Semiselective POCE NMR Spectroscopy

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A new scheme is proposed to edit separately glutamate C_3 and C_4 resonances of ¹H bound to ¹³C, in order to resolve these two signals which overlap at intermediate magnetic fields (1.5 T-3 T), commonly available for human brain studies. The two edited spectra are obtained by combining the individual acquisitions from a four-scan measurement in two different ways. The four acquisitions correspond to the two steps of the classical POCE scheme combined with another two-scan module, where the relative phases of the C_3 and C_4 ¹H resonances are manipulated using zero quantum and double quantum coherence pathways. This new technique exhibits the same sensitivity as POCE and allows the ¹³C labeling of C_3 and C_4 glutamate from [1-¹³C]glucose to be monitored separately in the rat brain at 3 T. Magn Reson Med 44:395–400, 2000. © 2000 Wiley-Liss, Inc.

Key words: POCE; glutamate; tricarboxylic acid cycle; brain; glucose

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the in vivo NMR monitoring of glutamate ¹³C labeling from intravenously infused [1-¹³C]glucose has become a prominent tool for the investigation of brain oxidative metabolism (1–7). The recent evidence that the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle flux determined by this approach is stoichiometrically coupled to glutamate-glutamine cycling has enhanced the interest of in vivo NMR spectroscopy for evaluating glutamatergic neuronal activity (8,9). While direct ¹³C detection offers a wealth of spectral information, enabling sophisticated metabolic modeling, it requires large sample volumes to attain sufficient temporal resolution (10-12). In order to investigate functionally-specialized cortical areas (or even deep brain structures), direct ¹³C detection has been often abandoned to the benefit of reverse detection of ¹H bound to ¹³C, which offers a greatly improved sensitivity at the expense of spectral resolution (4-7,13-15).

Among several reverse $\{{}^{13}C\}{}^{-1}H$ spectroscopy techniques, whose in vivo feasibility has been demonstrated (16–18), the techniques mostly used for robust neurobiological investigations are derived from the well-established Proton Observed Carbon Edited (POCE) approach based on difference spectroscopy (1,19). At very high field (e.g. 9.4 T in Ref. 6) reverse $\{{}^{13}C\}{}^{-1}H$ experiments provide information on ${}^{13}C$ labeling of several metabolites (glutamate, glutamine, aspartate, lactate, GABA). However, at intermediate fields mostly accessible for human studies (1.5 to 4 T), kinetic information is usually restricted to the labeling of the C_3 and C_4 positions of glutamate (3,15). Below 3 T, the resolution of the C_3 and C_4 14 signals

Received 2 February 2000; revised 20 April 2000; accepted 21 April 2000. © 2000 Wiley-Liss, Inc. becomes difficult, partly because of their broad multiplet structures. Even if the time course of label incorporation into glutamate C_4 alone has already been used to estimate TCA cycle flux (4,5,7), it is more accurate to use both C_4 and C_3 kinetics (2). The time lag of C_3 labeling (occurring on the second turn of TCA cycle) behind C_4 labeling (occurring on the first turn) is indeed directly related to the cycle rate. Therefore, when both kinetics are available, an estimate of the TCA cycle rate can be obtained even in the absence of information on the time course of plasma glucose ¹³C-enrichment.

The purpose of this study is to propose and evaluate a new editing scheme, called SPOCE (Semiselective POCE), designed to resolve the time courses of glutamate C_3 and C_4 ¹H resonances, even when both signals strongly overlap. The two kinetics are acquired simultaneously and without loss of sensitivity as compared to the standard POCE method. After a theoretical analysis of the editing sequence, in vitro and in vivo results demonstrating the efficiency of the new method are presented.

