The Conditions of the Violations of Le Chatlier’s Principle in Gas Reactions at Constant \(T\) and \(P\)

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ABSTRACT

Le Chatelier’s principle is used as a very simple way to predict the effect of a change in conditions on a chemical equilibrium. However, several studies have been reported the violation of this principle, still there is no reported simple mathematical equation to express the exact condition of violation in the gas phase reactions. In this article, we derived a simple equation for the violation of Le Chatelier’s principle for the ideal gas reactions at the constant temperature and pressure.

1. INTRODUCTION AND PRELIMINARIES

Le Chatelier principle (LCP) is a very simple way of predicting the direction of a disturbed chemical equilibrium [1]. LCP is often expressed as follows: In a system at equilibrium, a change in one of the variables that determines the equilibrium will shift the equilibrium in the direction counteracting the change of that variable. However, the LCP has led to some wrong predictions and thus caused to some controversial discussions among many students and teachers [2–7].

The industrial synthesis of ammonia is shown below:

\[ N_2(g) + 3H_2(g) \rightleftharpoons 2NH_3(g) \]

This is a traditional example used by teachers when the LCP is discussed. In this reaction, at constant pressure and temperature, when the mole fraction of nitrogen in the equilibrium mixture exceeds 0.5, the LCP predicts that this change should shift the equilibrium to the right in order to moderate the excess of nitrogen. However, in contrast to LCP prediction this disturbance shifts the reaction to the left, producing more \(N_2\).

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Although many discussions and examples of the failure of LCP have been reported, a simple inquiry to predict the conditions of the failure of LCP in gas phase reaction (at constant T and P) is still missing. The inquiries discussed by Jeffrey E. Lacy [10] are not general and only limited to special cases, where Δν < 0.

In this work, we mathematically derive the criteria in which LCP fails to predict the correct direction of a reaction at equilibrium upon changing the mole number of a species at constant T and P.

2. Theorem and Derivation

**Theorem 1.** In the ideal gas reaction \( \sum_i ν_i A_i(g) = 0 \) where \( \frac{Δn}{mol} = \sum_i ν_i \) and \( ν_i \) is the stoichiometric factor of species \( A_i(g) \) in the reaction (where it is positive for products and negative for reactants). At constant temperature (T) and pressure (P), by changing \( n_j \) of the j-th species, the reaction proceeds towards the direction that offsets this perturbation unless:

\[
x_j ≥ \left| \frac{ν_j}{Δn} \right| \text{ mol and } Δn≠0,
\]

where, \( x_j \) is the mole fraction of j-th species at the reaction equilibrium before perturbation. In equal state, the reaction equilibrium does not change. However, in non-equal state, the perturbation factor is elevated.

**Derivation 2.** The expression for the chemical potential \( (μ_i) \) at equilibrium is given as \( \sum ν_i μ_i = 0 \). This term leads to \( ΔG^0 = RTlnK_p^0 \), where \( ΔG^0 = \sum ν_i μ_i^0 \) and the standard equilibrium constant \( K_p^0 = \prod_i (P_i/P_b)^{ν_i} \) is a function of T only.

For a closed system in equilibrium (at constant P and T), if we perturb the system by adding (or removing) \( n_i \) mole of \( A_j \), the equilibrium will shift to the direction to counteract this perturbation. Because in this condition \( K_{eq} \) is constant, we use \( Q_p \) as a parameter to find the direction of shift. We know from thermodynamic if \( Q_p < K_{eq} \), the reaction proceeds forward (producing more product) and if \( Q_p > K_{eq} \), the reaction proceeds backward (producing more reactant). At constants T and P, \( Q \) depend only on \( n_i Q_p = Q_p(\{n_1,n_2,...,n_j ... \}) \). Let us add small mole of \( A_j \) \( (dn_j) \) to this system. The term \( \frac{∂Q_p}{∂n_j} \) represents the change in \( Q_p \) upon addition of \( A_j \). As \( dn_j \) is positive, the sign of \( dQ_p \) illustrates the direction of reaction. The term \( dQ_p > 0 \) denotes the elevation of \( Q_p \) upon addition of species. This is the case where reaction proceeds backward to reach the new equilibrium (because \( K_{eq} \) is constant). In the same way, the reaction proceeds forward if \( dQ_p < 0 \). However, there is no change in the reaction equilibrium upon addition of \( n_j \) if \( dQ = 0 \). Before going step forward to the final statement, let us discuss the following required expressions:

