

Frequency-selective heteronuclear dephasing and selective carbonyl labeling to deconvolute crowded spectra of membrane proteins by magic angle spinning NMR

Nathaniel J. Traaseth^a, Gianluigi Veglia^{a,b,*}

^a Department of Biochemistry, Molecular Biology, and Biophysics, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455, United States

^b Department of Chemistry, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455, United States

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ABSTRACT

We present a new method that combines carbonyl-selective labeling with frequency-selective heteronuclear recoupling to resolve the spectral overlap of magic angle spinning (MAS) NMR spectra of membrane proteins in fluid lipid membranes with broad lines and high redundancy in the primary sequence. We implemented this approach in both heteronuclear ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ and homonuclear ^{13}C - ^{13}C dipolar assisted rotational resonance (DARR) correlation experiments. We demonstrate its efficacy for the membrane protein phospholamban reconstituted in fluid PC/PE/PA lipid bilayers. The main advantage of this method is to discriminate overlapped $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ resonances by strategically labeling the preceding residue. This method is highly complementary to $^{13}\text{C}'_{i-1}$ - $^{15}\text{N}_i$ - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha_i$ and $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha_{i-1}$ - $^{15}\text{N}_{i-1}$ - $^{13}\text{C}'_i$ experiments to distinguish inter-residue spin systems at a minimal cost to signal-to-noise.

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1. Introduction

Magic angle spinning (MAS) and oriented NMR experiments have been widely employed to determine the structure, topology, and dynamics of biomacromolecules [1–3]. These methods are particularly suited for integral membrane proteins, whose association with lipid vesicles limits the use of liquid-state NMR techniques. In the past years, there has been an outburst of MAS methodologies for resonance assignments and distance measurements in membrane protein samples [1,4–13]. Unlike oriented solid-state NMR (SSNMR), which requires a high-degree of orientation with respect to the magnetic field [14–21], MAS sample preparations are more straightforward, making this technique popular in membrane protein structural biology. The strategy to obtain structural parameters for membrane protein structures by MAS is similar to that defined for liquid-state NMR, with the first step involving the tedious and lengthy process of resonance assignments followed by distance and torsion angle measurements. The NMR experiments carried out on micro-crystalline membrane protein samples give highly resolved NMR spectra [22–25], although the lack of a fluid membrane protein environment is a concern, and risks (as with X-ray crystal-

lography) to offer conformational snapshots that may not reflect the physiological conditions of proteins in membranes.

In contrast, the membrane protein samples obtained in fluid lipid membranes [26] display significant line broadening and overlap of resonances, particularly in transmembrane (TM) segments, composed of highly redundant hydrophobic amino acids types (Leu, Ala, Gly, Val, Ile, and Phe) [27]. The helical nature of the majority of membrane proteins, the redundancy of the residue-types, and the line broadening caused by static and dynamic disorder limit the resolution in the ^{15}N and ^{13}C spectra. Only in selected cases do the linewidths enable sequence-specific assignments for non-crystalline uniformly ^{13}C and ^{15}N samples [28–31]. A number of approaches have been proposed to address these challenges: (1) main-chain assignment [32] to identify specific residues based on $^{13}\text{C}/^{13}\text{C}$ correlation spectra [33], (2) solid-phase peptide synthesis that introduces a minimal number of labeled residues at a time [34–38], and (3) selective [25,39] or reverse biosynthetic labeling [40–43] to achieve *pair-wise* distributions. The second and third methods substantially reduce the number of resonances in the spectrum, making sequential assignments possible. Nevertheless, these labeling approaches used in combination with pulse sequences utilizing several polarization transfer steps have been optimized for protein fibers, crystalline proteins, or lipid-depleted membrane protein samples, and do not perform well for membrane proteins functionally reconstituted in fluid lipid membranes.

An elegant way to resolve complex spectra in a uniformly labeled background is to use rotational echo double resonance

Abbreviations: SSNMR, solid-state NMR; MAS, magic angle spinning; PLN, phospholamban; FDR, frequency-selective dipolar recoupling; DARR, dipolar assisted rotational resonance.

* Corresponding author. Address: 6-155 Jackson Hall, 321 Church St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455, United States. Fax: +1 612 625 2163.

E-mail address: vegli001@umn.edu (G. Veglia).

