INTERFACIAL PROPERTIES IN COMPOSITE NANOSYSTEMS FOR ENERGY HARVESTING

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Composite nanostructures can be efficiently applied for Sunlight detection and conversion and, more in general, for energy harvesting and generation of solar fuels. In most of the applied systems, like photodetectors, excitonic solar cells and (photo)-electrochemical cells to produce solar fuels, nanomaterials can play a critical role in boosting photoconversion efficiency by ameliorating the processes of charge photogeneration, exciton dissociation and charge transport. Critical role in such processes is played by the structure and quality of the interface, which needs to be properly assembled to obtain the desired functionality. Several strategies can be pursued to maximize energy harvesting and storage, including broadening of light absorbance to reduce solar light losses, fastening exciton dissociation and charge injection from the photoactive medium to the charge transporting materials, reducing charge recombination during charge transport and collection at the electrodes. In this lecture, a few examples of application of nanocomposites will be discussed, including all-oxide coaxial p-n junction nanowire photodetectors and solar cells, core-shell quantum dot fluorophores for high-efficiency luminescent solar concentrators, composite sulfides for hydrogen generation, and oriented carbon nanotube forest dispersed in polymer matrix as efficient low-temperature thermoelectric composite. Emphasis will be given to the role of interface engineering in improving the efficiency of energy conversion in different systems, spanning from electric power generation from Sunlight, to chemical fuel production, to conversion of heat lost through thermoelectric materials.

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