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Theoretical Analysis of Saline Diffusion during Sodium Chloride Aqueous Solutions Freezing for Desalination Purposes

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Abstract: Considering the important demand of fresh water and its scarce availability, water desalination is an interesting technology, producing about 44 Mm³/year worldwide, but, in general the most common desalination techniques are highly energy demanding. Freezing-Melting (F/M) desalination uses just up to 70% less thermal energy, but is the least used process mainly, due to the difficulty of the salt separation. This study proposes a model able to analyse the thermodynamic potential that allows the salt diffusion during the F/M process, using an aqueous solution of sodium chloride. This should allow to obtain a sensitive analysis of the process to promote the separation between the high concentration brine and the ice with liquid separation by physical process. The unidimensional model is based on the evolution of both processes: thermal and mass diffusions, depending on temperature and saline gradients, predicting whether the salt will remain inside the ice or not. Thus, the thermal potential is adjusted to frozen only when the salt has been "pushed" towards the brine. Mostly models have based their results on the assumption of a "certain value of saline concentration of the liquid fraction", value in which there is great disagreement. In this paper the calculations are based on the concentration in the solid-liquid interface, which has been extensively studied and there is a coincidence in those results, being the main advantage of the proposed model.

Keywords: freezing/melting desalination process; aqueous solutions of sodium chloride; theoretical diffusive models

1. Introduction

The desalination process aims to obtain water suitable for human consumption (Castillo and Pilatowsky, 2013), which is important but cost- and energy intensive process (Erlbeck *et al.*, 2017). Numerous methods have been used, nevertheless, until June 2016, the 51% of seawater on the world, was desalted by a Multi-Stage Flash (MSF), a thermal process accompanied with high environmental impact due to the high consumption of hydrocarbons (Guevara and Stabridis, 2008). About 10,000 tons of oil were used in the world to produce 1000 m³/day of desalinated water (Ghalavand, Hatamipour and Rahimi, 2014).

Freezing/Melting (F/M) has the advantage to be the most theoretically energy-efficient desalination processes. This low consumption is due to the fact that the latent heat of melting of the ice is only 334 kJ/kg against 2,257 kJ/kg for its vaporization, so the process of the F/M could save up to 70% of the energy required by the thermal conventional desalination processes (Williams *et al.*, 2015), (Mtombeni, T., Maree, J.P., Zvinowanda, C, 2013). The most commercial process is Reverse Osmosis, which is the more used technology for brackish water desalting, near to 84% on the world, (IDA Desalination, 2017). However, the problem of membrane replacement persists, no being the case of the F/M process.

The F/M process can remove dissolved salts in solutions during the formation of ice crystals (Johnson, 1976; Jungwirth, 2005; Blank, Tusel and Nisanc, 2007). Freezing has been used to separate a wide variety of contaminants from water, such as minerals, organic chemicals and dissolved particles. In addition to low energy consumption, it operates at low temperature, minimizing corrosion problems and allowing low cost materials such as plastic. A pre-treatment is not required, thus avoiding the use of chemicals and implies minimum environmental impact (Rahman et al. 2007, (Johnson, 1979; Mandri *et al.*, 2011).

During the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, there were several attempts to commercialize this technology, which has continued its development for 45 years, through many technological innovations (Thompson and Nelson, 1954; Marshall, Goff and Hartel, 1967; Curran, 1970; Rice and Chau, 1997) and countless pilot plants.

However, this operation stays having many drawbacks compared to reverse osmosis and thermal processes, such as high capital costs. However, the most difficult problem to solve has been the entrapment of salts in the ice during the crystallization, hindering their separation, and requiring for it, crushing and recrystallization of the ice, which increases operating costs (Wiegandt and Berg, 1980; Subramani and Jacangelo, 2015).

Ice quality depends on several factors linked mainly to freezing process kinetics. The objective is to eject salt in a small volume of unfrozen brine. However, it often occurs that some salts are trapped in the ice crystal, even independently of the solubility of the salts in ice (Jungwirth, Vrbka and Jungwirth, 2005). Research works have been oriented towards reaching a lower water salinity. Thus, Yoshihito Shirai proposed to use agitators and fan to circulate the solution and cold air to improve heat and mass transfer, additionally an seed ice was integrated (Shirai *et al.*, 1998). (Yu, Ma and Zhang, 2007) find that at low initial solution temperature (about 6oC), the temperature of coolant, the solution concentration and the re-crystallization process as important factors to obtain a mayor purity of the ice produced. Experiments have also been conducted at different salt concentrations, stirring velocity in the separation vessel, as well as increase the number of washing steps to determine if the mentioned parameters can reduce the effects on salt retention.