(REDOR) difference spectroscopy [44–46]. This experiment is analogous to the spin-echo difference spectroscopy developed for solution NMR [47], which has been applied to deconvolute spectra containing three different isotopically labeled species [48,49]. Similar approaches have been utilized in solid-state NMR to measure short- and long-range distances between nuclei. Since MAS causes I - S dipolar couplings to average to zero over a complete rotor cycle, 180° recoupling pulses on the I -spin applied during the rotor cycle reintroduce the dipolar couplings. By subtracting the spectra obtained with and without recoupling pulses, only S resonances that have a measurable dipolar coupling with I spins are observed. Significant efforts have been made to achieve frequency-selective REDOR [44] and TEDOR [50] experiments for spectral filtering, heteronuclear magnetization transfer, as well as distance/dihedral angle measurements [7,24,51–60]. One of these methods, the frequency-selective dipolar recoupling (FDR), has been implemented in 1D spectra showing applicability to model amino acid compounds [57,58]. This sequence uses 90° pulses instead of 180° recoupling pulses to I spins that makes the average Hamiltonian offset dependent [57].

Here, we combined the FDR approach with carbonyl-selective labeling to obtain unambiguous assignments in $^{15}\text{N}/^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ and $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha/^{13}\text{C}^\beta$ 2D spectra. This new approach complements the existing experiments for sequential assignment ($^{15}\text{N}-^{13}\text{C}$, $^{15}\text{N}-^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$, $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha-^{15}\text{N}-^{13}\text{C}$, $^{13}\text{C}^\beta-^{15}\text{N}-^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$, etc.) of crowded MAS spectra of membrane proteins. When extended in the third dimension, this approach will increase the spectral resolution for membrane proteins with high primary sequence redundancy, allowing the measurement of inter-residue dipolar correlations.

2. Results

Fig. 1 shows heteronuclear and homonuclear pulse sequences used to correlate $^{15}\text{N}-^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ (t_1-t_2) and $^{15}\text{N}-^{13}\text{C}^\alpha-^{13}\text{C}^\beta$ ($t_1-t_2-t_3$) with the FDR block. Following cross-polarization from ^1H to ^{15}N , the FDR train of 90° pulses is applied after each rotor cycle (125 μsec) at the ^{13}C frequency (177 ppm). In the middle of rotor cycles, 180° pulses are applied to the ^{15}N channel in order to refocus chemical shift evolution, while allowing for dipolar recoupling to occur between ^{13}C and ^{15}N [57,58]. The pulses utilized XY-4 [62] phasing cycling to ^{15}N (S spins) and MLEV-4 [61] to ^{13}C (I spins).

In proteins, the covalent $^{13}\text{C}-^{15}\text{N}$ peptide bond is $\sim 1.3 \text{ \AA}$, whereas the two-bond distance is $\sim 2.5 \text{ \AA}$, giving maximum dipolar couplings of 1.4 and 0.2 kHz, respectively. The theoretical average Hamiltonian dephasing curves for the two distances are plotted in Fig. 2 using analytical Bessel functions [63]. Note that the dephasing of FDR scales $1/\sqrt{2}$ with respect to the REDOR experiment [58]. From the theoretical curves, it is evident that ^{15}N magnetization with one-bond ^{13}C dipolar couplings is dephased after 1.5–2.0 ms ($\Delta S/S_0 > 0.9$), whereas the magnetization for the two-bond couplings is not dephased ($\Delta S/S_0 < 0.1$). Following the FDR block, ^{15}N chemical shift is evolved during t_1 under ^1H TPPM decoupling [64]. The next step uses SPECIFIC-CP [65,66] to transfer magnetization from ^{15}N to $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$. Therefore, the FDR selectivity filter combined with the $^{15}\text{N}-^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ transfer gives a 2D heteronuclear correlation spectrum of $^{15}\text{N}-^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ filtered by the preceding ^{13}C (Fig. 1A). When 90° pulses are applied to ^{13}C , the magnetization of the ^{15}N spins covalently attached to ^{13}C will be selectively dephased

