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Structure and Dynamics in Bulk Metallic Glass forming liquids with minor additions

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Enhancing the glass-forming ability of alloys via the minor addition of specific elements is a technique currently at the forefront of BMG design. The addition of only 4 at.% Al or Ti to binary Zr₅₀Cu₅₀ increases its critical casting thickness from 2 mm to at least 5 mm. However, the physical picture of how minor additions improve the glass-forming ability of alloys is still largely incomplete. Using in-situ synchrotron X-ray diffraction and quasi-elastic neutron scattering (QENS), we investigate the interplay between melt structure and mass transport quantities like viscosity and self-diffusion, as well as the solidification behavior of the (Zr₅₀Cu₅₀)₉₆(Ti,Al)₄ alloys. Combined with electrostatic levitation (ESL), we are able to measure the liquid properties of these chemically reactive alloys over a large temperature range. At the liquidus temperature of Zr₅₀Cu₅₀, the self-diffusivity in the investigated (Zr₅₀Cu₅₀)₉₆Al₄ and (Zr₅₀Cu₅₀)₉₆Ti₄ alloys is almost a factor of two lower than in Zr₅₀Cu₅₀. For the (Zr₅₀Cu₅₀)₉₆Al₄ alloy, this is in line with the observation that minor Al addition leads to higher melt viscosities. However, despite the different microscopic dynamics, the average packing fractions of Zr₅₀Cu₅₀ and (Zr₅₀Cu₅₀)₉₆(Ti,Al)₄ melts are very similar. Hence, contributions from chemical short range order are expected to play an important role in the melt. The ternary alloys also exhibit different crystallization behavior compared to that of Zr₅₀Cu₅₀, which vary with overheating temperature and cooling rate. Both the sluggish dynamics and the complex solidification could contribute considerably to the improved glass-forming ability upon minor addition.

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