In an experimental study, the desalination rate positively correlated with freezing temperature while negatively correlated with freezing rate, the solid fraction, solution concentration and the surface area

of the freezing container (Luo et al. 2010). Reddy et al proposed that an agitator can reduce the salts encapsulated in crystals (Reddy *et al.*, 2009).

(Erlbeck *et al.*, 2017), carried out important research on the effect on efficient desalination with different methods as cooled plate with several operation conditions and their dependence on ice production, the heat transfer via droplets of non-miscible organic fluids and classical crystallization with stirred, then, they add a post treatment to produce usable water.

1.1. Theoretical studies

Some authors introduced the conditions prevailing in the interface, the latent heat and the rejection of the salts were accomplished (Körber, Scheiwe and Wollhöver, 1983). The position and advancement of the interface is not known a priori but should be determined through the mechanisms of mass transport and brine properties depending on concentration.

Other theoretical works studied the combination of thermal behavior, heat transfer and liquid-solid phase-change. (Voller and Cross, 1981), describe an extension to the explicit finite difference solution to the enthalpy formulation, which describe an accurate solution to Stefan problems. The temperature distribution, the phase of change position and its velocity, using a finite difference method for a melting problem for different materials were evaluated (Savović and Caldwell, 2003). A complete list of studies of phase-change phenomena from solid to liquid or solid to gas was presented (Yao and Prusia, 1989).

In other research, mathematical models used finite differences to approximate the crystal growth and the temperature distribution, as well as the position and velocity of the interface in motion (Orcutt, 1969), in relation to solute distribution during freezing, (Terwilliger and Dizio, 1970; Körber, Scheiwe and Wollhöver, 1983). The solute distribution coefficients were also determined. Measurements of temperature and concentration profiles were performed (Weeks and Lofgren, 1967; Grange, Viskanta and Stevenson, 1976; Wollhöver *et al.*, 1985; Kapembwa, Rodríguez-Pascual and Lewis, 2014). The phenomenon of solute or impurity rejection at the solid-liquid interface stayed far from understanding (Grange, Viskanta and Stevenson, 1976). However, most of the works do not consider the physical properties changes of the saline solution which have no constant concentration, leading to inaccuracies in their calculations. The present work aims to analyze profiles of both temperature and salinity applying the mains heat and mass transfer equations, providing information to promote the diffusion of the salt, by the temperature gradient. Other factors as the initial saline concentration, recipient dimensions or geometry for instance should be considered to obtain a better of salt separation from ice being the temperature gradient the most important to produce an acceptable fresh water quality. This process has not been widely commercially used for desalination purposes but however this technology had been applied in the food Industries.

2. Physical model

Based on the literature reviewed a lack information about saline solution freezing and salt rejection was found. Especially the effect of concentration gradient on the physical properties of the solution, such as: density, freezing point, thermal conductivity, thermal coefficients, kinematic viscosity, etc. consequently, a physical model is proposed, which allows their calculation.

2.1. Description

This physical model consists in a horizontal transparent cylinder which was thermal insulated except in one flat side to drive the heat flow in a unidimensional x -direction. The non-insulated surface was exposed to the cold air at temperatures T_a below the freezing point of saline solution. Depending on both, brine and air temperatures; T_b and T_{air} , respectively, ice formation evolution take place at the solid-liquid interface. When T_{air} is below saline solution freezing point and T_b higher than the temperature of interface surface of ice, the heat transfer should be performed from brine towards the cold air. The heat transfer is carried out by natural convection between the brine and the ice formed and between the cylinder surface and cold air. By conduction through the ice and the cylinder material thickness. Figure 1 shows the container of saline water.