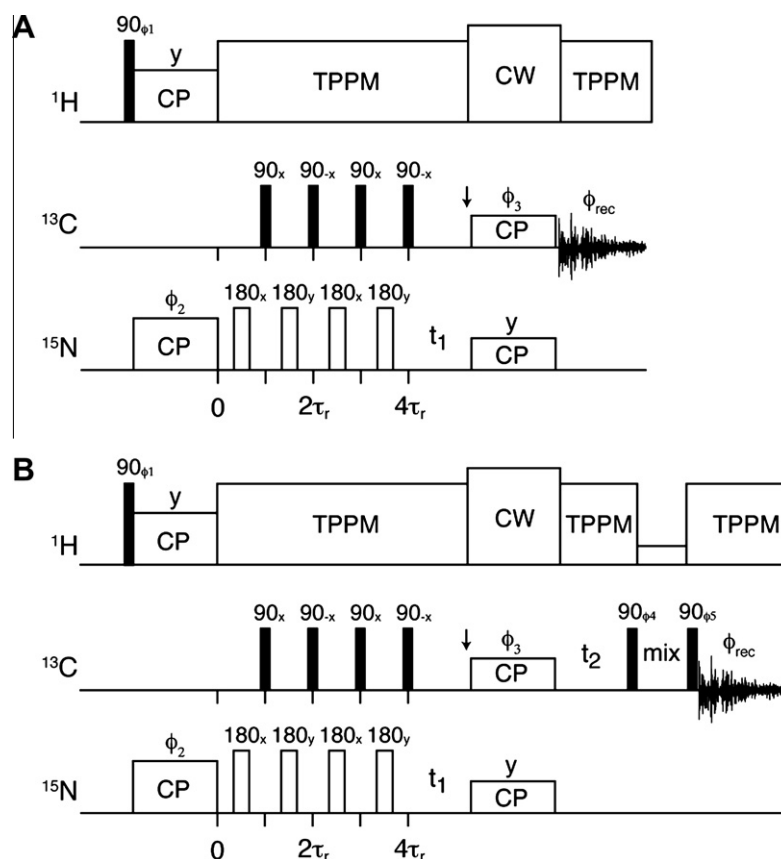


Fig. 1. Pulse sequences used to obtain (A) 2D FDR- $^{15}\text{N}-^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ and (B) 3D FDR- $^{15}\text{N}-^{13}\text{C}^\alpha-^{13}\text{C}^\beta$ -DARR spectra. The 90° pulses on ^{13}C are phase-cycled with MLEV-4 [61] and applied at the end of each rotor cycle, while the 180° pulses to ^{15}N are applied in the middle of the rotor cycle with XY-4 phase cycling [62]. Phase cycling is as follows: ϕ_1 { $x,-x$ }, ϕ_2 { y }, ϕ_3 { $x,x,y,y,-x,-x,-y,-y$ }, ϕ_4 { $y,y,-x,-x,-y,-y,x,x$ }, ϕ_5 { $-y,-y,x,x,y,y,-x,-x$ }, ϕ_{rec} { $x,-x,y,-y,-x,x,-y,y$ }. Phases ϕ_2 and ϕ_3 are adjusted by 90° to generate phase-sensitive data in t_1 and t_2 , respectively.

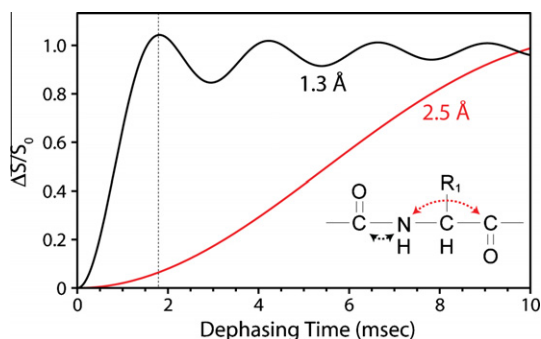


Fig. 2. FDR dephasing $^{15}\text{N}\{^{13}\text{C}\}$ curves for one-bond (1.3 Å) and two-bond (2.5 Å) ^{13}C - ^{15}N distances. The dotted line indicates the maximum dephasing for one-bond transfer, showing less than 0.1 dephasing for the two-bond curve. The FDR dephasing data is scaled by $1/\sqrt{2}$ with respect to the REDOR experiment [44,58].

(filtered-out), while that of the ^{15}N spins attached to ^{12}C will be retained. Subtracting the two experiments results in a spectrum similar to that obtained from the ^{13}C - ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ pulse sequence with double SPECIFIC-CP transfers [28,67,68].