\[
\frac{Δn}{mol} = \sum_i ν_i
\]
The Conditions of the Violations of Le Chatlier’s Principle

\[ Q_P = \prod_i (P_i)^{v_i} \tag{2} \]
\[ P_i = x_i P \tag{3} \]
\[ x_i = \frac{n_i}{n_t} \tag{4} \]
\[ n_t = \sum_i n_i \tag{5} \]

where in these equations, \( P_i \), \( x_i \), and \( n_i \) are partial pressure, mole fraction, and mole numbers of \( A_i \), respectively. The \( n_t \) is the total mole numbers of all gases in the reaction. By substituting the equations 1, 3, 4 into Eq. 2, we get:

\[ Q_P = \prod_i (P_i)^{v_i} = \prod_i (x_i P)^{v_i} \]
\[ = (\prod_i (x_i)^{v_i} (P)^{v_i}) (\prod_i (P)^{v_i}) \]
\[ = \left( \prod_i \left( \frac{n_i}{n_t} \right)^{v_i} \right) \left( (P) \Sigma_i (v_i) \right) \]
\[ = \left( \frac{\prod_i (n_i)^{v_i}}{(n_t)^{\Sigma_i v_i}} \right) \left( (P) \frac{\Delta n}{\text{mol}} \right) \]
\[ = \left( \frac{\prod_i (n_i)^{v_i}}{(\Delta n) / (n_t)^{\Sigma_i v_i}} \right) \left( (P) \frac{\Delta n}{\text{mol}} \right) \]
\[ = \frac{\Delta n}{\text{mol} n_t} \frac{\Delta n}{\text{mol} \prod_i (n_i)^{v_i}} \tag{6} \]

The final statement is used to obtain \( \left( \frac{\partial Q_P}{\partial n_j} \right)_{T, P, n_{i \neq j}} \)

\[ \left( \frac{\partial Q_P}{\partial n_j} \right)_{T, P, n_{i \neq j}} = \left( \frac{\partial}{\partial n_j} \right)_{T, P, n_{i \neq j}} \left[ p \frac{\Delta n}{\text{mol} n_t} \frac{\Delta n}{\text{mol} \prod_i (n_i)^{v_i}} \right] = \left( \frac{\partial}{\partial n_j} \right)_{T, P, n_{i \neq j}} \left[ n_t - \frac{\Delta n}{\text{mol} \prod_i (n_i)^{v_i}} \right] \]
\[ = \frac{\Delta n}{\text{mol} n_t} \left[ (n_i)^{-1} (\prod_i (n_i))^{v_i} + (n_t)^{-1} (\sum_{i \neq j} (n_i))^{v_i} \right] \]
\[ = \frac{\Delta n}{\text{mol} n_t} \left[ (n_i)^{-1} (\prod_i (n_i))^{v_i} + (n_t)^{-1} (\sum_{i \neq j} (n_i))^{v_i} \right] \]
\[ \times \left( \frac{\Delta n}{\text{mol} \prod_i (n_i)^{v_i}} \frac{1}{n_t} \prod_i (n_i)^{v_i} + (v_j) \frac{1}{n_j} \prod_i (n_i)^{v_i} \right) \]
\[ = \left( \frac{\Delta n}{\text{mol} \prod_i (n_i)^{v_i}} \frac{1}{n_t} + (v_j) \frac{1}{n_j} \right) \tag{7} \]