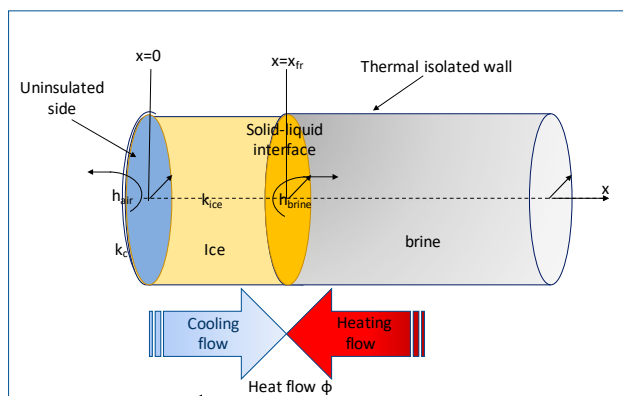


Figure 1. Scheme of the physical model

Temperature values and their gradients should be defined to: 1. produce ice at the solid-liquid interface, and 2. Operate the cooling flow to remove both solidification latent heat of water and heat sensible for ice sub-cooling. The correlation between the ice formation kinetics and the diffusion time. Ice formation should be performed progressively so that it allows to transfer the ions to the brine.

2.2. Heat transfer Model description

2.2.1. Main equations

Freezing cannot be simulated as a simple general equation of heat conduction, which only governs the solid phase. For the sensible heat transfer, the model is normally formulated for one-dimension thermal conduction.

At $x=0$, convection heat transfer is performed between cooling air and cylinder surface no insulated, with a cooling rate:

$$\varphi_{air} = h_{air}(T_{x=0} - T_{air}) \quad \text{Eq.1}$$

At time t , freezing interface is located at $x=x_{Fr}$ and Eq.1 is only adequate for $0 \leq x < x_{Fr}$. At $x=x_{Fr}$, the convection heat transfer is performed between brine and ice surface:

$$\varphi_b = h_b(T_b - T_o) \quad \text{Eq.2}$$

Combining the equations 1, and 2 (Eq.3), the solution of the evolution of temperature and global heat flow as function of x and t is obtained. The progression of the position of ice-brine interface $x_o=x_i$ and the heat flow allows identifying the development of ice production as function of time, at $x_o=x_i$:

$$\varphi_{brine} - \varphi_{ice} = -\rho L_f \frac{dx_o}{dt_o} \quad \text{Eq.3}$$

Where $\frac{dx_o}{dt}$ is the rate of volume of ice formed per unit area on the growing surface ($\text{m}^3/(\text{s m}^2)$) and ρL_f is the latent fusion heat per volume (J/m^3). When the distribution of temperatures allows that the total generated heat flow to be negative, ice rate increases and consequently $\frac{dx_o}{dt_o}$ is positive.

An adequate analytic solution of these coupled partial differential equations is very difficult and may be obtained only for specific cases. Moreover, the particular solution is known at the actual physical conditions on the border. The repartition of temperature should modify the physical and thermal properties within the ice. In order to simplify the solution and adopt practical values, it is assumed that the homogeneity of physical properties of the subcooled solid phase (ice), such as density ρ_{ice} , heat capacity c_{ice} , conductivity k_{ice} , and thermal diffusivity α_i). Further simplifications were implemented by assuming that the cooling air temperature T_{air} keeps constant, while liquid (brine) temperature T_b kept slightly higher than solidification temperature of water ($T_o=T_{Fr} \approx 0^\circ\text{C}$) and lower than brine freezing.

The temperature gradients $(T_i - T_{air}) = (T_b - T_i)$ generated, the heat flow rate; acting as thermal resistances in series from the ice, the plate, and the air:

$$\varphi_{ice} = \frac{T_i - T_{air}}{\frac{1}{h_{air}} + \frac{1}{\frac{k_c}{l_c}} + \frac{1}{\frac{k_{ice}}{x_o}}} \quad \text{Eq.4}$$

The heat flow rate from the brine section is given by Eq. 2, it is exclusive from convection heat transfer. Combining the equations 2 and 4 (in Eq. 5) to vanish the heat flow rates:

$$\frac{T_i - T_{air}}{\frac{1}{h_{air}} + \frac{1}{\frac{k_c}{l_c}} + \frac{1}{\frac{k_{ice}}{x_o}}} - h_b(T_b - T_i) = \rho L_f \frac{dx_o}{dt_o} \quad \text{Eq.5}$$

166 It manages to relate the ice depth x_o to the freezing time t_o . If the process starts at $t=0$ and continue
 167 until t_{fr} time, dt_{fr} needs to increase dx of ice generation becomes:

$$dt_{fr} = \frac{\rho L_f}{\frac{T_i - T_{air}}{\frac{1}{h_{air}} + \frac{1}{\frac{k_c}{e_c}} + \frac{1}{\frac{k_{ice}}{x}}} - h_b(T_b - T_i)} dx_o \quad \text{Eq.6}$$

168 This Eq. 6 is used to identify the time t_{fr} necessary to freeze a thickness x_o of brine. Obviously, the
 169 increase of ice thickness as function of time implies that the coefficient of dx_o should be
 170 positive.

