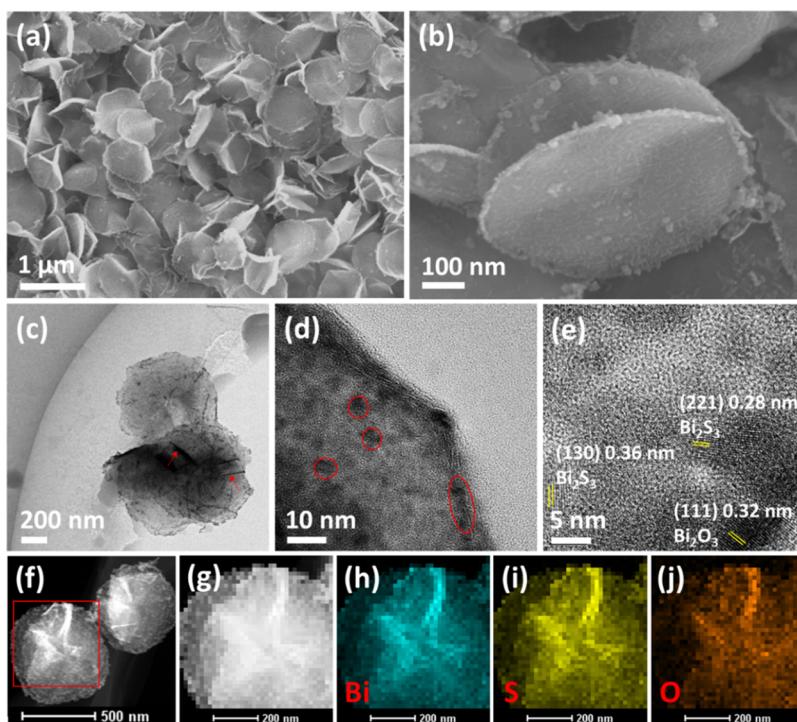


Figure 3. Morphology characterizations of BS-BO heterostructures. SEM images (a,b), TEM images (c,d), HRTEM image (e), STEM images (f,g), and corresponding elemental mapping images (from the red rectangle area in (f)) of Bi (h), S (i), O (j) of BS-BO heterostructured sheets.

XPS survey spectra of Bi_2O_3 and BS-BO heterostructure are provided in Figure 2c. Signals from Bi, O, and C elements can be observed in the XPS spectrum of Bi_2O_3 . After sulfurization, the S 2s peak at 225.1 eV can be detected in BS-BO, confirming the successful incorporation of S. Figure 2d shows the high-resolution XPS spectra of Bi_2O_3 and BS-BO heterostructure. For Bi_2O_3 , the two strong peaks located at 164.1 and 158.3 eV can be ascribed to $\text{Bi} 4f_{7/2}$ and $\text{Bi} 4f_{5/2}$,

respectively. For BS-BO, the peaks with a binding energy of 162.8 and 157.6 eV are correlated with $\text{Bi} 4f_{7/2}$ and $\text{Bi} 4f_{5/2}$ in Bi_2S_3 , respectively. Moreover, the $\text{Bi} 4f_{7/2}$ and $\text{Bi} 4f_{5/2}$ peaks for Bi_2O_3 shift toward higher energies by approximately 0.5 eV, which is because of the coupling effect resulted from the strong chemical bonding between Bi_2O_3 and Bi_2S_3 .⁴² The peak centered at 160.4 eV in BS-BO is ascribed to S 2p transition,⁴³ which further confirms the formation of BS-BO hetero-