THEORY

The SPOCE sequence is depicted in Fig. 1. It is very similar to the POCE sequence, except that two ¹³C editing pulses are used instead of one. Depending on the flip angle and the relative phase of these two pulses, non-selective or semiselective inversion of glutamate C_3 and C_4 resonances of ¹H bound to ¹³C (referred to as satellites) can be obtained, as explained below. In the conventional POCE scheme, two sequences A and B are run with $(\theta_1, \theta_2) = (0^\circ, 0^\circ)$ and $(\theta_1, \theta_2) = (0^\circ, 180^\circ)$, respectively. The glutamate C_3 and C_4 satellites are inverted in sequence B and not inverted in sequence A, relative to the resonances of ¹H bound to ¹²C (referred to as mother resonances). By taking the difference between the two spectra (A-B), both C_3 and C_4 satellites are co-edited with the same sign (defined as positive by reference to the mother resonances), and the mother resonances are canceled.

In the new SPOCE scheme, two additional sequences C and D are run with $(\theta_1, \theta_2) = (90^\circ, 90^\circ)$ and $(\theta_1, \theta_2) = (90^\circ, -90^\circ)$, respectively. All ¹³C hard pulses are applied at the C_4 frequency and $1/\tau$ is set to twice the frequency difference $\Delta \nu_{C3-C4}$ between the C_3 and C_4 ¹³C resonances ($\Delta \nu_{C3-C4} = 201$ Hz for glutamate at 3 T). Using the product operator formalism for a weakly coupled IS system (I for ¹H, S for ¹³C) with an heteronuclear coupling constant J, the effect of the different sequences (A, B, C, D) on C_3 and C_4 satellites can be analyzed. All pulses are assumed to have + x phase and the ¹³C rotating frame is set at the C_4 frequency. Chemical shift effects for ¹H are refocused by the spin echo, so that their influence is not explicitly accounted for in the calculations. The evolution of the IS spin system

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Table 1 Sign of the C_3 and C_4 Satellites Signals, Relatively to Their Mother Resonances, for the Four Sequences A, B, C, and D of the SPOCE Scheme Depicted in Fig. 1

	C_3 satellites	C ₄ satellites
A : $(\theta_1, \theta_2) = (0^\circ, 0^\circ)$	+	+
$B: (\theta_1, \theta_2) = (0^\circ, 180^\circ)$	—	—
$C : (\theta_1, \theta_2) = (90^\circ, 90^\circ)$	+	—
D : $(\theta_1, \theta_2) = (90^\circ, -90^\circ)$	_	+

during sequence C, after the excitation pulse, is depicted in the following diagram:

$$C4: -I_y \xrightarrow{1/2J} 2I_x S_z \xrightarrow{\theta_1} -2I_x S_y \xrightarrow{\tau + 180^\circ}$$

$$-2I_x S_y \xrightarrow{\theta_2} -2I_x S_z \xrightarrow{1/2J} -I_y$$

C3:
$$-I_y \xrightarrow{1/2J} 2I_x S_z \xrightarrow{\theta_1} -2I_x S_y \xrightarrow{\tau + 180^\circ}$$

$$2I_x S_y \xrightarrow{\theta_2} 2I_x S_z \xrightarrow{1/2J} I_y$$

Of course, for the mother C_3 and C_4 resonances (no heteronuclear J coupling), the spin state at the end of sequence C is represented by I_y . Thus, in the case $(\theta_1, \theta_2) = (90^\circ, 90^\circ)$, C_4 satellites, but not C_3 satellites, are inverted relatively to their mother resonances. This simple result suggests that, although $1/\tau$ is of the same order of magnitude as J, sequence C works as if heteronuclear scalar coupling could be neglected during the evolution delay of the $90^\circ - \tau - 90^\circ$ semiselective pulse on the ¹³C channel. Whatever the relative values of $1/\tau$ and J, this naive interpretation is strictly true because the transverse terms of the density operator during τ are heteronuclear zero and double quantum coherences which do not evolve under scalar coupling.