171 2.2.2. Complementary equations

172 In order to obtain the thermal properties, (Yunus Cengel, 2011), it was used the following relations:

$$Nu = \left\{ 0.825 + \frac{0.387 * Ra^{1/6}}{[1 + [0.492/Pr]^{9/16}]^{8/27}} \right\} \quad \text{Eq.7}$$

173 It is a function of:

$$Ra_{air} = \frac{g\beta_{air}(T_c - T_{air})d_c^3}{v_{air}^2} Pr \quad \text{Eq.8}$$

$$Ra_b = \frac{g\beta_w(T_b - T_i)d_c^3}{v_w^2} Pr \quad \text{Eq.9}$$

174 And then, finally:

$$h_{air} = \frac{k_{air}}{d_c} Nu_{air} \quad \text{Eq.10}$$

$$h_b = \frac{k_b}{d} Nu_b \quad \text{Eq.11}$$

175 For both air and brine sides, respectively.

176 While saline solution freezing process occurs the salt contained homogeneously at the beginning of
 177 the process is displaced towards the non-frozen section, consequently, the concentration increases as
 178 ice (now free of salt) grows, and the factors affecting the heat transfer phenomena (described in Eqs.
 179 7-11), depend on the characteristics of the actual solution.

To simplify the model and give an accurate approach, we used sodium chloride (NaCl) to estimate the brine behavior as the evolution of seawater, sodium chloride is the main salt in seawater and values for density, dynamic viscosity and specific heat are in good agreement with literature values of sea water (Melinder and Ignatowicz, 2015). The freezing temperature $T_i(^{\circ}\text{C})$ of the brine salt solution was estimated using the equation proposed in (Fofonoff and R.C., 1983):

$$T_i(^{\circ}\text{C}) = -5.75 \cdot 10^{-2}S + 1.710523 \cdot 10^{-3}S^{\left(\frac{3}{2}\right)} - 2.154996 \cdot 10^{-4}S^2 - 7.53 \cdot 10^{-4} \quad \text{Eq.12}$$

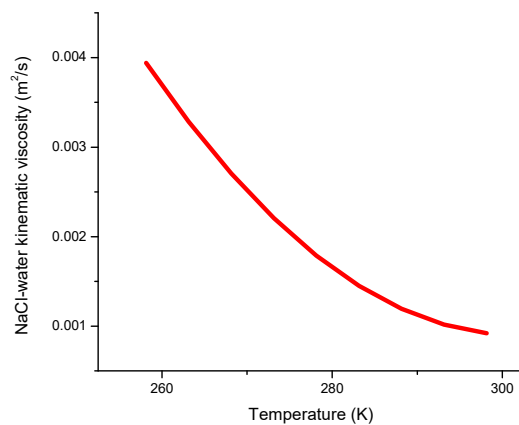


Figure 2 Kinematic viscosity for NaCl-water solutions

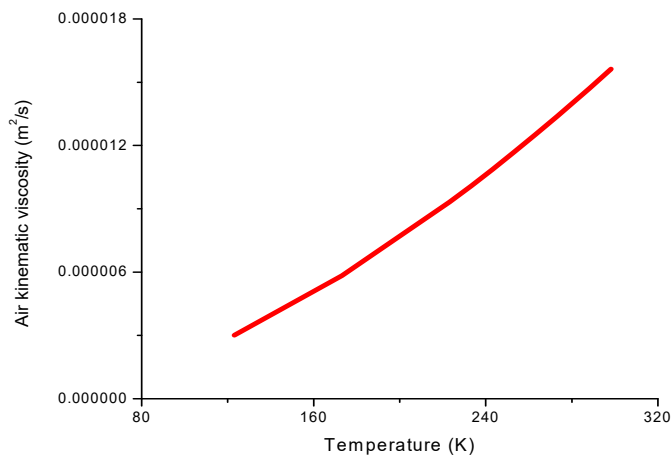


Figure 3 Air kinematic viscosity at low temperatures

The characteristics of dilute solutions, depend on salt concentration. Thus, the freezing point decreases, the density increase, such as the coefficient of volumetric expansion and osmotic pressure. Given the lack information and because the literature gives no values for the variables to be used below 0°C , the functions have been extrapolated mainly based on the freezing point and the properties of sodium chloride-water solutions.

