Study on the Enhancement of Proton Affinity by N-Diisopropyloxy Phosphorylation of Amino Acid in Mass Spectrometry

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Abstract: With introduction of a diisopropyloxy phosphoryl group into the N terminal of amino acids, it was found that proton affinity (PA) of amino acid was enhanced in mass spectrometry. Density functional theory calculations showed that the energy for protonation of DIPP-amino acid is lower than that of amino acid, which means PA of DIPP-AA is higher than that of corresponding amino acid. These results, coincident with our empirical results, offer a useful interpretation of experimental observations.

Keywords: Proton affinity, diisopropyloxy phosphoryl group, amino acid, mass spectrometry.

In our previous work, it was found that N-phosphorylation of small peptides could improve their sensitivity in FAB-MS. Theoretical study showed that N-dimethyloxy phosphoryl dipeptide is more easily to be ionized¹. Further research work was done in this direction. Using the kinetic method developed by Cooks², we obtained proton affinities (PA) of some phosphoryl amino acids in ESI-MS. It was found that introduction of a diisopropyloxy phosphoryl group (DIPP) into the N-terminal of amino acids resulted in an enhancement of the PA of amino acid. To demonstrate the result the energies for protonation of DIPP-AA, and corresponding amino acid were studied by density functional theory. The geometries of all the species were optimized at the B3LYP/6-31G (d, p) level on SGI R12000 workstation.

Results and Discussion

In the kinetic method, the proton-bound dimmers of DIPP-Ala or DIPP-Leu with different reference base, such as Ile, Pro, Trp, have been formed respectively and dissociated in ESI-MS/MS. Compared with the gas-phase proton affinities of amino acids³, it could be concluded that the PA of DIPP-Ala and DIPP-Leu are between 934 kJ/mol to 948 kJ/mol, about 36-50kJ/mol higher than Ala 898kJ/mol and 20-34kJ/mol higher than Leu 914kJ/mol.

For computational work, we proposed a simplified model for protonation process, two possible proton-binding sites were marked (**Scheme 1**). Using density functional theory, we obtained the relative energies of protonated amino acid and DIPP-AA listed in **Table 1**, the energies of non-protonated forms were zero points. For amino acid, the

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best proton-binding site is amino group. The energy of protonated amino acid ion 1, with the proton binding to the amino group, is about 100kJ/mol lower than that of protonated amino acid ion 2, with the proton binding to carbonyl group. For DIPP-AA, DIPP group is the best proton-binding site. As showed in **Table 1**, the energy of the protonated DIPP-Ala ion 1 is 43.94kJ/mol lower than that of the protonated Ala. In other words, the PA of DIPP-Ala is higher than that of Ala, which is in agreement with the results from kinetic method experiments. Similar result was obtained for DIPP-Leu and Leu, in agreement with the conclusion mentioned above.

The enhancement of PA of amino acid with introduction of DIPP group results in improvement of sensitivity of amino acid in ESI-MS. This property might have some potential for the amino acid detection in mass spectrometry, provide a new approach for the analysis of peptides, such as peptide sequencing, which is very valuable in the proteomics.

Scheme 1 Ionization process of the model compounds, amino acid and DIPP-amino acid, with their proton-binding sites marked.



DIPP-AA

CH₂CH(CH₃)₂

amino acid

Table 1 Relative energies of protonated amino acid and protonated DIPP-amino acid

	Relative energy of protonated amino acid /phosphoryl amino acid (Unit: kJ/mol)					
	$[Ala + H]^+$	$[DIPP-Ala + H]^+$	ΔE	$[Leu + H]^+$	$[DIPP-Leu + H]^+$	ΔE
Binding Site 1	-908.50	-952.44	43.94	-923.99	-955.06	31.07
Binding Site 2	-792.50	-823.74	31.24	-815.58	-834.89	19.31

The energies of non-protonated forms are zero point. ΔE is the difference between the relative energies of protonated amino acid and protonated DIPP-AA, in agreement with the results $\Delta E =$ 36-50kJ/mol for Ala and ΔE =20-34kJ/mol for Leu obtained from the kinetic method experiments.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the National Natural Science Foundation of China (No. 20175026), the Ministry of Science and Technology of China, the Education Ministry of China and Tsinghua University for financial support.

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Received 24 April, 2002