The results of similar analyses, carried out for all four sequences of the SPOCE scheme, are summarized in Table 1. It appears from this table that the spectrum obtained through the combination A-B+C-D retains the full intensity of the C_3 satellites signal and suppresses the C_4 satellites signal, as well as both mother resonances. On the other hand, the combination A-B-C+D suppresses the C_3 satellites signal while editing the full C_4 satellites signal. Therefore, separate editing of C_3 and C_4 satellites is achieved from the same four spectral acquisitions, and no time is wasted as compared to the standard POCE method.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In Vitro Sample and Animal Preparation

A 1.8-ml glass sphere was filled with a 500 mM solution of glucose in 99.9% D_20 . The ¹³C-enrichment of glucose on carbon 1 was adjusted to about 50% using [1-¹³C]glucose (ISOTEC Inc.). A male Sprague-Dawley rat (300 g), fasted

overnight, was anesthetized with ketamine and xylazine. The left femoral vein was cannulated with PE 50 tubing for infusion of glucose. The scalp was removed and the skull was cleaned of all tissues between the temporal ridges. The animal was installed on a platform with its head maintained in place by a bite-bar and ear barrels. A thin layer of plastic wrap was placed over the skull to limit dessication and avoid contact of moisture with the probe positioned just above the skull.

During the in vivo NMR experiment, the plasma glucose level of the rat was rapidly raised from euglycemia (1.1 g/l) to about 4 g/l by a 3.5 ml/kg bolus of 100%-enriched $[1^{-13}C]$ -glucose (ISOTEC Inc.) in a 20% (wt/vol) solution. The bolus was infused at an exponentially decaying rate over 9 min, and was followed by a continuous infusion at 3 ml.kg⁻¹hr⁻¹. This infusion profile had been previously optimized to rapidly achieve a stable hyperglycemic plateau.

NMR Acquisitions

All spectra were acquired on a Bruker AVANCE spectrometer interfaced to a 3 T whole-body magnet (Oxford). A gradient insert with a rise time of 170 μ sec and a maximum gradient strength of 25 mT/m was used for spoiling and localization. The home-build RF probe consisted of a ¹H surface coil (12 mm diameter) for transmission and reception, and a larger ¹³C concentric coil (30 mm diameter) for editing and decoupling pulses.

The pulse sequence in Fig. 1 was used to edit either glucose $C_1\alpha$ and $C_1\beta$ satellites, in vitro, or glutamate C_3 and C_4 satellites, in vivo. For glucose, the chemical shift difference between the ¹³C resonances of $C_1\alpha$ (92.7 ppm) and $C_1\beta$ (96.6 ppm) is smaller than for glutamate C_3 (27.9 ppm) and C_4 (34.4 ppm). However, the heteronuclear coupling constants are higher for glucose (162–170 Hz) than for glutamate (127– 130 Hz). Thus, for glucose, the experimental delays $1/J_{CH}$ and τ were set to 6.0 msec and 4.0 msec, respectively, resulting in a total echo time of 10.0 msec. For glutamate, the experimental delays $1/J_{\rm CH}$ and τ were set to 8.0 msec and 2.5 msec, respectively, resulting in a similar total echo time of 10.5 msec. In both cases, the ¹³C carrier was set on the low field resonance ($C_1\beta$ for glucose, C_4 for glutamate), and 2.5 msec gradient spoilers at 70% maximum strength (on x and z directions) were symmetrically applied in the spin echo to eliminate non-refocusing magnetization.

Localization of a $10 \times 6 \times 10 \text{ mm}^3$ (in x, y, and z directions) volume of interest (VOI) was achieved through outer volume suppression before the SPOCE sequence. Six hyperbolic secant pulses were used for ~90° excitation in a non-adiabatic manner to saturate the six slices adjacent to the VOI (20). The water linewidth in the VOI was optimized manually down to about 15 Hz in vivo. The



FIG. 1. Schematic representation of the pulse sequence used in the SPOCE scheme.

SWAMP method was used for adiabatic water suppression (21). The ¹³C pulses were calibrated using a 1 ml sphere containing a solution of $[1^{-13}C]$ formate and positioned above the probe. For in vivo measurements, the ¹³C frequency of glutamate C_4 was deduced from ¹H frequency of the creatine singlet at 3.0 ppm, based on previous in vitro calibration. The sensitivity of in vivo NMR experiments was improved through WALTZ-8 broadband decoupling, applied on the ¹³C channel during ¹H acquisition.