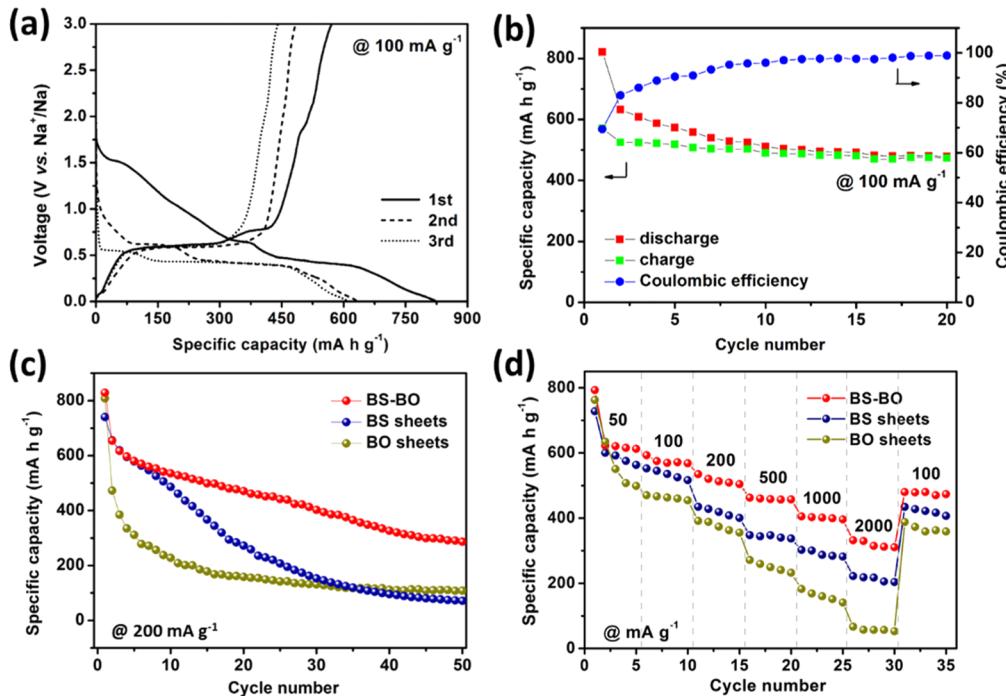


Figure 4. Electrochemical performances of BS–BO, Bi₂S₃, and Bi₂O₃ electrodes for sodium storage. (a) Typical charge–discharge profiles of BS–BO at a current density of 100 mA g^{−1} for the initial three cycles. (b) Cycling performance of BS–BO at 100 mA g^{−1} for 20 cycles. (c) Cycling performance of BS–BO, Bi₂S₃, and Bi₂O₃ sheets at a current density of 200 mA g^{−1}. (d) Rate performances of BS–BO, Bi₂S₃, and Bi₂O₃ sheets at different current densities.

structures. In addition, the high-resolution C 1s (Figure S2a) and O 1s (Figure S2b) XPS spectra of BS–BO indicate the presence of absorbed species, such as CTAB and H₂O, which are consistent with the FTIR results. CHNS elemental analysis results are shown in Table S1; the weight percentage of sulfur in BS–BO is determined to be 14.83%. The abovementioned results reveal that the orthorhombic Bi₂S₃ and cubic Bi₂O₃ coexist in the BS–BO heterostructured composite.

The morphologies and microstructures of the BS–BO, Bi₂O₃, and Bi₂S₃ were characterized by FESEM and TEM. The Bi₂O₃ displays a uniform sheet-like structure with ultrathin thickness and quite smooth surface (Figure S3). The Bi₂O₃ sheets are wrinkled rather than flat, which avoids their stacking (Figure S3a). The thickness of the Bi₂O₃ sheets is less than 20 nm (Figure S3b). TAA was utilized as the sulfurization agent to convert Bi₂O₃ into Bi₂S₃.⁴⁴ The amount of the sulfurization agent plays a vital role in the synthesis. If an excess amount of TAA was used, micrometer-sized Bi₂S₃ sheets can be obtained (Figure S4a). The Bi₂S₃ sheets show a coarse surface (Figure S4b). With the use of an appropriate amount of TAA, a BS–BO heterostructured composite can be achieved (Figure 3). The as-synthesized BS–BO well inherits the sheet-like morphology of the Bi₂O₃ precursor; however, it shows a coarser surface with less wrinkles (Figure 3a). The diameter and thickness of the BS–BO nanosheets are determined to be around 600 nm and tens of nanometer, respectively (Figure 3b). When further examined under TEM, the wrinkles can be clearly observed on the surface of BS–BO (indicated by arrows in Figure 3c). The heterostructure feature can be clearly recognized by the contrast in the TEM image (Figure 3d), in which the Bi₂S₃ shows darker mass-thickness contrast (highlighted with the red circle) while the Bi₂O₃ shows brighter contrast. A typical HRTEM image of BS–BO is provided in Figure 3e. The atomic spacing of 0.28 and 0.36 nm correspond

to the (221) and (130) planes of orthorhombic Bi₂S₃, respectively. The lattice fringe of 0.32 nm is correlated with the (111) planes of cubic Bi₂O₃. The elemental mapping images under TEM (Figure 3g–j) confirm the uniform distribution of Bi, S, and O elements within BS–BO nanosheets. The abovementioned results indicate that sheet-like BS–BO heterostructures have been successfully constructed.

Sodium Storage Performance. The sodium storage behaviors of BS–BO, Bi₂S₃, and Bi₂O₃ sheets were examined in CR2016 coin cells. CV was first employed to investigate electrochemical performance of BS–BO (Figure S5). During the first cathodic scan, a broad reduction peak located at 0.51 V can be observed. This peak splits into two peaks at around 0.31 and 0.68 V in the subsequent scans, suggesting the evolution might be associated with irreversible activation. The first oxidation process of BS–BO is featured by two peaks at around 0.64 and 0.78 V, which are different from the typical oxidation peaks of Bi₂O₃ (Figure S6) and Bi₂S₃ anodes (Figure S7). Because of the homogeneous distribution at nanoscale and strong chemical interactions between Bi₂S₃ and Bi₂O₃, the electrochemical redox process of BS–BO cannot be directly recognized as the simple overlap of its two counterparts. As CV cycles proceed, the profiles of BS–BO change slightly with less pronounced current responses.