The values for the modified properties during the freezing process, were obtained from the literature, (Å. Melinder, 2007; Cengel and Boles, 2011; Frank Dreith, Raj M. Manglik, 2011), adapting for low temperatures for air and NaCl-water solution, shown in Figure 2 and 3.

The correlations for kinematic viscosities are:

$$v_{air} = 0.0001T_{air}^2 + 0.227T_{air} - 1.6 \quad \text{Eq.13}$$

and

$$v_b = 2 * 10^{-6}T_b^2 - .001T_b + .1471 \quad \text{Eq.14}$$

for air and NaCl-water solution, respectively.

The values of kinematic viscosity, thermal conductivity which depend on brine concentration during the process are defined by many authors. (Å. Melinder, 2007; Sharqawy, Mostafa H., Lienhard V, John H., 2013; Melinder and Ignatowicz, 2015). Their results agree with measurements of thermal conductivity reported by Ryedel, (Granryd and Melinder, 2005; A. Melinder, 2007).

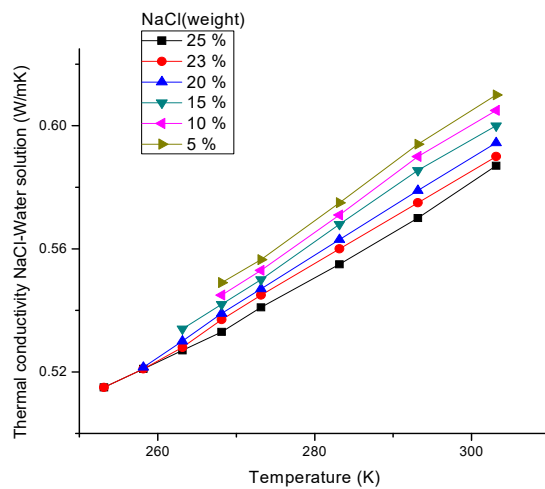


Figure 4 Thermal conductivity for NaCl-Water solutions at different salinity

$$\begin{aligned}
 k_b = & -6.29 - 0.73 \log W_{\%} + 5688.8/T_b - 0.13 \log W_{\%}^2 \\
 & - \frac{1.59 * 10^6}{T_b^2} + \frac{231 \log W_{\%}}{T_b} - 2.45 \\
 & * 10^{-3} \log W_{\%}^3 + \frac{1.49 * 10^8}{T_b^3} \\
 & - \frac{1.24 * 10^4 \log W_{\%}}{T_b^2} \\
 & + \frac{30.8 \log W_{\%}^2}{T_b}
 \end{aligned} \quad \text{Eq.15}$$

202 Prandtl number (Pr) for air low temperature, kinematic viscosity and thermal conductivity can be
 203 obtained by many ways. In this work the tables presented by Holman (1998) are used.

204 The equation for Pr number obtained is:

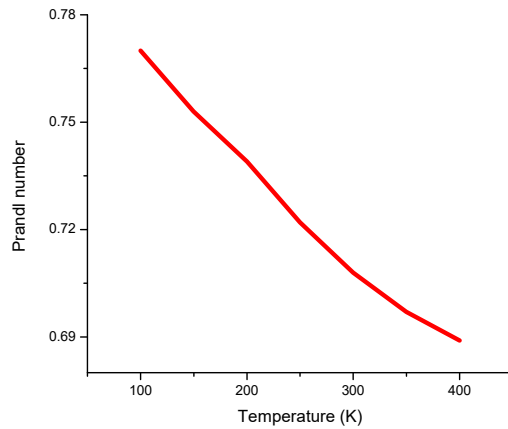


Figure 6 Prandtl Number for low temperatures

$$Pr_{air} = 3 \cdot 10^{-7} T_b^2 - 4 \cdot 10^{-4} T_b + 8.109 \quad \text{Eq.16}$$