In order to minimize subtraction artifacts, single scans from SPOCE sequences A, B, C, and D were acquired in an interleaved mode using the pipeline filter capability of the Bruker AVANCE system. For in vivo kinetic studies, each block of four spectra consisted of two dummy scans and 128 interleaved scans recorded with TR = 2.5 s, leading to an accumulation time of 5.5 min. These 128 scans were summed into four separate FIDs of 32 scans each, corresponding to SPOCE sequences A, B, C, and D. Edited spectra were obtained by directly combining individual FIDs, before Fourier transform.

RESULTS

In Vitro Test

The SPOCE scheme was first evaluated in vitro, on a spherical phantom containing a solution of glucose ¹³C-enriched on carbon 1. This phantom provided at 3 T two well-resolved sets of satellites, corresponding to the $C_1\alpha$ and $C_1\beta$ resonances and mimicking glutamate C_3 and C_4 resonances, respectively. Thus, with a straightforward adjustment of the delays of the acquisition sequence, this phantom enabled us to test the selectivity of the semiselective editing in optimal conditions in terms of signal-tonoise ratio and spectral resolution.

Figure 2 shows the spectra resulting from four different combinations of the four SPOCE sequences A, B, C, and D. Figure 2a corresponds to the standard POCE scheme, with the difference spectrum A-B, where both sets of satellites are co-edited with the same sign. By taking the difference C-D (Fig. 2b), $C_1 \alpha$ and $C_1 \beta$ satellites are also co-edited, but with opposite signs. The spectrum in Fig. 2c is the sum of the two previous difference spectra and shows the selective editing of the $C_1\alpha$ satellites (combination A-B+C-D). Similarly, the spectrum in Fig. 2d results from the subtraction of the two initial difference spectra and shows the selective editing of the $C_1\beta$ satellites (combination A-B-C+D). The excellent selectivity of the SPOCE scheme is reflected by the very low level of contamination of the edited satellites by the non-edited satellites both in Fig. 2c and 2d.

In Vivo Validation

The in vivo SPOCE editing of glutamate C_3 and C_4 resonances is illustrated in Fig. 3 using ¹³C decoupling during acquisition. These spectra, acquired on a rat brain, correspond to 22 min of accumulation centered 70 min after the beginning of a [1-¹³C]glucose IV infusion. Similarly to Fig. 2, glutamate C_3 and C_4 resonances are co-edited with the same sign and with opposite signs in Fig. 3a and b, respectively. Figure 3c demonstrates the selective editing of glutamate C_3 resonance, at 2.10 ppm, while Fig. 3d demonstrates for the same sign and selection of the same sign and compared to the selective editing of glutamate C_3 resonance, at 2.10 ppm, while Fig. 3d demonstrates for the selective selection of the selective selection of the selective selection.



FIG. 2. Validation of the SPOCE scheme on a phantom of glucose ¹³C-enriched on carbon 1. The four spectra correspond to the following combinations of the acquisition sequences listed in Table 1: **a:** A-B; **b:** C-D; **c:** A-B+C-D; **d:** A-B-C+D. The semiselective editing of the ¹H bound to ¹³C at $C_1\alpha$ and $C_1\beta$ positions is demonstrated in **c** and **d**, respectively.

strates the selective editing of glutamate C_4 resonance, at 2.35 ppm. The edited spectra also display minor signals, which can be assigned to lactate/alanine, aspartate, and creatine/GABA, according to Ref. 6.

Serial spectra obtained through the SPOCE scheme on a rat brain are shown in Fig. 4 with a time resolution of 5.5 min. The two series of spectra, acquired simultaneously during the same [1-¹³C]glucose infusion, clearly reflect the difference in kinetics between the ¹³C labeling of glutamate C_4 and that of C_3 . A three-parameter mono-exponential fit of the peak height versus time (Fig. 5) provided a time constant of 33 min for glutamate C_4 and 62 min for C_3 .

