

Reaction chamber for a chemical reactor, and chemical reactor constructed therefrom

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- 5 The present invention relates to a reaction chamber for a chemical reactor, comprising a casing of the reaction chamber, a floor of the reaction chamber having an opening located in the floor and an agitator shaft located in the chamber and having at least one agitator element, connected thereto. The invention further relates to a chemical reactor which comprises a multiplicity of reaction chambers according to the invention, and also a process for carrying out chemical reactions in such
10 a reactor.

For many chemical apparatuses, it is advantageous to combine a good mixing with a narrow residence time distribution in a continuous mode of operation. Advantages of the good mixing are, for example, the reduction of mass transfer resistances, a more rapid homogenization or the suspension of solids.

- 15 A narrow residence time distribution frequently permits a higher product quality and a higher space-time yield. The advantages of a continuous mode of operation include, inter alia, stabilization of product quality, higher resource efficiency, shorter set-up times, a higher degree of automation and lower hold-up volumes.

- Possible applications to which said requirement profile can apply are continuous processing of
20 single- or multiphase liquids, dispersions, gas-liquid mixtures, supercritical fluids or mixtures of said materials in various process engineering apparatuses such as chemical or biological reactors, and also apparatuses for absorption, extraction or crystallization.

- In many chemical processes, in addition, the achievable heat exchange is a parameter to be taken into account. Microstructured apparatuses here offer the possibility of achieving very high specific
25 heat exchange surface areas. On account of the low volume thereof, however, they are not suitable for reactions having a long residence time if a certain throughput is to be achieved. In addition, the risk of fouling and blocking due to solids present in the process on account of the small channel diameter is a great challenge.

- Since solids, e.g. in the form of a heterogeneous catalyst, or insoluble reaction products, are present
30 in many process engineering processes as wanted or unwanted components, the handling of suspended solids can be an additional requirement of the process equipment.

In practice, the defined requirement profile can most easily be achieved by a cascade of series-connected, continuously operated stirred tanks. Under certain conditions, however, a more compact structure of the apparatus may be necessary. Such an application case is, e.g., installation into compact, modular production plants.

- 5 It is further known that the defined requirement profile can also be met in particular applications by subdividing a flow tube into a plurality of compartments, each of which are mixed by suitable agitators and are connected to one another via openings.

However, the performance ability of such an apparatus depends greatly on the operating conditions. A high agitator rotary speed, long residence times and large openings between the individual
10 compartments lead to a higher degree of back-mixing and therefore to a wider residence time distribution (e.g. L. Zhang, Q. Pan, G.L. Rempel, Residence Time Distribution in a Multistage Agitated Contactor with Newtonian Fluids: CFD Prediction and Experimental Validation: Industrial & Engineering Chemistry Research, Ind. Eng. Chem. Res. 46 2007, 3538-3546.).

Such apparatuses are widely used, especially in extraction technology. In theory, the back mixing
15 can be minimized by using very small openings between adjoining compartments. However, in this case the pressure drop in the apparatus increases and the discharge of solids is no longer possible, and so this measure is frequently unsuitable for practical use.

The use of a cascaded tube in the reaction technique is described, for example, in US 4,370,470 (DE 32 13 628 A1). The subject matter is a contact device which is a vertical long cylindrical
20 housing having closed ends that is subdivided into a plurality of individual chambers by horizontal baffle plates and having access from one chamber to another via concentric circular openings that are axially centered in the baffle walls, having a continuously rotatable shaft that extends concentrically to the baffle walls within the housing, having at least one agitator appliance that is fixed to the shaft in each chamber, wherein the shaft in the circular openings forms ring-shaped
25 openings in the baffle walls, in such a manner that the ratio of the back-flow extent to the feed extent through the openings is less than 1.5. A description is also given of a process for the continuous preparation of arylene sulfide polymers, in which reaction components that are suitable for the preparation of poly(arylene sulfide) are fed into at least one first chamber of the above described contact vessel, as a result of which a reaction mixture is formed that is conducted through
30 the chambers of the contact device, while each chamber is maintained under conditions for the formation of arylene sulfide polymers, and arylene sulfide polymer is obtained from a chamber that is situated remote from the chamber into which the starting reaction components are introduced. The achievable degree of backmixing in such apparatuses is frequently too high for applications that require a very narrow residence time distribution; in particular, if the reactor volume is low

(some liters or less) and the implementable number of stages is therefore restricted.

