



## Sequential assignment of proline-rich regions in proteins: Application to modular binding domain complexes

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### Abstract

Many protein–protein interactions involve amino acid sequences containing proline-rich motifs and even polyproline stretches. The lack of amide protons in such regions complicates assignment, since <sup>1</sup>HN-based triple-resonance assignment strategies cannot be employed. Two such systems that we are currently studying include an SH2 domain from the protein Crk with a region containing 9 prolines in a 14 amino acid sequence, as well as a WW domain that interacts with a proline-rich target. A modified version of the HACAN pulse scheme, originally described by Bax and co-workers [Wang et al. (1995) *J. Biomol. NMR*, **5**, 376–382], and an experiment which correlates the intra-residue <sup>1</sup>H<sup>α</sup>, <sup>13</sup>C<sup>α</sup>/<sup>13</sup>C<sup>β</sup> chemical shifts with the <sup>15</sup>N shift of the subsequent residue are presented and applied to the two systems listed above, allowing sequential assignment of the molecules.

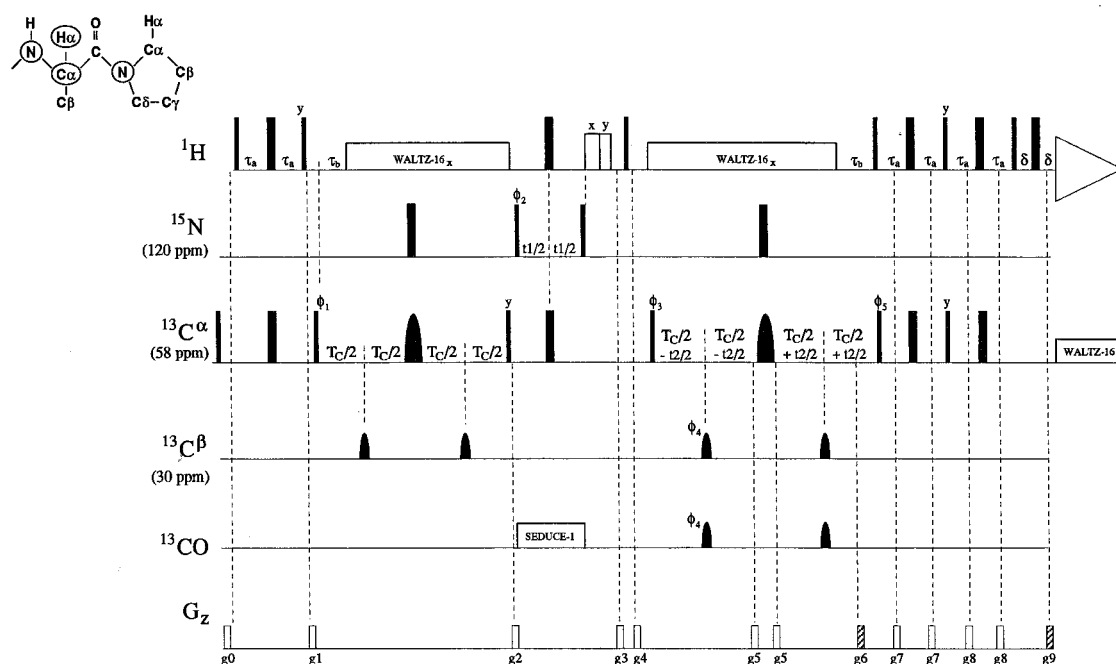
### Introduction

Protein–protein interactions regulate a diverse array of cellular processes, including growth and differentiation, motility and enzyme function (Pawson, 1995). With the identification of an increasing number of modular binding domains and associated targets it is apparent that proline-rich sequences play a central role in coordinating many protein complexes. For instance, SH3 domains bind sequences with the minimum consensus PXXP (Yu et al., 1994; Alexandropoulos et al., 1995). A classic example is the interaction of SH3 domains from the adaptor protein Grb2 with the sequence VPPPVPVRR in the guanine nucleotide exchange factor Sos1 (Rozakis-Adcock et al., 1993). WW domains also bind proline-rich regions in their target proteins, of which four types have been identified to date. Three of these contain stretches of sequential proline residues, including XPPXY (Staub