By Eq. 4 into the final term of Eq. 7, we have:

\[ x_j = \frac{n_j}{n_t} \rightarrow n_t = \frac{n_j}{x_j} \]
\[
\left( \frac{\partial Q_p}{\partial n_j} \right)_{T,P,n_i \neq j} = \left( \frac{P}{n_t} \right)^{\Delta n \over mol} \prod_i (n_i)^{\nu_i} \left[ -\frac{\Delta n}{mol} \frac{1}{n_j} + \frac{v_j}{n_j} \right] \\
= \left( \frac{P}{n_t} \right)^{\Delta n \over mol} \prod_i (n_i)^{\nu_i} \left[ -\frac{\Delta n}{mol} \frac{x_j}{n_j} + \frac{v_j}{n_j} \right] = \left( \frac{P}{n_t} \right)^{\Delta n \over mol} \left( \frac{\prod_i (n_i)^{\nu_i}}{n_j} \right) \left[ v_j - x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \right] 
\]

(8)

The statement before bracket is denoted as \( \omega \) for simplicity. It is clear that this statement is positive.

\[
\left( \frac{P}{n_t} \right)^{\Delta n \over mol} \left( \frac{\prod_i (n_i)^{\nu_i}}{n_j} \right) \equiv \omega > 0
\]

Now Eq. 8 will be written as:

\[
\left( \frac{\partial Q_p}{\partial n_j} \right)_{T,P,n_i \neq j} = \omega \left[ v_j - x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \right]
\]

(9)

\[
(\partial Q_p)_{T,P,n_i \neq j} = \omega \left[ v_j - x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \right] (\partial n_j)_{T,P,n_i \neq j}
\]

(10)

We now assume \((\partial n_j)_{T,P,n_i \neq j}\) is positive, which means that \(n_j\) is added to the system. Therefore, the only parameter which effects the sign of \((\partial Q_p)_{T,P,n_i \neq j}\) is the statement inside the bracket, i.e. \(v_j - x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol}\). We now try to determine the sign of this statement. To do it, let us refer to the absolute property as follows:

\[
|\theta| = \begin{cases} 
+\theta, & \theta > 0 \\
-\theta, & \theta < 0
\end{cases}
\]

(11)

We now distribute Eq. 10 vs. sign of \(v_j\) and \(\Delta n\) to find in which condition \((\partial Q_p)_{T,P,n_i \neq j}\) is positive, negative or zero. For simplicity, we omit subscript T, P and \(n_i \neq j\).

\[
\begin{cases} 
\nu_j > 0 \rightarrow \partial Q_p = \omega \left[ +|v_j| - x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \right] \partial n_j \\
\Delta n > 0 \rightarrow \partial Q_p = \omega \left[ +|v_j| - x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \right] \partial n_j \rightarrow \begin{cases} 
|v_j| > x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \rightarrow \partial Q_p > 0 \\
|v_j| < x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \rightarrow \partial Q_p < 0 \\
|v_j| = x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \rightarrow \partial Q_p = 0
\end{cases}
\end{cases}
\]

\[
\begin{cases} 
\Delta n = 0 \rightarrow \partial Q_p = \omega \left[ +|v_j| \right] \partial n_j > 0 \\
\Delta n < 0 \rightarrow \partial Q_p = \omega \left[ +|v_j| + x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \right] \partial n_j > 0
\end{cases}
\]

\[
\begin{cases} 
\Delta n > 0 \rightarrow \partial Q_p = \omega \left[ -|v_j| - x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \right] \partial n_j < 0 \\
\Delta n = 0 \rightarrow \partial Q_p = \omega \left[ -|v_j| \right] \partial n_j < 0
\end{cases}
\]

\[
\begin{cases} 
\Delta n < 0 \rightarrow \partial Q_p = \omega \left[ -|v_j| - x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \right] \partial n_j \rightarrow \begin{cases} 
|v_j| > x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \rightarrow \partial Q_p > 0 \\
|v_j| < x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \rightarrow \partial Q_p < 0 \\
|v_j| = x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \rightarrow \partial Q_p = 0
\end{cases}
\end{cases}
\]