The results from the FDR- ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ 2D spectra on microcrystalline NAVL are shown in Fig. 3. For these experiments, NAVL was labeled [U- ^{13}C , ^{15}N]-Leu/Val with the acetyl group at natural ^{13}C abundance. The MAS rate was set to 8 kHz and used 2 ms of dipolar dephasing. The experiment with no ^{13}C 90° pulses (reference spectrum) gives two peaks from the two ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ bonds in NAVL (Fig. 3B). In contrast, the experiment with dephasing gives one intense resonance that is 85% of the intensity of the reference spectrum and one that was reduced to 12% intensity (Fig. 3A). The difference spectrum (dephased – reference spectra) gives one intense peak that was assigned to the ^{15}N resonance covalently bonded to ^{13}C (i.e., the Leu peak). These experiments demonstrate the usefulness of the FDR scheme to discriminate between one- and two-bond ^{13}C - ^{15}N dipolar couplings in heteronuclear multidimensional correlation experiments.

Filtering one- and two-bond ^{13}C - ^{15}N dipolar couplings can also be achieved using the ^{13}C - ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ experiment [28,67,68]. This experiment utilizes two SPECIFIC-CP [65] elements to transfer magnetization from ^{13}C to ^{15}N and then from ^{15}N to $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$. To compare the two approaches, we optimized all parameters in each experiment and directly tested the efficiencies with respect to the ^1H - ^{13}C cross-polarization and ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ experiments using NAVL (Fig. 4). The integrated intensities from these spectra are shown in Table 1. We found that the FDR approach gives 36–41% (for 2.0 and 1.5 ms dephasing times) of the signal with respect to the ^1H - ^{13}C cross-polarization experiment for the peak at 61.0 ppm (resonance not dephased), while the largest peak in the

^{13}C - ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ experiment (peak at 56.3 ppm) gives 22% intensity retention. Relative to the ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ spectrum, FDR gives 68–76%, while the ^{13}C - ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ experiment gives 49% efficiency, an improvement in signal-to-noise of 38–55%. Another added benefit of our method is the relative ease of setting up the FDR experiment, which requires calibration of 90° and 180° pulses, while the ^{13}C - ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ experiment requires an additional SPECIFIC-CP transfer, which is sensitive to instrumental instabilities [88].

We also applied the FDR- ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ experiment to the integral membrane protein phospholamban (PLN). The monomeric mutant of PLN (AFA-PLN, C36A/C41F/C46A) was synthesized by solid-phase Fmoc chemistry with residues 30–33 labeled [U- ^{13}C , ^{15}N], resulting in four ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ bonds and three ^{13}C - ^{15}N peptide bonds. The protein was reconstituted in 8/1/1 (w/w/w) egg phosphatidylcholine/phosphatidylethanolamine/phosphatidic acid (PC/PE/PA) lipid bilayers at a lipid/protein ratio of 60/1. This ratio is higher than the typical membrane protein samples utilized for MAS spectroscopy and is necessary to maintain the protein structural and functional integrity [69,70]. We acquired 1D (Fig. 5) and 2D spectra (Fig. 6) of the reference and FDR sequence. From these spectra, it is clear that the most upfield peak in the reference spectrum is the only signal that does not change in intensity (Fig. 5A and B, respectively). This is more apparent from the difference spectrum in Fig. 5C, which shows only three peaks. The 2D spectrum is shown in Fig. 6 with a comparison to a standard $^{15}\text{N}/^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ spectrum obtained with SPECIFIC-CP. It is straightforward to assign the missing peak to Asn³⁰. The incomplete dephasing of the signals in the FDR experiment can result from a small offset of the ^{13}C transmitter from the carbonyl carbons, isotopic dilution in the sample, or protein dynamics that can scale the dipolar couplings.

The 3D version of the FDR- ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ -DARR pulse sequence is shown in Fig. 1B. Prior to t_2 evolution, this pulse sequence is identical to the 2D version reported in Fig. 1A. Following SPECIFIC-CP, $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ chemical shifts are evolved during t_2 , and then allowed to mix under the dipolar assisted rotational resonance (DARR) condition. This gives a 3D spectrum of ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ (t_1 - t_2 - t_3). The advantage of this method is to discriminate overlapped C^α resonances by strategically labeling the preceding residue (e.g., ^{13}C). The 2D spectra without evolution of ^{15}N is shown in Fig. 7, and demonstrates that the FDR pulse element filters out more than 80% of the signals from the reference spectrum.