et al., 1996; Staub and Rotin, 1996), PPLP (Bedford et al., 1997; Ermekova et al., 1997) and regions rich in P, G and M (Bedford et al., 1998). The newly described GYF domain from the CD2 binding protein CD2BP2 recognizes two tandem repeats of the sequence PPPPGHR spaced seven amino acids apart in the cytoplasmic tail of the T cell surface glycoprotein CD2 (Freund et al., 1999). The cytoskeletal protein profilin binds to the sequence (P<sub>5</sub>G)<sub>3</sub> as well as stretches of greater than six sequential proline residues (Reinhard et al., 1995; Gertler et al., 1996), while the EVH1 domains in Mena and VASP recognize the core sequence FPPPP found in a number of cytoskeletal proteins (Gertler et al., 1996). A small number of the reported interactions involving poly-Pro sequences are summarized in Table 1.

Over the past several years our laboratories have studied a number of complexes where one of the com-

(a)



**Figure 1.** Pulse schemes used to record the HACAN (a) and (HB)CBCA(CO)N(CA)HA (b,c) data sets along with schematic representations of the correlations along the peptide backbone observed in these experiments. All narrow (wide) pulses are applied with a flip angle of  $90^\circ$  ( $180^\circ$ ) along the x-axis unless indicated otherwise. All  $^1\text{H}$  and  $^{15}\text{N}$  pulses are applied with fields of 31 and 6.5 kHz, respectively, with the exception of  $^1\text{H}$  WALTZ-16 decoupling (Shaka et al., 1983) (6.5 kHz) and the  $^1\text{H}$  purge pulses (12.4 kHz, durations of 6 and 3.7 ms for pulses of phase x and y, respectively). (a) All  $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$  rectangular pulses are applied with a 20 kHz field, centered at 58 ppm, while the shaped  $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$  refocusing pulses have the RE-BURP profile (350  $\mu\text{s}$ ) (Geen and Freeman, 1991) and are centered at 40 ppm. The  $^{13}\text{C}^\beta$  inversion pulses applied during the first  $2T_C$  period have the I-BURP2 shape (1.8 ms  $\times$  500/ $\nu_0$ , where  $\nu_0$  is the spectrometer frequency in MHz, centered at 30 ppm) as do the  $^{13}\text{C}^\beta/^{13}\text{CO}$  pulses (1.8 ms  $\times$  500/ $\nu_0$ ) during the second  $2T_C$  interval. In the latter case the pulses are applied simultaneously using a waveform obtained by summing phase modulated pulses centered at the  $^{13}\text{C}^\beta$  and  $^{13}\text{CO}$  regions.  $^{13}\text{CO}$  decoupling during  $t_1$  is achieved using a 118 ppm cosine modulated WALTZ scheme where each of the  $90^\circ$  pulses has the SEDUCE-1 shape (345  $\mu\text{s}$ ) (McCoy & Mueller, 1992b).  $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$  decoupling during acquisition is achieved using a 2.3 kHz WALTZ field. The delays used are:  $\tau_a = 1.6$  ms,  $\tau_b = 3.57$  ms,  $T_C = 11.6$  ms,  $\delta = 0.75$  ms. The phase cycling is:  $\phi_1 = (y, -y)$ ,  $\phi_2 = 2(x), 2(-x)$ ,  $\phi_3 = 8(x), 8(-x)$ ,  $\phi_4 = 4(x), 4(-x)$ ,  $\phi_5 = x$ ,  $\text{rec} = 2(x, -x, -x, x), 2(-x, x, x, -x)$ . Quadrature detection in  $t_1$  is obtained by States-TPPI (Marion et al., 1989) of  $\phi_2$ , while quadrature detection in  $t_2$  is generated using the enhanced sensitivity gradient approach (Kay et al., 1992; Schleucher et al., 1993) where for each value of  $t_2$  data sets with  $(g_6, \phi_5)$  and  $(-g_6, \phi_5 + 180^\circ)$  are recorded. For each complex  $t_2$  point the phase  $\phi_3$  and the phase of the receiver are incremented by  $180^\circ$ . The durations and strengths of gradients are:  $g_0 = (1$  ms,  $-5$  G/cm),  $g_1 = (0.5$  ms,  $-1$  G/cm),  $g_2 = (0.4$  ms,  $-8$  G/cm),  $g_3 = (7$  ms,  $15$  G/cm),  $g_4 = (4$  ms,  $15$  G/cm),  $g_5 = (0.3$  ms,  $12$  G/cm),  $g_6 = (1.5$  ms,  $30$  G/cm),  $g_7 = (0.3$  ms,  $2$  G/cm),  $g_8 = (0.4$  ms,  $2.5$  G/cm),  $g_9 = (0.375$  ms,  $-29.9$  G/cm). Decoupling is interrupted during application of gradients (Kay, 1993). (b,c)  $^{13}\text{C}^{\alpha/\beta}$   $90^\circ$  ( $180^\circ$ ) pulses (between points a and b) are applied with fields of  $\Delta/\sqrt{15}$  ( $\Delta/\sqrt{3}$ ) where  $\Delta$  is the difference (Hz) between the carrier (43 ppm) and the center of the  $^{13}\text{CO}$  chemical shift region (Kay et al., 1990), while shaped  $^{13}\text{CO}$   $180^\circ$  pulses have the SEDUCE-1 profile (McCoy and Mueller, 1992a) and are 225  $\mu\text{s}$  in duration. The pulses marked with vertical arrows compensate for Bloch-Siegert effects (Vuister and Bax, 1992). At point b the carbon carrier is shifted to 58 ppm. All subsequent  $^{13}\text{C}$   $90^\circ$  ( $180^\circ$ ) pulses are applied with fields of  $\Delta'/\sqrt{15}$  ( $\Delta'/\sqrt{3}$ ) where  $\Delta'$  is the difference (Hz) between the centers of the  $^{13}\text{CO}$  and  $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$  chemical shift regions. The delays used are:  $\tau_a = 1.8$  ms,  $\tau_b = 1$  ms,  $\tau_c = 3.6$  ms,  $\tau_d = 2.7$  ms,  $\tau_e = 1.8$  ms,  $T_C = 3.6$  ms,  $\zeta = 12.4$  ms. The phase cycle employed is:  $\phi_1 = (x, -x)$ ,  $\phi_2 = 2(y), 2(-y)$ ,  $\phi_3 = 4(x), 4(-x)$ ,  $\phi_4 = 4(x), 4(-x)$ ,  $\phi_5 = 8(x), 8(-x)$ ,  $\phi_6 = 2(x), 2(-x)$ ,  $\text{rec} = (x, -x, -x, x), 2(-x, x, x, -x), (x, -x, -x, x)$ . Quadrature detection in  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  is obtained by States-TPPI of  $\phi_1$  and  $\phi_6$ , respectively. The strengths and durations of gradients are:  $g_0 = (0.5$  ms,  $4$  G/cm),  $g_1 = (0.5$  ms,  $8$  G/cm),  $g_2 = (1$  ms,  $15$  G/cm),  $g_3 = (0.1$  ms,  $10$  G/cm),  $g_4 = (2.5$  ms,  $17$  G/cm),  $g_5 = (0.5$  ms,  $12$  G/cm),  $g_6 = (0.4$  ms,  $7.5$  G/cm),  $g_7 = (0.5$  ms,  $12$  G/cm),  $g_8 = (3.5$  ms,  $20$  G/cm),  $g_9 = (2$  ms,  $20$  G/cm),  $g_{10} = (1.3$  ms,  $10$  G/cm),  $g_{11} = (1.3$  ms,  $7$  G/cm). Note that in both experiments correlations where magnetization originates on Gly residues are severely attenuated.