WO 2006/126891 (EP 1 904 225) discloses, for example, a cylindrical reactor for the continuous treatment of a stirred material composition that comprises at least two components, comprising a number of reactor chambers that are arranged in a primarily vertical column, separated by base
5 plates, while the transport of the material composition from any desired reactor chamber in the steady state is arranged in order to proceed to the adjoining chamber below, wherein each reactor chamber is provided with a vane mechanism. The vane mechanism comprises a ring-shaped member that is concentric to the reactor chamber and has a vertical elongation and at least one movable agitator member that is arranged in order to induce a vertical movement component in the
10 material in the chamber. The transport is arranged from one chamber to the next chamber in order to take place periodically through an opening having a slider flap in the base plate of each chamber. However, such an apparatus has the disadvantage that an additional movable part and, in association therewith, a seal also, needs to be provided at each chamber.

Cascaded tube installations having elongated gaps for decreasing the backmixing are described in
15 the following publications: J. R. Couper, Chemical process equipment: Selection and design, 2nd ed., Elsevier, Amsterdam, Boston, 2005, pp. 307-315 and B. C. Xu, W. R. Penney, J. B. Fasano, Interstage Backmixing for Single-Phase Systems in Compartmented, Agitated Columns: Design Correlations, Ind. Eng. Chem. Res. 44 (2005) 6103-6109.

For abrasive systems in particular, it is desirable to provide a more robust solution in terms of
20 apparatus of the described formulation of the problem. In addition, it is desirable to make the apparatus design as flexible as possible in such a manner that use is possible with differing systems and under differing process conditions. In this case, the flexibility term comprises not only the property of changing the total volume of the reactor in a flexible manner, but also exchanging individual elements such as agitators or baffles to optimize the geometry for a particular
25 application.

The object of the present invention is to provide an apparatus which combines said requirements. Preferably, said apparatus in addition provides a specific heat-exchange surface area which is as high as possible.

According to the invention, this object is achieved by a reaction chamber for a chemical reactor,
30 comprising a casing of the reaction chamber, a floor of the reaction chamber having an opening located in the floor, and an agitator shaft located in the chamber and having at least one agitator element, connected thereto, wherein the agitator shaft, seen in the longitudinal direction, has a beginning and an end. In addition in the opening of the floor a removable sleeve is provided, which projects out of the reaction chamber, the sleeve is arranged in alignment with the axis of rotation of

the agitator shaft, the internal diameter of the sleeve is greater than the diameter of the agitator shaft and the agitator shaft, at the beginning thereof and/or at the end thereof, is adapted to absorb reversibly a torque provided by means of a further shaft and/or to transmit a torque to a further shaft.

- 5 By means of a multiplicity of reaction chambers according to the invention, a chemical reactor can be built up in a modular manner and be flexibly adapted to changing requirements. The reaction chamber according to the invention can of course be used not only for chemical reactions in the narrow sense, but also for example for extractions and the like.

10 The "casing of the reaction chamber" is that part of the reactor chamber which, in the case of a vertical reaction chamber, is the lateral boundary of the chamber interior to the outside world. In the case of a cylindrical or cylinder-like reaction chamber, it is then the cylinder casing. Accordingly, the "floor of the reaction chamber" is the lower boundary, seen in the vertical direction, of the chamber interior to the outside world.

15 Following the concept of modular usability, in the reaction chamber there is already one agitator shaft having at least one agitator element, connected thereto, to agitate the contents of the reaction chamber. Both radially and tangentially demanding agitation elements can be used. The agitating elements can also be made to be detachable from the agitator shaft and therefore exchangeable.

20 Furthermore, additional internals can be present in the reaction chamber. These meet two main purposes. Firstly, they serve as baffles and prevent the co-rotation of the liquid in the apparatus and support an intensive mixing, secondly, they support an axial and radial bearing mounting of the agitator shaft. Owing to the modular structure, the rapid adaptation to various material systems is realizable. For example, in a system of relatively high viscosity, without great expenditure, the baffles can be adapted and anchor agitators can be used.