3. Discussion

Sequence-specific assignments in MAS spectra of membrane proteins in fluid lipid membranes are a challenging endeavor. Several SSNMR studies on membrane proteins have reported residue-specific assignments that fail to give the atomic resolution provided for in crystalline or synthetically labeled samples. To

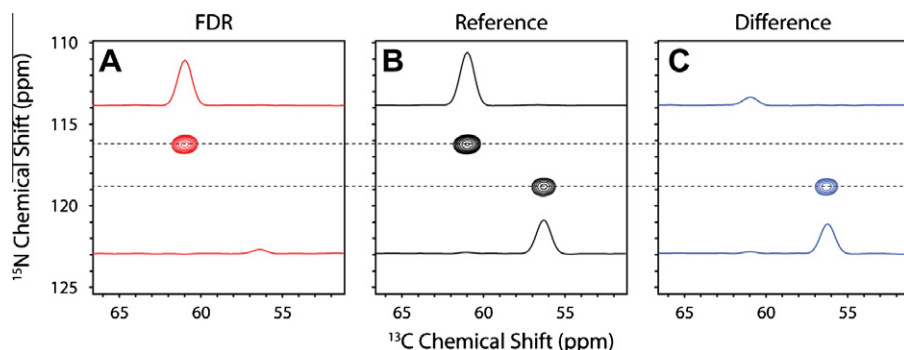


Fig. 3. FDR- ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ spectra for NAVL. Spectra were acquired with (FDR, panel A) and without ^{13}C 90° pulses (reference, panel B). A total dephasing time of 2 ms was used with an MAS rate of 8 kHz. (C) Subtraction of the FDR spectrum from that of the reference. Note that in the subtracted spectrum, the noise increases by a factor of $\sqrt{2}$.

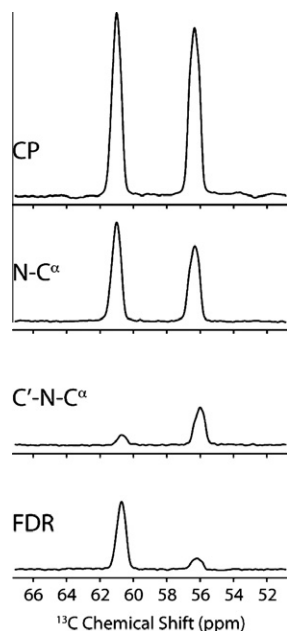


Fig. 4. Comparison of ^1H - ^{13}C cross-polarization, ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ SPECIFIC-CP, $^{13}\text{C}'$ - ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ double SPECIFIC-CP, and FDR- ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ (2.0 ms dephasing time) experiments. The integrated intensities from these spectra are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Transfer efficiencies calculated from integrated 1D NAVL spectra for the ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$, $^{13}\text{C}'$ - ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$, and FDR- ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ experiments in Fig. 4 expressed as a percentage from that of the cross-polarization (^1H - ^{13}C) experiment. Data are normalized with respect to each peak in NAVL. The FDR experiment was conducted using total dephasing times of 1.5 and 2.0 ms. Errors for all values are less than 0.1%.

| Experiment | Peak 1 ($\text{C}^\alpha = 61.0$ ppm) (%) | Peak 2 ($\text{C}^\alpha = 56.3$ ppm) (%) |
|--|---|---|
| Cross-polarization | 100 | 100 |
| $\text{N}-\text{C}^\alpha$ | 53.3 | 44.5 |
| $\text{C}'-\text{N}-\text{C}^\alpha$ | 5.6 | 22.0 |
| FDR- $\text{N}-\text{C}^\alpha$ (1.5 ms) | 40.7 | 9.6 |
| FDR- $\text{N}-\text{C}^\alpha$ (2.0 ms) | 36.3 | 6.3 |

address these problems, we propose an approach that is based on carbonyl-selective labeling combined with frequency-selective dipolar recoupling experiments and SPECIFIC-CP. These experiments will be useful to obtain specific assignments, while retaining better signal to noise (~ 68 – 76%) with respect to a 2D ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ experiment using SPECIFIC-CP than the $^{13}\text{C}'$ - ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ experiment ($\sim 49\%$).