The first three galvanostatic discharge–charge profiles of BS–BO, Bi₂O₃, and Bi₂S₃ at a current density of 100 mA g^{−1} are shown in Figures 4a, S8, and S9, respectively. The first discharge and charge capacities for BS–BO are 821 and 571 mA h g^{−1}, corresponding to a relatively low initial Coulombic efficiency of 69.5%. The irreversible capacity loss might be caused by the generation of solid electrolyte interphase films. In detail, the initial discharge plateau of BS–BO at around 1.55 V representing the activation process is almost lost in the

subsequent cycles. Two apparent discharge plateaus are located at 0.65 and 0.45 V, agreeing well with the CV profiles. These plateaus are associated with the formation of metallic Bi and Na_xBi alloys, respectively. The discharge plateaus are consistent with the ex situ studies on bismuth-based anode materials.²⁹ The main charge plateau is located at 0.61 V, which is ascribed to the dealloying process from Na_3Bi to metallic Bi and the oxidation of Bi to Bi^{3+} .²⁵ The cycling performance and the corresponding Coulombic efficiency of BS–BO at a current density of 100 mA g⁻¹ are shown in Figure 4b. A large capacity loss occurs in the first cycle. The second discharge capacity can reach 630 mA h g⁻¹, which is slightly higher than the theoretic capacity of Bi_2S_3 (625 mA h g⁻¹) and approaches the theoretical capacity of Bi_2O_3 (690 mA h g⁻¹). After 20 cycles, the BS–BO is capable of delivering a discharge capacity of 477 mA h g⁻¹, corresponding to a capacity retention of 76% (against the second discharge capacity). Additionally, the Coulombic efficiency increases significantly during the initial six cycles and stabilizes at around 98% in the subsequent processes.

For comparison, the cycling performances of BS–BO, Bi_2S_3 , and Bi_2O_3 at a current density of 200 mA g⁻¹ are provided in Figure 4c. The capacity of Bi_2O_3 decays fast from the start of cycling. After 50 cycles, the capacity of Bi_2O_3 is merely around 109 mA h g⁻¹. A similar severe capacity decay is also observed in Bi_2S_3 . With respect to BS–BO, the capacity decay is mild. The capacity retentions for BS–BO, Bi_2S_3 , and Bi_2O_3 sheets (against second discharge capacity) are 43, 11, and 2%, respectively. The great enhancement in capacity retention confirms the advantages of the novel BS–BO heterostructure.

To further demonstrate the good sodium storage performance of BS–BO, the rate performances of the three samples were measured with the applied current densities increasing from 50 to 2000 mA g⁻¹ and then reducing back to 100 mA g⁻¹ (Figure 4d). As can be seen clearly, the BS–BO exhibits a remarkably improved rate performance at a variety of current densities. The reversible discharge capacities are approximately 620, 574, 518, 460, 404, and 314 mA h g⁻¹ at 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000, and 2000 mA g⁻¹, respectively. Besides, when the current density reduces to 100 mA g⁻¹, an average capacity of 468 mA h g⁻¹ can be restored for the BS–BO. In contrast, both Bi_2S_3 and Bi_2O_3 sheets suffer from severe capacity loss at a high rate and exhibit poor capacity recovery ability. These results demonstrate that the constructed BS–BO heterostructure is beneficial to the rate capability when compared with the Bi_2S_3 or Bi_2O_3 counterparts.

EIS measurements were performed to investigate the kinetic characteristic and charge transfer resistance of various electrodes. All typical Nyquist plots provided in Figure S10 exhibit a slope line in the low frequency region and a semicircle in the high–medium frequency region. It can be clearly observed that the semicircle diameter for BS–BO is much smaller than those for Bi_2S_3 and Bi_2O_3 sheets. After simulation, the charge transfer resistance (R_{ct}) values for the BS–BO, Bi_2S_3 , and Bi_2O_3 sheets are calculated to be 17.8, 42.6, and 209.2 Ω , respectively. The EIS results confirm the enhanced charge transport in BS–BO heterostructures.