25 A fixed upper boundary of the chamber interior to the outside world, also understood as a "lid", is not absolutely necessary for the reaction chamber according to the invention. This is because a plurality of reaction chambers can be stacked one above the other (and are intended to be, in order to form the further chemical reactor according to the invention that is described hereinafter) and the floor of the one reaction chamber can act as a lid of the chamber lying therebeneath.

30 The floor of the reaction chamber according to the invention in addition has an opening. Through this opening, agitator shafts can be conducted out of the interior of the reaction chamber and in addition substances can be introduced into the chamber or discharged from the chamber. At the beginning and/or the end of the agitator shaft, said agitator shaft is designed to absorb or transmit a torque. Preferably it is a redetachable shape-fit connection. This can be implemented, for example,

using a simple push-fit connection such as a hexagon. In this manner, in the case of reaction chambers according to the invention that are stacked one above the other, a shared agitator shaft can be provided for all reaction chambers.

5 The reaction chamber according to the invention in addition has a detachable sleeve, which is arranged in the opening of the floor. In the geometric aspect, the sleeve (and therefore also the opening of the floor of the reaction chamber) are arranged in alignment with the axis of rotation of the agitator shaft, in order that, in the case of the abovementioned reaction chambers stacked one above the other, a continuous agitator shaft can be obtained.

10 Furthermore, the internal diameter of the sleeve is greater than the diameter of the agitator shaft (of course, agitator elements mounted on the agitator shaft are not taken into account when the diameter is determined). Then, even when an agitator shaft is conducted through the opening and sleeve, a mass transfer can take place between chambers stacked one above the other. Preferably, the difference between the internal diameter of the sleeve and the diameter of the agitator shaft is > 0 mm to ≤ 10 mm, more preferably ≥ 1 mm to ≤ 8 mm, and particularly preferably ≥ 2 mm to ≤ 7 mm. Owing to the fact that the sleeve is removable, for any reaction system, the mass transfer through the opening between sleeve and agitator shaft can be adapted individually.

20 As a result of the fact that the sleeve projects out of the reaction chamber, it ensures a decreased backmixing between the contents of the reaction chamber thereof and the contents of the subsequent reaction chamber into which it in turn projects. The extent to which the sleeve projects through the opening from the reaction chamber can be, for example $\geq 10\%$ to $\leq 200\%$, more preferably $\geq 20\%$ to $\leq 150\%$, and particularly preferably $\geq 30\%$ to $\leq 100\%$ of the internal diameter thereof, in each case measured from the lower side of the floor.

25 Further embodiments and aspects of the present invention are described hereinafter. They can be combined in any way with one another, provided that the contrary does not clearly result from the context.

In an embodiment of the reaction chamber according to the invention the agitator shaft is conducted out of the reaction chamber through the sleeve in such a manner that it projects out of the reaction chamber and a gap is formed between agitator shaft and sleeve.

30 Preferably, the gap between agitator shaft and sleeve has a width from > 0 mm to ≤ 5 mm. The values are preferably from ≥ 0.5 mm to ≤ 4 mm and particularly preferably ≥ 1 mm to ≤ 3.5 mm.

In a further embodiment of the reaction chamber according to the invention, the floor has an inclination to the horizontal of $> 0^\circ$ to $\leq 60^\circ$. Preferred inclinations are $> 5^\circ$ to $\leq 50^\circ$, more

preferably $> 10^\circ$ to $\leq 45^\circ$. Such a tapering of the chamber floor serves to support a solid transport within the reaction chamber. In addition, the corners at which the floor abuts the casing, can be rounded.

5 In a further embodiment of the reaction chamber according to the invention the casing and the floor of the reaction chamber are constructed jointly as heating and/or cooling casing. This permits, for example, via a double-walled structure with a cavity, for a continuous-flow heating or cooling medium to be achieved. This embodiment generally has the advantage that a specific heat-transfer surface area which is as large as possible can be provided: the heating or cooling proceeds not only via the side walls, but also via the floors of the chamber. To maximize the outer heat-transfer
10 coefficient, the inflow in the cavity can proceed tangentially, in such a manner that the entire flow of the heating or cooling medium is offset in rotation and a high relative velocity between wall and heating or cooling medium is achieved. The inflow velocity can be adapted by varying the diameter of the corresponding connections.

