ISO SPECTROSCOPY OF YOUNG STELLAR OBJECTS

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ABSTRACT

Observations of gas-phase and solid-state species toward young stellar objects (YSOs) with the spectrometers on board the Infrared Space Observatory are reviewed. The excitation and abundances of the atoms and molecules are sensitive to the changing physical conditions during star-formation. In the cold outer envelopes around YSOs, interstellar ices contain a significant fraction of the heavy element abundances, in particular oxygen. Different ice phases can be distinguished, and evidence is found for heating and segregation of the ices in more evolved objects. The inner warm envelopes around YSOs are probed through absorption and emission of gas-phase molecules, including CO, CO_2, CH_4 and H_2O. An overview of the wealth of observations on gas-phase H_2O in star-forming regions is presented. Gas/solid ratios are determined, which provide information on the importance of gas-grain chemistry and high temperature gas-phase reactions. The line ratios of molecules such as H_2, CO and H_2O are powerful probes to constrain the physical parameters of the gas. Together with atomic and ionic lines such as [O I] 63 μm, [S I] 25 μm and [Si II] 35 μm, they can also be used to distinguish between photon- and shock-heated gas. Finally, spectroscopic data on circumstellar disks around young stars are mentioned. The results are discussed in the context of the physical and chemical evolution of YSOs.

Key words: molecules; ices; silicates; embedded YSOs; shocks; PDRs; circumstellar disks.

1. INTRODUCTION

The formation of stars occurs deep inside molecular clouds, and is often obscured by hundreds of magnitudes of extinction. In recent years, ground-based infrared and (sub-)millimeter observations have provided a broad outline of the different stages of star formation (see Figure 1). The process starts with the collapse of a molecular cloud core, and is followed by an embedded phase in which both accretion onto the protostar and supersonic outflow occur simultaneously. This eventually leads to the clearing stage in which the envelope is dispersed and the young star is revealed optically, in most cases surrounded by a remnant circumstellar accretion disk (e.g., Shu et al. 1993). Intense ultraviolet radiation from the star-disk boundary layer and the young star itself can heat the surrounding gas and affect the abundances through photodissociation and photoionization (e.g., Hollenbach & Tielens 1997). The tremendous range in physical conditions in these different phases, with densities from 10^4 to 10^{13} cm^{-3} and temperatures from 10–10,000 K, affect the abundances and excitation of atoms and molecules. Spectroscopic data therefore contain an enormous amount of information with which to unravel the physical and chemical evolution during star formation.

Observations with the spectrometers on board the Infrared Space Observatory (ISO) in the 2.4–200 μm region are particularly well suited to address several aspects of the physical and chemical properties of YSOs. First, the infrared wavelength region is rich in diagnostic lines of atoms, ions and molecules, which can be used to constrain the physical parameters and assess the importance of different processes such as shocks versus ultraviolet radiation. Second, the broad wavelength coverage, unhindered by the Earth's atmosphere, provides an unbiased overview of the major gas- *and* solid-state species in star-forming regions, and allows an inventory of the major elements (C, O, N, ...) to be made. Third, the evolution of the molecular composition from dark cloud cores to the formation of circumstellar disks and new planetary systems can be probed, thus providing insight into the origin of chemical compounds in our own solar system (see van Dishoeck & Blake 1998, Langer et al. 1999, van Dishoeck & Hogerheijde 1999