The improved sodium storage performance originates from the novel design of BS–BO heterostructures with three distinctive merits. First, a built-in electric field within the heterostructure can accelerate the charge transfer. A possible mechanism of the evolution of built-in electric fields in BS–BO is illustrated in Figure 5. The Bi_2O_3 is a n-type semiconductor

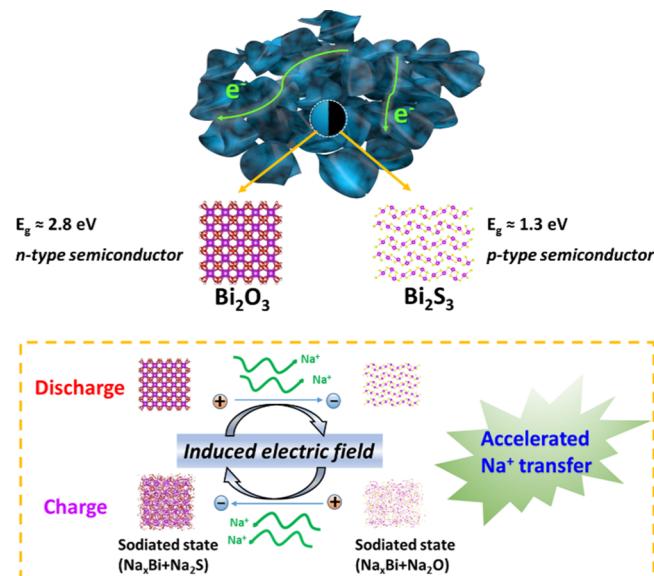


Figure 5. Schematic illustration of the accelerated charge transfer resulted from an induced electric field mechanism in BS–BO heterostructures.

featured with a relative wide band gap of 2.8 eV,^{13,14} while Bi_2S_3 is a typical p-type semiconductor with a narrow band gap (1.3 eV).²⁸ In the BS–BO heterostructure, BS–BO p–n heterojunctions formed at the interface can induce a built-in electric field with a direction from Bi_2O_3 ($E_g \approx 2.8$ eV) to Bi_2S_3 ($E_g \approx 1.3$ eV).⁴⁵ It can be anticipated that during the discharge process, this electric field can facilitate the immigration of Na^+ ions. On the other hand, Bi_2O_3 is converted into Na_xBi and Na_2O after full sodiation. Meanwhile, Bi_2S_3 is sodiated into Na_xBi and Na_2S .³⁷ As evidenced in the literature, more Na^+ ions might be released at the sulfide area (Bi_2S_3 -domained area) after full de-sodiation on account of its higher reversibility relative to some oxides (Bi_2O_3 -domained area).^{37,46} Consequently, when subject to the charge process, an electric field could be formed with a direction from Bi_2S_3 to Bi_2O_3 owing to the potential difference, which will promote the transfer of Na^+ ions. Therefore, within the BS–BO heterostructure, the induced built-in electric field would provide a driving force for Na^+ ions and remarkably improve the charge transfer kinetics, resulting in good rate capability. Secondly, the strong chemical interaction between Bi_2O_3 and Bi_2S_3 would be helpful to the elastic effects of the nanostructures upon sodiation/de-sodiation.⁴⁷ Last but not the least, the thin nanosheets design can effectively decrease the diffusion pathway of Na^+ ions, which further promotes the electrochemical kinetics. In a word, the synergetic effect of enhanced charge transfer kinetic, strong chemical interaction, and nanoscale size design makes BS–BO nanosheets a promising material for the high-performance sodium-ion battery anode.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, BS–BO heterostructured nanosheets have been constructed via an easy water-bath approach. The present method has been demonstrated to be a TAA-directed surfactant-assisted process. When applied in sodium storage, the BS–BO heterostructure displays a promising performance: it delivers a reversible discharge capacity of 630 mA h g⁻¹ at 100 mA g⁻¹ with relative good stability. Moreover, the BS–BO heterostructure exhibits improved rate capability compared to

Bi₂S₃ and Bi₂O₃ counterparts, which can be originated from the synergistic effect of enhanced charge transfer in the heterostructures, strong chemical interaction, and nanoscale size design. This work suggests that the construction of novel heterostructures can be a promising approach toward high-performance sodium-ion battery and related energy storage applications.

■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website at DOI: [10.1021/acsami.8b01613](https://doi.org/10.1021/acsami.8b01613).

XRD pattern of Bi₂S₃ sheets; XPS studies of C and O elements in BS-BO; SEM images of Bi₂O₃ sheets and Bi₂S₃ sheets; CHNS test results of BS-BO; CV profiles of various electrodes for the initial three cycles; typical charge-discharge curves of Bi₂S₃ sheets and Bi₂O₃ sheets for the initial three cycles; and Nyquist plots of various electrodes ([PDF](#))

([PDF](#))

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Author Contributions

W.L. and F.L. contributed equally to this work. The manuscript was written through contributions of all authors. All authors have given approval to the final version of the manuscript.

Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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