DISCUSSION

The proposed SPOCE approach allows two resonances of ¹H bound to distinct ¹³C to be edited separately, even if they overlap, provided that the two ¹³C resonances are sufficiently resolved. The method was validated in vitro by selectively editing the $C_1\alpha$ and $C_1\beta$ satellites of glucose, ¹³C-enriched on carbon 1. Separate editing of glutamate C_3 and C_4 satellites also was achieved in vivo, on the rat brain, in order to monitor the incorporation of ¹³C label during an IV infusion of [1-¹³C]glucose. With the SPOCE scheme, the individual kinetics of label incorporation on the two glutamate positions C_3 and C_4 could be measured



FIG. 3. Validation of the SPOCE scheme on the brain of an anesthetized rat receiving an IV infusion of $[1^{-13}C]$ glucose. The four ¹³C-decoupled spectra correspond to the following combinations of the acquisition sequences listed in Table 1: **a**: A-B; **b**: C-D; **c**: A-B+C-D; **d**: A-B-C+D. The only data processing used was a line broadening of 5 Hz. The data were obtained from a 22 min accumulation centered 70 min after the beginning of the glucose infusion. The semiselective editing of ¹H bound to ¹³C at C_3 and C_4 positions is demonstrated in **c** and **d**, respectively. Minor resonances from lactate/alanine (1.3 ppm), aspartate (2.8 ppm), and creatine/GABA (3.0 ppm), assigned according to Ref. 6, are highlighted with a star in **a**.

within the same acquisition, even at intermediate field strength (3 T in this study) where the two ¹H resonances strongly overlap.

The four-scan SPOCE measurement can be regarded as the combination of two distinct modules of difference spectroscopy, named SQ (for single quantum) and ZDQ (for zero and double quantum). In SQ, corresponding to the classical POCE scheme (sequences A and B in Table 1)



FIG. 4. Stacked plot of pairs of SPOCE spectra recorded from the brain of an anesthetized rat receiving an IV infusion of $[1^{-13}C]$ glucose and showing the ¹³C labeling of glutamate C_3 and C_4 . The midpoint time (in min from the beginning of the glucose infusion) for the acquisition of each other pair of spectra is indicated to the right. The only data processing used was a line broadening of 10 Hz.



FIG. 5. Time course of ¹³C labeling of glutamate C_3 and C_4 obtained through the SPOCE technique from the brain of an anesthetized rat (same experiment as in Fig. 4). The relative intensities of the resonances were determined by peak picking, after manual linear baseline correction. The solid lines represent the best fit of the data to a three-parameter mono-exponential equation.

and involving only single quantum coherences, glutamate C_3 and C_4 satellites are co-edited with the same sign, whatever the value of the delay τ (Fig. 1). For ZDQ (sequences C and D), the delay τ must be adjusted to a precise value $(1/2\Delta\nu_{C3-C4})$ in order to co-edit both C_3 and C_4 satellites with opposite signs. By adding or subtracting the difference spectra obtained from SQ and ZDQ, the C_3 or C_4 satellites are edited separately with the full intensity corresponding to the acquisition of the four individual spectra. Thus, while SPOCE is based on a four-scan measurement, cancellation of the mother resonances is obtained for each two-scan module (SQ or ZDQ). In addition to the interleaved acquisition mode, this feature contributes to the reduction of subtraction artifacts. It is noteworthy that sequence C or D is identical to the classical HMQC sequence (22) and involves a mixing of zero and double quantum coherences during the delay τ . Because the ¹³C pulses are applied at the C_4 frequency, the C_4 satellites are always edited by ZDQ with maximum amplitude, whatever τ value. On the other hand, the amplitude of the C_3 satellites is modulated as $\cos(2.\pi.\tau.\Delta\nu_{C3-C4})$, because the interference of zero and double quantum coherences varies with τ .

Because of this interference, the adjustment of the ¹³C carrier frequency is critical for an optimal performance of the SPOCE ZDQ module. The misadjustment of this experimental parameter results in a cross-contamination between the glutamate $C_{\rm 3}$ and $C_{\rm 4}$ signals in edited ${\rm ^1H}$ spectra. In the worst case, where ¹³C pulses are applied at the midpoint frequency between C_3 and C_4 ¹³C resonances, the difference spectrum resulting from the ZDQ module does not contain any C_3 or C_4 signal, and the two SPOCE spectra which should correspond to the selective editing of C_3 and C_4 now simply contain the co-edited C_3 and C_4 resonances from the SQ module, with additional noise. The spectra presented in Fig. 3 and the difference in kinetics of ^{13}C labeling reflected in Fig. 5 indicate that no major crosscontamination occurred during the in vivo experiment. However, in order to double-check the correct setting of the 13 C carrier frequency deduced from the creatine singlet 1 H frequency at 3.0 ppm, post mortem tests on the rat brain were performed at the end of the $[1-{}^{13}C]$ glucose infusion using the strong signal from $[3-{}^{13}C]$ lactate (data not shown).