ponents contains a proline-rich region important for binding. These include the SH2 domain from the protein Crk, with a proline-rich insertion in the DE loop

recognized by the SH3 domain from Abl kinase (Feller et al., 1994), as well as a complex of the C-terminal WW domain of rat Nedd4 and a proline-rich target

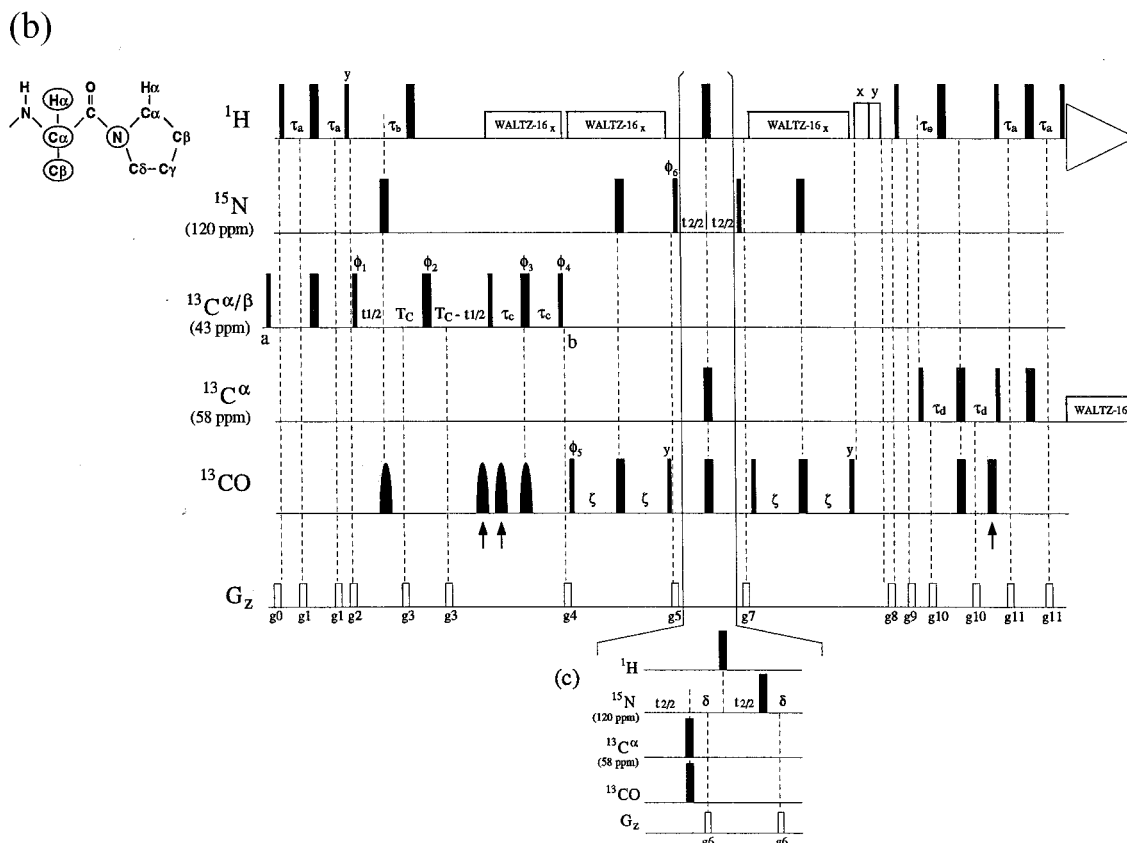


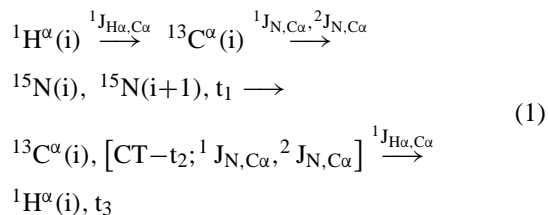
Figure 1. (continued).

sequence from the epithelial sodium channel (Staub et al., 1996; Staub and Rotin, 1996; Kanelis et al., 1998). Sequential assignment of the proline-rich regions in each case has been accomplished using a pair of pulse schemes which correlate (i) intra-residue  $^1\text{H}^\alpha$ ,  $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha/^{13}\text{C}^\beta$  chemical shifts with the  $^{15}\text{N}$  shift of the subsequent residue [(HB)CBCA(CO)N(CA)HA] and (ii) intra-residue  $^1\text{H}^\alpha$ ,  $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ ,  $^{15}\text{N}$  chemical shifts with the nitrogen shift of the next amino acid [HACAN]. These experiments supplement a number of schemes which exist in the literature for assignment of proline-containing regions in proteins. These include a sequence by Fesik and co-workers which correlates  $^1\text{H}^\alpha$ ,  $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$  shifts of residues immediately preceding proline residues in  $^{15}\text{N}$ ,  $^{13}\text{C}$  labeled proteins (Olejniczak and Fesik, 1994) as well as a sequence described by Bottomley et al. which links the  $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha/^{13}\text{C}^\delta$  shifts of residue  $i$  with the  $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha/^1\text{H}^\alpha$  shifts of the preceding residue  $i-1$  (Bottomley et al., 1999). Herein brief descriptions of the pulse sequences described above for backbone assignment are presented along with appli-