(12)

For conditions 1, 4 and 5 of Eq. 12, where \(v_j > 0\) and \(Q_p > 0\), by adding more species from products \((v_j > 0)\) \(Q_p\) increases. Therefore, the reaction shifts backward to reach the equilibrium, which is in agreement with the LCP. The conditions 6, 7 and 8 are
also in agreement with LCP; where by adding more reactants reaction proceeds forward. For conditions 3 and 10, no effect will be appeared by adding \( n_j \) while \( \partial Q_P = 0 \). The condition 2 (where \( v_j > 0 \) and \( \partial Q_P < 0 \)) reveals that by adding more product to the reaction at equilibrium, the reaction shifts to the right to produce more product, which is in contradiction to the LCP. The situation 9 is also contradictory to the LCP; where by adding more reactant, the reaction shifts to the left. For these conditions we can write:

\[
|v_j| < x_j \frac{\Delta n}{mol} \implies x_j > \left| \frac{v_j}{\Delta n} \right| mol
\] (13)

By combining conditions 2, 3, 9 and 10, we obtain:

\[
x_j \geq \left| \frac{v_j}{\Delta n} \right| mol
\] (14)

This is the equation we were searching for. From this equation we conclude that the term \( x_j = \left| \frac{v_j}{\Delta n} \right| mol \) represents the critical mole fraction; where if \( x_j \) increases (\( x_j > \left| \frac{v_j}{\Delta n} \right| mol \)), LCP would be broken. For NH\(_3\) production from N\(_2\) and H\(_2\), Posthumus [8] found that when the system is initially in chemical equilibrium and has more than 50% N\(_2\), the addition of N\(_2\) as reactant would result in an internal reaction forming more reactant at constant T and P. Using Eq. 14 we also found the critical mole fraction as:

\[
x_j = \left| \frac{v_j}{\Delta n} \right| mol = \left| \frac{-1}{-2} \right| = \frac{1}{2}
\]

Now, let’s obtain a general perquisite for reactions where the LCP is broken. To do so, we use the fundamental property of the mole fraction which cannot be exceeded unity. Hence the first prerequisite is as follows:

\[
\left| \frac{v_j}{\Delta n} \right| < 1
\] (15)

Using this statement, we will find plenty of reactions where the LCP could be broken.

3. CONCLUSIONS

We achieved a simple term for the situations that LCP fails to predict the correct direction of the reaction change after suffering a perturbation caused by adding species in gas phase reactions at constant T and P. If the term of Eq. 15 is met, the reaction can go toward the direction of added substrate (reactant or product) only if the mole fraction is larger than the critical mole fraction of \( \left| \frac{v_j}{\Delta n} \right| mol \) (Eq. 14). As an example in the following reaction:

\[
CH_4(g) + 2H_2S(g) \rightleftharpoons CS_2(g) + 4H_2(g)
\]

For both \( CH_4(g) \) and \( CS_2(g) \), the term \( \left| \frac{v_j}{\Delta n} \right| = \frac{1}{2} \) represents that the first prerequisite is fulfilled, that is \( \left| \frac{v_j}{\Delta n} \right| < 1 \). In the reaction at equilibrium, if the mole fraction of \( CH_4(g) \) or
$CS_2(g)$ is 0.5 or higher, then by adding one of these species to the reaction at constant $T$ and $P$, the reaction shifts in the direction to produce more of that species, in contradictory to LCP.

Finally, from Eqs. 14 and 15, we also conclude that for the reactions in which $\Delta n$ is 0 or 1, the LCP will never be broken while $v_j$ is an integer number.

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