The coherence pathways used during the delay τ for the ZDQ module do not allow a semiselective refocusing ¹H pulse to be used for water suppression, like most previous applications of POCE did. Because of this limitation, a simple 180° hard pulse was implemented in the ¹H spin echo and water suppression was optimized using adiabatic inversion pulses applied off-resonance (21). For future application in awake subjects, where subtraction error originating from unstable residual water signal may appear, further improvement of water suppression may be necessary. The ZDQ module of the SPOCE scheme also limits the total echo time of the sequence, through the constraint $\tau = 1/2\Delta\nu_{C3-C4}$. In the case of glutamate C_3 and C_4 (or of glucose $C_1\alpha$ and $C_1\beta$) at 3 T, the resulting value of 10.5 ms (or 10.0 ms, respectively) was short enough to limit the effect of homonuclear J-modulation on signal intensity, and long enough to be compatible with the current performances of gradients, even on a whole body system. At lower field, e.g. 1.5 T, where the SPOCE approach should be even more helpful, the total echo time of the editing sequence for glutamate would be increased to the perfectly acceptable value of 13.0 ms.

At magnetic field values beyond 3 T, where glutamate C_3 and C_4 ¹H resonances are sufficiently resolved, the SPOCE scheme should also prove useful in order to suppress the contamination of the glutamate C_4 signal by the glutamine C_4 resonance (6), e.g. for functional studies focused on ¹³C incorporation at the C_4 position (4,5,7,15). It must be noted that this contamination, usually neglected because of the slower kinetics of glutamine ¹³C labeling, is already reduced in the present in vivo data obtained at 3 T. The ¹³C glutamine C_4 resonance is indeed located about the midpoint frequency between glutamate C_3 and C_4 ¹³C resonances and it is hence poorly edited by the ZDQ module of the SPOCE scheme. However, the contamination from glutamine C_4 through the SQ module is still present. Similarly, glutamate C_3 ¹H signal is contaminated by glutamine C_3 resonance through the ZDQ module as well as through the SQ module, because the two corresponding ¹³C resonances are very close. Thus, the separation of all glutamate and glutamine ¹H signals (especially for long turn-over studies) does not appear possible with the proposed SPOCE scheme. Even if high field systems (6) and twodimensional NMR approaches (23) could offer solutions to this challenging problem, direct ¹³C detection certainly remains an attractive alternative to study metabolites with turn-over much slower than that of glutamate.

Another possible source of contamination in the 2–2.5 ppm region of SPOCE-edited ¹H spectra is the N-acetylaspartate (NAA) methyl signal. The ¹³C chemical shift of NAA methyl resonance is such that the corresponding ¹H resonance is predominantly co-edited with the glutamate C_4 signal through the SPOCE scheme. Because of its high concentration, natural abundance detection of NAA signal at 2.01 ppm has been achieved in human brain using a classical POCE scheme at 4 T (14). Due to lower sensitivity, no such signal could be observed in our spectra from rat brain before [1⁻¹³C]glucose infusion (Fig. 4). In addition, because of its extremely slow turnover (24), NAA ¹³C labeling was not observed on the time scale of the experiments reported here (Fig. 3d).

To conclude, the SPOCE scheme should advantageously replace classical POCE for all studies focused on brain glutamate C_4 and C_3 ¹³C labeling, especially at magnetic field strength below 4 T. The more accurate kinetic information, as well as the simplified spectroscopic analysis, resulting from the separate editing of the C_4 and C_3 resonances will facilitate the measurement of the TCA cycle flux on intermediate magnetic field NMR systems, more readily available for applications in humans.

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