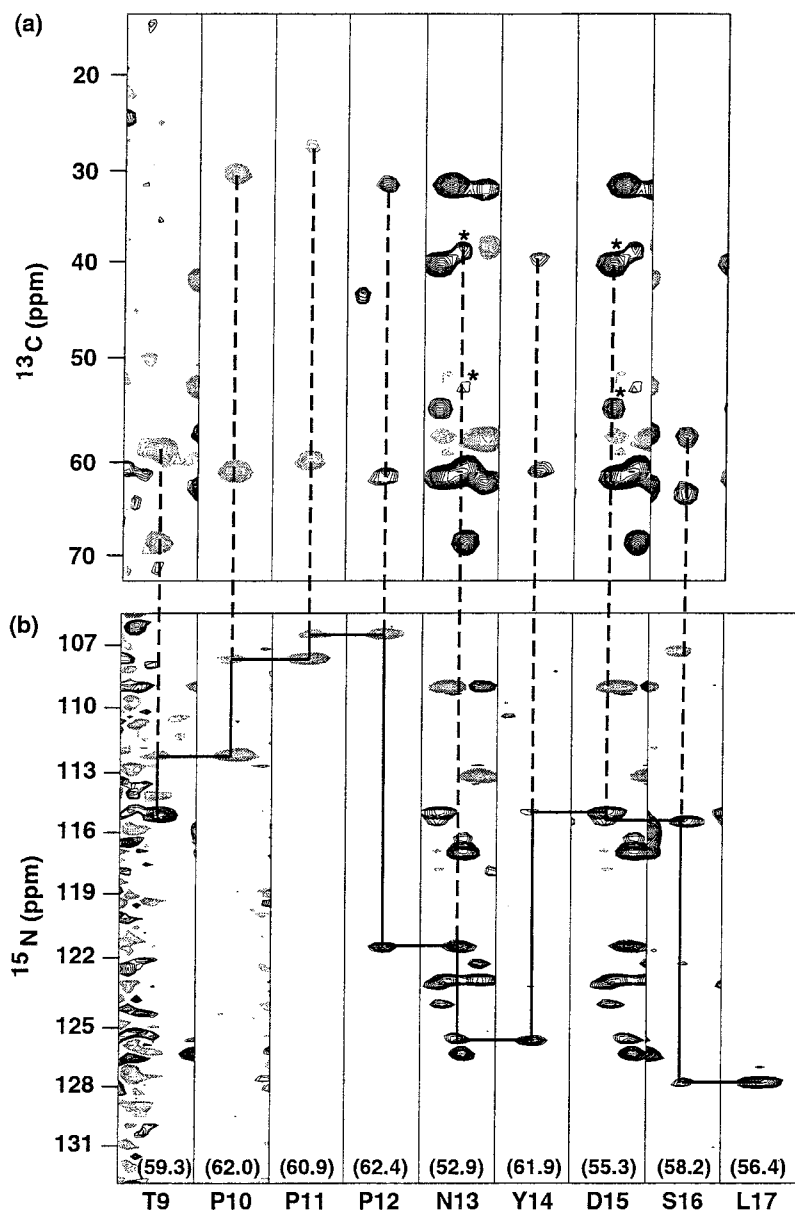
cations to the Crk SH2 and WW domain complexes described above.

## Results and discussion

Figure 1a illustrates the HACAN scheme that has been developed. The sequence is similar to a previously published HACAN scheme proposed by Bax and co-workers and only the differences will be described here. The transfer of magnetization proceeds as:



where the active couplings involved in each transfer step are indicated and  $t_i$  ( $i = 1-3$ ) denote acquisition periods. Fourier transformation of the resulting 3D