Selective labeling strategies have become useful to reduce the complexity of spectra and the assignment process in general. A common procedure is to grow bacteria and overexpress target proteins in unlabeled growth media enriched with one or more ^{13}C

and ^{15}N amino acids [71]. Alternatively, one can use reverse labeling [40], where unlabeled amino acids are added to the isotopically enriched growth media. Both give a significant reduction in spectral complexity. More advanced strategies involve the use of labeled metabolic precursors (reviewed in [71]). This approach has been primarily used for reducing the number of ^{13}C - ^{13}C scalar couplings [41,43,72], while maintaining a significant amount of ^{15}N and ^{13}C labels in the protein. The most robust protocols have been developed for labeling $^{13}\text{C}'$, $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$, and $^{13}\text{C}^\beta$ with the goal of performing ^{13}C solution NMR relaxation studies without the interference of covalently attached ^{13}C nuclei [72,73]. In particular, $^{13}\text{C}'$ labels can be incorporated in several different residues without the need to reduce the labeling of the $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ (reverse labeling + labeled amino acids). The ideal use of our approach from a sensitivity perspective is to label all $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ in the protein and incorporate $^{13}\text{C}'$ labels in several different residue types. This can be accomplished using 2- ^{13}C -glucose [73] and supplementing the growth medium with [U- ^{13}C] labeled leucine. This application would allow $i + 1$ residues with respect to leucine to be filtered out in the FDR- $\text{N}-\text{C}^\alpha$ experiment, and clearly identified in the difference spectrum, which would simplify the assignment. Further advancements will be to combine carbonyl-selective labeling with combinatorial approaches used to assign overlapped spectra in solution NMR [74–79]. In particular, one can apply the FDR approach to $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ and $^{13}\text{C}^\beta$ atoms to achieve frequency selective filters for assignment, or can use any of the labeling strategies discussed above to achieve pair-wise $^{13}\text{C}'$ - ^{15}N labels to simplify the spectrum.

4. Conclusions

The approach presented here is a sensitive complement to the sequential $^{13}\text{C}'$ - ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ experiments [28,67,68]. In particular, our method gives 38–55% more signal than the $^{13}\text{C}'$ - ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ experiment. It allows one to select $^{12}\text{C}'$ - ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ patterns while filtering out the $^{13}\text{C}'$ - ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ patterns, with a sensitivity of ~ 68 – 76% relative to the standard ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ spectrum obtained with SPECIFIC-CP. In addition, our method allows for the possibility of identifying chemically identical proteins with differential labeling in a single sample. Frequency selective methods combined with novel isotope incorporation such as the method described in this paper and others [1,41,68,80–83] will be useful to making sequence-specific assignments in fluid membrane protein samples and other samples with non-crystalline linewidths.

5. Experimental

5.1. Sample preparation

N-acetyl-valyl-leucine was synthesized using solid-phase synthesis from Fmoc-[U- ^{13}C , ^{15}N]-Leu and Fmoc-[U- ^{13}C , ^{15}N]-Val (Sigma-Aldrich, Isotec). The N-terminus of valine was acetylated

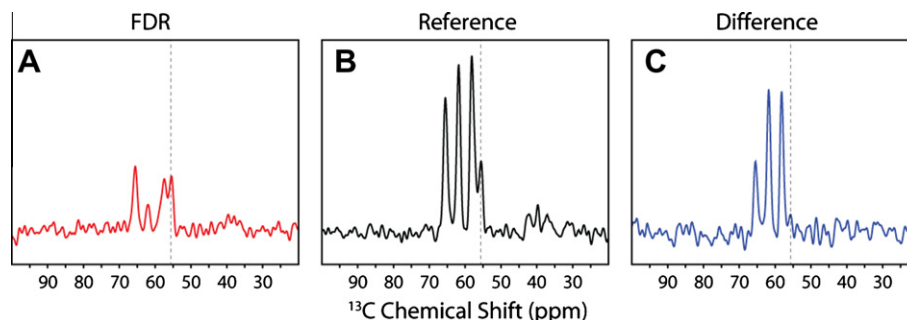


Fig. 5. FDR- ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ spectra for AFA-PLN labeled [U- ^{13}C , ^{15}N] at residues 30–33. 1D spectra were acquired with (FDR, panel A) and without ^{13}C 90° pulses (reference, panel B). A total dephasing time of 2 ms was used with an MAS rate of 8 kHz. (C) Subtraction of the FDR spectrum from the reference.