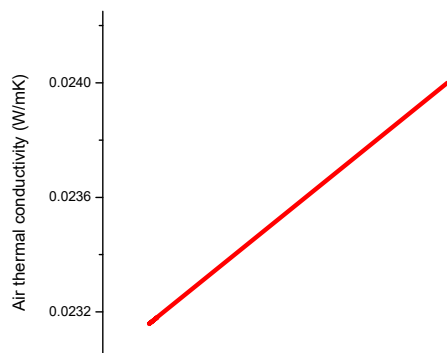


Figure 5 Air thermal conductivity for at low temperatures

205 And the equations obtained for thermal conductivity:

$$k_{air} = -3 \cdot 10^{-8} T_{air}^2 + 8 \cdot 10^{-5} T_{air} + 0.0236 \quad \text{Eq.17}$$

206 The minimum coefficient of multiple correlations for all the equations were $R^2=0.9983$.

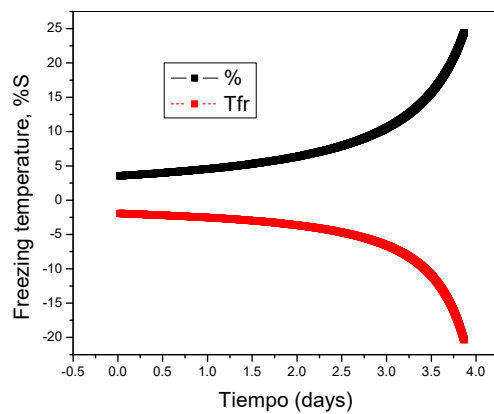


Figure 7 Salinity and freezing temperature evolution

Figure 7 shows freezing temperatures derived from the modeling and it can be observed the evolution of saline concentration and freezing temperature, which should continue until reaches cryostatic point, corresponding at -21°C and 23.4% of concentration, (A. Melinder, 2007), which agrees with colligative properties of diluted solutions.

2.3. Salt diffusion analysis

For salt diffusion during freezing, the model proposed by Allaf is used (Allaf *et al.*, 2011), issued from Fick law, (Allaf, 1982):

$$\frac{\rho_s}{\rho_w} (\vec{v}_s - \vec{v}_w) = -D \vec{\nabla} \left(\frac{\rho_s}{\rho_w} \right) \quad \text{Eq.18}$$

The salinity of solution is $\frac{\rho_s}{\rho_w}$, subsequently, if it is assumed that the water velocity in the brine was globally: $\vec{v}_w \approx 0$, and the movement of salt should be uniaxial towards one dimension; Eq.18 became:

$$S v_s = -D \frac{\partial S}{\partial x} \quad \text{Eq.19}$$

Since the grow ice aims reaching a new equilibrium phase change (Fukui and Maeda, 2002), solidification process is responsible of a partial or total expulsion of salt towards the residual more concentrated brine. The requirement of a complete expulsion of salt ions from dx layer of ice implies that $S_{(x+dx,t)}$ should be twice that $S_{(x,t)}$, then:

$$S v_s = - \frac{D(S_{(x+dx,t)} - S_{(x,t)})}{dx} \quad \text{Eq.20}$$

And

$$Sv_s = -\frac{D(2S_{(x,t)} - S_{(x,t)})}{dx} \quad \text{Eq.21}$$

221 Then, since the diffusion time t_{dif} is correlated with dx ice layer, we have:

$$S \frac{dx}{dt_{dif}} = -\frac{D(S_{(x,t)})}{dx} \quad \text{Eq.22}$$

222 and:

$$\frac{dx}{dt_{dif}} = -\frac{D}{dx} \quad \text{Eq.23}$$

223 Thus, the time dt_{tr} needed for diffusing salt out of dx layer should be:

$$dt_{dif} = \left| \frac{dx^2}{D} \right| \quad \text{Eq.24}$$

224 Accordingly, the study of mass transfer requires estimation of diffusivity D of salt in the brine. There
 225 are several accurate experimental methods for the measurement of D , for example, optical (Krahn,
 226 Schwelger and Lucas, 1983), spectroscopic (Stejskal and Tanner, 1965) the Taylor method (Ouano,
 227 1972; Atwood and Goldstein, 1984). However, the value of D has frequently been estimated because
 228 of the problems due the expensive instrumentation.

229 There are several literature correlations for this purpose (Wilke and Chang, 1955; Hayduk and
 230 Laudie, 1974; Robert C. Reid, John M. Prausnitz, 1987; Miyabe, 2011). We use the Nernst-Haskell for
 231 electrolyte solutions, (Robert C. Reid, John M. Prausnitz, 1987):

$$D = \frac{RT[1/n_+] + [1/n_-]}{F^2[1/\lambda_+^0] + [1/\lambda_-^0]} \quad \text{Eq.25}$$

232 The limiting ionic conductance in water at 298 K for Cl^- is 76.3 and for Na^+ 50.1 ($\text{A}/\text{cm}^2\text{V}/\text{cm}$)(g-
 233 equiv/ cm^3) (Harned and Benton B., 1943).