*Figure 2.* (a) Strips from the 2D ( $F_1/F_3$ ) (HB)CBCA- (CO)N(CA)HA spectrum of the unlabeled C-terminal WW domain of rat Nedd4 with a  $^{15}\text{N}$ ,  $^{13}\text{C}$ -labeled proline-rich target sequence (17 residues) from the epithelial sodium channel at the  $^1\text{H}^\alpha$  chemical shift of the residue indicated along the x-axis. (b) Strips from the corresponding 2D ( $F_1/F_3$ ) HACAN spectrum. Spectra were recorded on a sample of 3 mM unlabeled WW domain, 1 mM labeled peptide, 10 mM sodium phosphate, pH 6.5, 30 °C, 90%  $\text{H}_2\text{O}/10\%$   $\text{D}_2\text{O}$  on a Varian Inova 500 MHz spectrometer. Measuring times of approximately 1 h/2D spectrum were employed. In (a) the symbol \* is used to indicate the position of correlations for N13 and D15. These data sets (and those in Figure 3) were processed using NMRPipe/NMRDraw (Delaglio et al., 1995) and analyzed using either the PIPP/CAPP (Garrett et al., 1991) or NMRView (Johnson and Blevins, 1994) programs. Negative contours are indicated by light shading.

Table 1. Examples of binding domains and proteins recognizing proline-rich regions

Protein	Domain	Target	Sequence
Grb2 <sup>a</sup>	SH3	Sos1	VPPPVPPRR
Abl <sup>b</sup>	SH3	Crk	PRPPVPPSPAQPPP
Nedd4 <sup>c</sup>	WW	$\alpha$ -ENaC	PPLALTAPPAY
		$\beta$ -ENaC	TLPTPGTPPPNYDSL
		$\gamma$ -ENaC	PGTTPPPRY
FBP11 <sup>d</sup>	WW	ld10	PPLP
FE65 <sup>e</sup>	WW	Mena	PPLP
FBP21 <sup>f</sup>	WW	SmB and SmB'	PPPGMRPP
Profilin <sup>g</sup>		VASP site 1	LEGGGPPPPALPTW
		VASP site 2	GPPAPPAGGPPPPGPPPPGPPPPGPPPLPPSG
		Mena site 1	SGPAAPPPPPPPPPPPPPPLPPPLPPLASL
		Mena site 2	LGPPAPPPPLPSGPAYSALPPPPGPPPPPLPSTGPPPPPPPPPLPNQA
		Cdc12p	IITHPTPPPPPLP...PAFPPPPPPPPPLVS
		formin site 1	PPAPPTPPPLPPPLIPPPPLPPGL
		formin site 2	CPUSPPPPPPPPPTPVPPSDGPPPPPPPPPLPNVLA
Mena/VASP <sup>h</sup>	EVH1	vinculin	FPPPP
		zyxin	FPPPP
		CD2	PPPPGHRSQAPSHRPPPPGHR

<sup>a</sup>Rozakis-Adcock et al., 1993; <sup>b</sup>Feller et al., 1994; <sup>c</sup>Staub et al., 1996; Staub and Rotin, 1996; <sup>d</sup>Bedford et al., 1997; <sup>e</sup>Ermekova et al., 1997; <sup>f</sup>Bedford et al., 1998; <sup>g</sup>Reinhard et al., 1995; Gertler et al., 1996; <sup>h</sup>Gertler et al., 1996; Niebuhr et al., 1997; <sup>i</sup>Freund et al., 1999.

time-domain matrix yields a data set with correlations at  $(\omega_{N(i)}, \omega_{C\alpha(i)}, \omega_{H\alpha(i)})$  and  $(\omega_{N(i+1)}, \omega_{C\alpha(i)}, \omega_{H\alpha(i)})$ . This experiment is extremely valuable for proline-rich regions of proteins in that sequential correlations can be observed linking multiple proline residues, a situation that occurs with some frequency among proline-rich targets, as demonstrated in Table 1.

For the successful application of the present scheme to proteins and protein complexes on the order of 15–20 kDa, it is important that sensitivity be maximized. The main source of signal loss in this experiment stems from the efficient decay of transverse  $^{13}\text{C}\alpha$  magnetization during the  $T_C$  delays. In principle, therefore, it is important that these delays be optimized on a per-protein basis and that evolution due to passive couplings,  $^1J_{C\alpha,CO}$  and  $^1J_{C\alpha,C\beta}$ , be completely refocused by the end of each  $2T_C$  interval. Although a choice of  $2T_C = 1/^1J_{C\alpha,C\beta}$  ensures that the signal intensity is not attenuated by  $^{13}\text{C}\alpha$ - $^{13}\text{C}\beta$  couplings (Santoro and King, 1992; Vuister and Bax, 1992), this value of  $T_C$  may be prohibitively long for many systems. Application of band-selective IBURP-2 inversion pulses (Geen and Freeman, 1991) centered at 30 ppm refocuses evolution from  $^1J_{C\alpha,C\beta}$  couplings for the majority of residues in a protein, allowing a