15 In a further embodiment of the reaction chamber according to the invention the agitator shaft is received within the reaction chamber by a bearing that is supported within the reaction chamber.

In a further embodiment of the reaction chamber according to the invention, the sleeve comprises a polymeric material. Suitable materials are, in particular, polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) and polyolefins such as polyethylene (PE) and polypropylene (PP).

20 Flat chambers offer advantages to achieve a high specific surface area and a high number of stages in a small structure. However, chambers that are too flat suppress the formation of vortexes and thus prevent effective mixing. In a further embodiment of the reaction chamber according to the invention, therefore, the chamber has a ratio of height to diameter of $\geq 0.4:1$ to $\leq 1:1$. The diameter in this case is taken to mean the internal diameter of the chamber and the internal height, measured from the lowest point within the chamber vertically up to the highest point within the chamber.
25 Preferred ratios of chamber height to diameter are $\geq 0.5:1$ to $\leq 0.9:1$, and more preferably $\geq 0.6:1$ to $\leq 0.8:1$. The chamber internal diameter is, for example, between 2 and 15 cm.

In a further embodiment of the reaction chamber according to the invention, said reaction chamber in addition comprises additional feeds and/or outlets, through which substances can be introduced and/or discharged. Additional feeds and/or outlets can be desirable in order to add not all of the
30 reaction components at the beginning of the reactor, but along the reactor. In this manner, for example undesirable side reactions or secondary reactions in a chemical reaction can be suppressed. Similarly, it can be desirable to separate off substances that are formed.

A further aspect of the present invention is a chemical reactor, wherein the reactor comprises a multiplicity of reaction chambers according to the present invention, wherein at least one first reaction chamber and one second reaction chamber are arranged following one another and the agitator shaft for the first reaction chamber is connected to the agitator shaft of the second reaction chamber to transmit a torque.

Preferably, 2 to 20 individual reaction chambers are used. It is further possible that a plurality of reaction chambers are connected to one another by additional feeds and/or outlets.

The invention further relates to a process for carrying out a chemical reaction, wherein the reaction is carried out in a reactor according to the present invention.

10 In an embodiment of the process according to the invention the reaction is carried out at least intermittently with a constant amount of substances introduced into the reactor and discharged from the reactor.

In a further embodiment of the process according to the invention, in the stirred reactor there are arranged, following one another, a first reaction chamber according to the invention comprising additional feeds and/or outlets through which substances can be introduced and/or discharged and a second reaction chamber according to the invention comprising additional feeds and/or outlets through which substances can be introduced and/or discharged. Furthermore, the agitator shaft of the first reaction chamber is connected to the agitator shaft of the second reaction chamber for transmitting a torque and in the first and/or second reaction chamber, at least one operating state is monitored, at a predetermined deviation of the operating state from a predetermined value of this operating state, the feeds opening out into this reaction chamber are closed and the substances originally transported through these feeds are introduced into another reaction chamber.

In this case, it is preferred that the monitored operating state is the pressure drop from one reaction chamber to the adjacent reaction chamber.

25 This reaction procedure permits a reaction chamber to be shut down in the event of blockages and other faults, and to pass the material streams in the reactor round this chamber. Thus, the reaction can be carried on at a following site.

In a further embodiment of the process according to the invention, the reaction is a multiphase reaction. This includes, for example, not only liquid/liquid systems, but also solid/liquid systems.

30 The present invention will be described in more detail with reference to the figures hereinafter, without being limited thereto. In the drawings:

FIG. 1 shows a reaction chamber according to the invention in a view from the top and in cross section

FIG. 2 shows a multiplicity of reaction chambers according to the invention stacked one above the other in cross section

5 FIG. 3 shows a chemical reactor according to the invention

FIG. 1 shows a reaction chamber according to the invention in a combined view having a plan view (upper part of the figure) and a side cross sectional view (lower part of the figure). The reaction chamber has a casing 100, a floor 200 inclined in this case at 33°, and also an opening 300 in the floor 200. The casing 100 and the floor 200 are constructed jointly as heating and cooling casing.