234 **Table 1 Values obtained of diffusivity of salt in water, Temperature and Salinity**

Salt diffusivity in water	Temperature °C	Salinity S g/l
8.42×10^{-6}	0.717	35.5
8.3517×10^{-6}	-1.497	52.04
8.2841×10^{-6}	-3.686	124.03
8.1921×10^{-6}	-9.347	198.34

235

236 3. Conditions for F/M desalination

237 The F/M process requires at least three essential conditions:

238 1. A positive evolution of grow ice through thickness x :

$$dx_o = a dt_{fr} \quad \text{Eq.26}$$

239 From Eq. 6, since coefficient a should be positive, it is proposed:

$$a = \frac{\frac{T_i - T_{air}}{\frac{1}{h_{air}} + \frac{1}{\frac{k_c}{e_p} + \frac{k_i}{x}}} - h_b(T_b - T_i)}{\rho L_f} > 0 \quad \text{Eq.27}$$

240 Consequently:

$$\frac{T_i - T_{air}}{\frac{1}{h_{air}} + \frac{1}{\frac{k_c}{e_p} + \frac{k_i}{x}}} - h_b(T_b - T_i) > 0 \quad \text{Eq.28}$$

241 This is to say that Eq. 26 and 27 are conditions which strictly depends on air temperature (T_{air}) as well
242 as brine temperature (T_b).

243 2. Requirements of high value of diffusivity D : Since diffusion time t_{dif} normally depends on the
244 diffusivity, which is a function of salinity (Eq. 26 and Table 1), it means that the higher the salinity,
245 the lower value of D .

246 3. Requirements of diffusion time lower than freezing time to get salt-free ice:

$$\frac{dt_{dif}}{dt_{fr}} < 1 \quad \text{Eq.29}$$

247 Freezing conditions should be carried out to perform ice formation as slow as possible, that it allows
248 salt ions to "escape" into brine solution before reaching the solidification of a considered layer (dx).

249

250 4. Results

251 Salt separation should be considered as the most important condition of an appropriate F/M
252 desalination. From the three conditions established, it is possible to regulate the process in terms of
253 the most convenient initial temperatures and salt concentration to allow freezing without salt trap
254 into frozen water.

The Table 2 presents some result of these interesting parameters. Excessive gradient of temperatures will result on entrapment of salts on ice and contrary, the diffusion occurs at low freezing velocity.

Table 2. Properties obtained from the model proposed

d/length	T _{air}	T _i	<i>l_i</i>	Solution viscosity	S (g/l)	Freezing temperature (°C)	β _{air}
0.12/0.6	-15	25	0.1	0.00272	42.6	-2.37	0.0038
0.12/0.6	-15	25	0.2	0.02259	53.3	-3.01	0.0039
0.12/0.6	-30	25	0.4	0.02280	106.5	-6.69	0.0081

Table 3. Continuation. Properties obtained from the model proposed

h _{air}	k _w	h _w	Q _b	$\frac{dt_{dif}}{dt_{fr}}$	a (m/s)	Ice salt free?
7.950	0.459	4.43	1036	0.04369	3.65E-07	YES
7.953	0.453	4.46	1045	0.03322	3.03E-07	YES
12.15	0.432	4.69	1093	1.00045	1.69E-07	NO

S: Salt concentration on liquid.

5. Conclusions

New fundamental model was defined to obtain the conditions able to achieve a suitable saline solution desalination. This model is based on the comparison of both freezing process and salt diffusion in saline water. It involves the effect of thermal parameters, which normally depend on salt concentration (conductivity, freezing temperature, etc.), physical characteristics (density, expansion coefficient, kinematic viscosity, salt diffusivity, etc.), and equipment geometry. The model is at the same time simple and effective and provides an approach tool to conduct F/M desalination process. Important information has been collected to achieve data closer to observed in experimentation in a complex problem. The ice grow rate value must be around 3E-07 to ice salt separation and the freezing temperature must be lower than -15°C to achieve 233 g/l on liquid. The results of this model will help the design and build high-performant adequate F/M prototypes and industrial plants.

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