value of  $T_C$  to be chosen in a manner independent of  $^1J_{C\alpha,C\beta}$ . For example, a 1.8 ms pulse inverts ( $M_z \rightarrow >95\% -M_z$ )  $^{13}\text{C}\beta$  signals resonating between 38.8 and 21.2 ppm (at 500 MHz), while signals downfield of 44 ppm are unperturbed ( $<3\%$ ). In the case of proline residues, with average random coil  $^{13}\text{C}\alpha$ ,  $^{13}\text{C}\beta$  shifts of 63 and 32 ppm (Wishart et al., 1995), respectively, this inversion profile is ideal. Sensitivity is also maximized in the present sequence by preserving both cosine- and sine-modulated  $t_2$  components (Palmer et al., 1991) with coherence transfer selection by gradients (Kay et al., 1992; Schleucher et al., 1993), allowing spectra to be recorded in  $^1\text{H}_2\text{O}$ .

The (HB)CBCA(CO)N(CA)HA sequence illustrated in Figure 1b generates cross peaks at  $(\omega_{C\beta(i)}/\omega_{C\alpha(i)}, \omega_{N(i+1)}, \omega_{H\alpha(i)})$ , allowing facile separation of intra- from inter-residue correlations in the HACAN. This experiment is very similar to the previously published (HB)CBCACO(CA)HA (Kay, 1993), with an additional transfer period in the present scheme to relay the magnetization to  $^{15}\text{N}$  of residue  $i+1$  from the  $^{13}\text{CO}$  of  $i$ . It is possible to invert the sign of non-proline signals by allowing  $^{15}\text{N}$  magnetization to evolve under the one-bond  $^1\text{HN}$ - $^{15}\text{N}$  scalar coupling,  $^1J_{\text{NH}}$ , for an additional period of  $2\delta = 1/^1J_{\text{NH}}$ , as il-