10 For this purpose, a double-shell construction having a second casing 110 and a second floor 210 is used, which contains a cavity 120. Through this cavity 120, a heating or cooling medium for heat exchange can be conducted by means of inlets and outlets that are not shown here. The chamber floor is also heated or cooled thereby and not only the casing as in many conventional structures of kettle reactors.

15 The reaction chamber in addition has an agitator shaft 400 for driving agitator elements 500. The beginning 600 of the agitator shaft 400 is shown at the top in FIG. 1, and the end 700 at the bottom. Beginning 600 and end 700 of the agitator shaft 400 are designed as male and female, respectively, connectors or plug-in connections, in such a manner that when a plurality of reaction chambers are stacked one above the other the agitator shafts of two successive reaction chambers engage in one
20 another in a form-fitting manner in the direction of rotation. Then they form a combined agitator shaft with which the agitator elements of the individual chambers can be driven.

Within the reaction chamber, the agitator shaft 400 is received by a bearing 1000, which itself is supported via corresponding supports 1100 in the reaction chamber. In addition, within the reaction chamber, baffles 1200 are present which, in interaction with agitator elements 500, ensure a
25 relatively high mixing of the reactor contents.

In the opening 300 of the floor 200 of the reaction chamber, in addition there is a removable sleeve 800 which (as shown at the bottom here) projects out of the reaction chamber. The sleeve 800 is arranged in alignment with the axis of rotation of the agitator shaft 600. In FIG. 1, sleeve and axis of rotation are centered in the reaction chamber.

30 The internal diameter of the sleeve 800 is greater than the diameter of the agitator shaft 400 at the height of the sleeve 800. In addition, the agitator shaft 400 projects through the sleeve 800 out of the reaction chamber. As a result, a gap 900 is formed between agitator shaft 400 and sleeve 800,

through which gap, in the case of a plurality of reaction chambers stacked one above the other, a mass transfer can take place between one chamber and the adjacent chamber.

To increase the versatility and modularity of the use of the reaction chambers according to the invention, not only is the sleeve 800 detachable, but also the agitator shaft 400, the bearing 500, the support 1100 and the baffle 1200, and therefore are usable for other structures adapted to a specific application case.

FIG. 2 shows a cross-sectional view of three reaction chambers according to the invention stacked one above the other, as can occur in a chemical reactor according to the invention. The individual chambers are as shown and explained in FIG. 1. As may be seen, the reaction chambers are designed in such a manner that the bottom seal of one chamber forms the upper seal of the chamber lying therebeneath. As a result, a chemical reactor may be made up in a modular manner. Obviously, a sealing composition can also further be provided between the individual reaction chambers.

The agitator shafts 400 engaging in one another in a form-fitting manner in the direction of rotation form, as related to transmission of a torque, a combined agitator shaft. In this case, it can be noted that shear forces also occur in the gap 900, which is formed between agitator shaft 400 and sleeve 800 and through which a mass transfer can take place between adjacent reaction chambers. Therefore, there is no "dead zone" in which the contents of the reaction chamber are not thoroughly agitated.

The width of the gap 900 and therefore the mass transfer between the individual reaction chambers may be established by means of the diameter of the agitator shaft and/or the internal diameter of the sleeves 800. For practical reasons, it is preferred only to exchange the sleeves 800 if another gap width between the chambers is desired. Owing to the fact that the sleeves 800 are removable, this is effected in a simple manner.

FIG. 3 shows schematically a chemical reactor according to the invention with a total of seven reaction chambers according to the invention. The reaction chambers are stacked one above the other in a similar manner to the arrangement shown in FIG. 2 and are sealed at top and bottom with a cover plate 2000 and base plate 2010. The arrangement is mechanically stabilized by means of tie rods 2100 and nuts 2110.

A torque for driving the agitator shafts is transmitted by means of coupling 2200 to the agitator shafts in the interior of the chemical reactor. In the cover plate 2000, in addition accesses 2300 and 2310 are arranged, through which substances or measuring sensors can be introduced into the topmost reaction chamber. Such an access 2320 is also located at the outlet 2400 which is

integrated into the base plate 2010.

Via the feed lines 2500 and the outlets 2510, the heating/cooling casings of the individual reaction chambers can be provided with a heating or cooling medium. An individual heating or cooling is possible.

- 5 The individual reaction chambers are accessible via accesses 2600 and 2610 for material introduction, material discharge and measuring sensors. Via a suitably chosen piping installation, in addition, a bridging of a reaction chamber can be achieved, if a fault occurs during running operation.

Claims

1. A reaction chamber for a chemical reactor, comprising:

a casing (100) of the reaction chamber,

a floor (200) of the reaction chamber having an opening (300) located in the floor,

5 an agitator shaft (400) located in the chamber and having at least one agitator element (500), connected thereto, wherein the agitator shaft (400), seen in the longitudinal direction, has a beginning (600) and an end (700),

characterized in that

10 in the opening (300) of the floor (200) a removable sleeve (800) is provided, which projects out of the reaction chamber,

the sleeve (800) is arranged in alignment with the axis of rotation of the agitator shaft (400),

the internal diameter of the sleeve (800) is greater than the diameter of the agitator shaft (400)

15 and in that the agitator shaft (400), at the beginning (600) thereof and/or at the end (700) thereof, is adapted to absorb reversibly a torque provided by means of a further shaft and/or to transmit a torque to a further shaft.

20 2. The reaction chamber as claimed in claim 1, wherein the agitator shaft (400) is conducted out of the reaction chamber through the sleeve (800) in such a manner that it projects out of the reaction chamber and a gap (900) is formed between agitator shaft and sleeve.

3. The reaction chamber as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein the floor (200) has an inclination to the horizontal of $> 0^\circ$ to $\leq 60^\circ$.

4. The reaction chamber as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the casing (100) and the floor (200) of the reaction chamber are constructed jointly as heating and/or cooling casing.

25 5. The reaction chamber as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the agitator shaft is received within the reaction chamber by a bearing (1000) that is supported within the reaction chamber.

6. The reaction chamber as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein the sleeve (800) comprises a polymeric material.
7. The reaction chamber as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein the chamber has a ratio of height to diameter of $\geq 0.4:1$ to $\leq 1:1$.
- 5 8. The reaction chamber as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 7, wherein the gap (900) between agitator shaft (400) and sleeve (800) has a width from > 0 mm to ≤ 5 mm.
9. The reaction chamber as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 8, in addition comprising additional feeds (2600) and/or outlets (2610), through which substances can be introduced and/or discharged.
- 10 10. A chemical reactor, **characterized in that** the reactor comprises a multiplicity of reaction chambers as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein at least one first reaction chamber and one second reaction chamber are arranged following one another and the agitator shaft for the first reaction chamber is connected to the agitator shaft of the second reaction chamber to transmit a torque.
- 15 11. A process for carrying out a chemical reaction, **characterized in that** the reaction is carried out in a reactor as claimed in claim 10.
12. The process as claimed in claim 11, wherein the reaction is carried out at least intermittently with a constant amount of substances introduced into the reactor and discharged from the reactor.
13. The process as claimed in claim 11 or 12, wherein in the stirred reactor, there are arranged following one another, a first reaction chamber as claimed in claim 9 and a second reaction
- 20 chamber as claimed in claim 9 and the agitator shaft of the first reaction chamber is connected to the agitator shaft of the second reaction chamber to transmit a torque and furthermore at least one operating state is monitored in the first and/or second reaction chamber, at a predetermined deviation of the operating state from a predetermined value of this operating state the feeds opening out into this reaction chamber are closed and the substances originally transported through these
- 25 feeds are introduced into another reaction chamber.
14. The process as claimed in claim 13, wherein the monitored operating state is the pressure drop from one reaction chamber to the adjacent reaction chamber.
15. The process as claimed in any one of claims 11 to 14, wherein the reaction is a multiphase reaction.