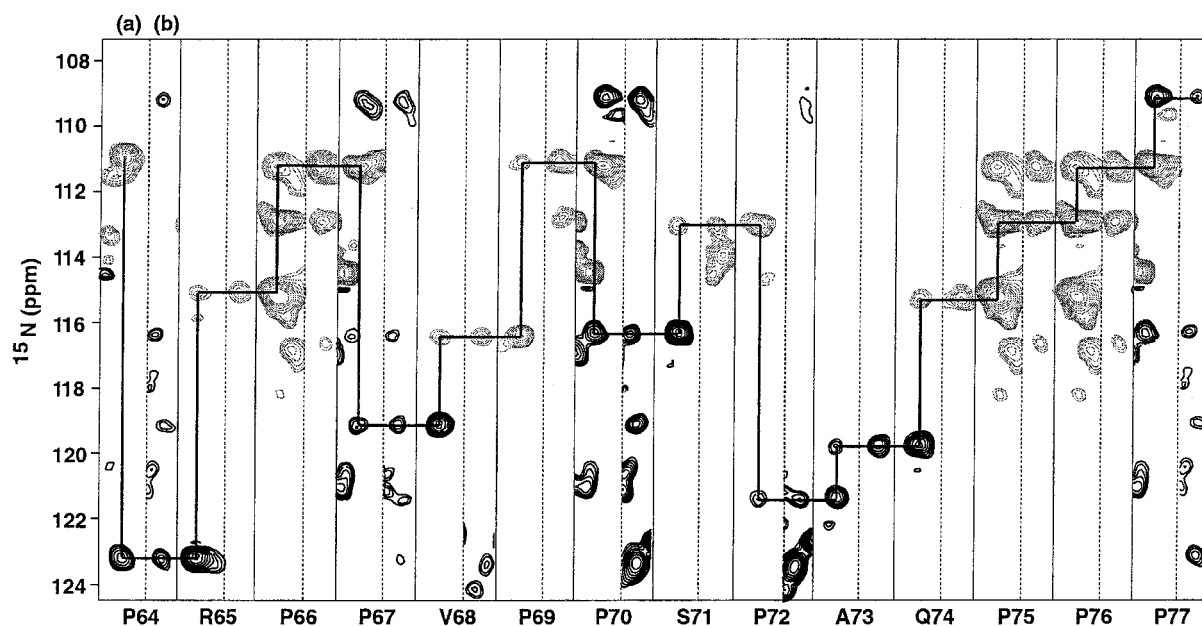


Figure 3. Strips from (a) 3D HACAN and (b) 3D (HB)CBCA(CO)N(CA)HA spectra taken at the  $^{13}\text{C}^{\alpha}$ ,  $^1\text{H}^{\alpha}$  chemical shifts of the residue indicated along the x-axis and recorded on a trimolecular complex comprising a  $^{15}\text{N}$ ,  $^{13}\text{C}$ -labeled Crk SH2 domain, an unlabeled Crk phosphopeptide consisting of residues 217–229 of intact Crk and an unlabeled Abl SH3 domain in the ratio (1.0 mM, 1.1 mM, 1.1 mM). Buffer conditions are 50 mM sodium phosphate, pH 6.8, 0.01% sodium azide, 30 °C, 90%  $\text{H}_2\text{O}/10\%$   $\text{D}_2\text{O}$ . Spectra were recorded on a Varian Inova 500 MHz spectrometer. The HACAN data set was collected as a (32,58,512) complex matrix corresponding to acquisition times of (25.8 ms, 17.8 ms, 64 ms) in  $(t_1, t_2, t_3)$ , while a (50,46,512) matrix [(6.4 ms, 37.5 ms, 64 ms)] was employed for the (HB)CBCA(CO)N(CA)HA.

illustrated in Figure 1c. Although the  $^{15}\text{N}$  chemical shift for proline residues is distinctively downfield, the sign change relative to other correlations provides a useful confirmation of the assignment. Moreover, because proline residues lack an amide proton, the additional delay of  $1/{}^1J_{\text{NH}}$  does not introduce significant relaxation losses for X-Pro correlations, at least for the proteins that we have examined.

Figure 2 illustrates the quality of data obtained from a complex of the unlabeled C-terminal WW domain of rat Nedd4 (50 residues) with a  $^{15}\text{N}$ ,  $^{13}\text{C}$ -labeled proline-rich target sequence (17 residues) from the epithelial sodium channel (Staub et al., 1996; Staub and Rotin, 1996). Because the peptide is small, only 2D ( $F_1, F_3$ ) spectra were necessary for assignment. In (a) strips from the (HB)CBCA(CO)N(CA)HA for a region extending from T9 to S16 are illustrated. Since data was recorded using the scheme of Figure 1c, correlations involving residues immediately preceding a proline are of opposite sign relative to those that are not. Figure 2b shows correlations from the HACAN from which sequential connectivities are readily obtained. Note that cross peaks derived from prolines are aliased in  $F_1$  ( $^{15}\text{N}$ )

and, because a first order phase correction of  $180^\circ$  is employed in this dimension, they are of opposite phase relative to other correlations.

Figure 3 shows strips from data recorded on a complex of  $^{15}\text{N}$ ,  $^{13}\text{C}$  labeled Crk SH2 (120 residues), unlabeled Abl SH3 (65 residues) and an unlabeled 13 residue phosphorylated peptide comprising the region in Crk that binds its SH2 domain in an intramolecular fashion (Rosen et al., 1995). Slices from three-dimensional data sets recorded with the HACAN (a) and the (HB)CBCA(CO)N(CA)HA (b) schemes, respectively, are illustrated, taken at the  $^{13}\text{C}^{\alpha}$ ,  $^1\text{H}^{\alpha}$  chemical shifts of the residues indicated along the x-axis. The fact that assignments could be obtained for this region despite the large numbers of proline residues (9 of 14) and the degeneracy or near degeneracy of  $^{13}\text{C}^{\alpha}$ ,  $^1\text{H}^{\alpha}$  and  $^{15}\text{N}$  shifts of P66, 75 and 76 is a good illustration of the utility of the HACAN and the (HB)CBCA(CO)N(CA)HA experiments.

## Conclusions

In summary, a pair of pulse schemes have been presented that are particularly useful for the assignment

of backbone chemical shifts of proline residues in  $^{15}\text{N}$ ,  $^{13}\text{C}$  labeled proteins. The experiments are also of value for applications to proteins dissolved at high pH, where assignment strategies based on recording  $^1\text{HN}$  chemical shifts may fail.

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