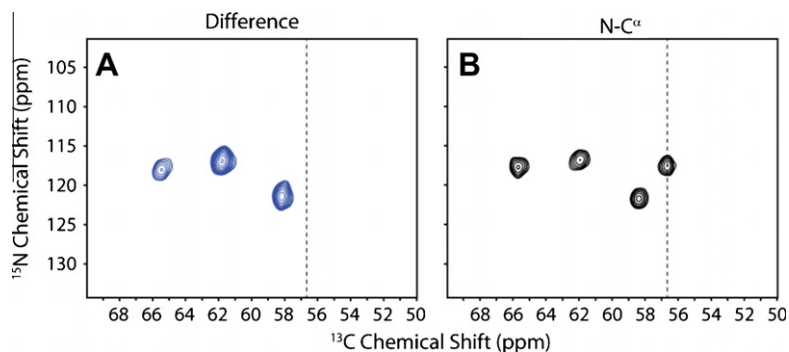


Fig. 6. 2D FDR- ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ spectra for AFA-PLN labeled [^{13}C , ^{15}N] at residues 30–33. (A) Difference spectrum for AFA-PLN $^{30-33}$ using similar parameters as that in Fig. 5. (B) ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ spectrum of AFA-PLN $^{30-33}$.

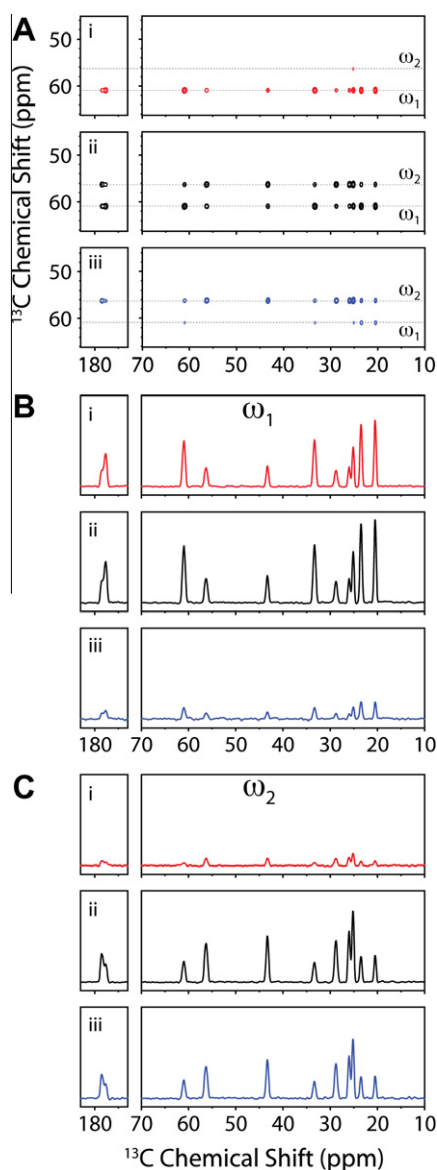


Fig. 7. FDR- $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ -DARR spectra for NAVL. (A) Spectra were acquired with (FDR, panel i) and without ^{13}C 90° pulses (reference, panel ii) using the pulse sequence in Fig. 1B. A total dephasing time of 2 ms was used with an MAS rate of 8 kHz. (iii) Subtraction of the FDR spectrum from that of the reference. A 100 ms DARR mixing time was used. Panels B and C show the 1D traces from the 2D spectra in panel A.

by acetic anhydride at natural ^{13}C abundance. AFA-PLN was labeled at residues 30–33 with 99% [^{13}C , ^{15}N]-Asn, Leu, Phe, and Ile (Sigma-Aldrich, Isotec) using solid-phase synthesis as described previ-

ously [16]. Labeling was checked by solution NMR in dodecylphosphocholine micelles [70] and mass-spectrometry. PLN (~ 2 mg) was solubilized in 500 μl trifluoroethanol and added to 15 mg egg PC/PE/PA lipids (8/1/1, w/w/w; Avanti Polar Lipids, Alabaster, AL) in chloroform. The solvent was dried under a stream of nitrogen gas and placed in a vacuum desiccator overnight to remove residual organics. Vesicles were prepared by adding 2 ml buffer (20 mM HEPES pH 7.0, 100 mM potassium chloride, 10 mM dithiothreitol, and 3 mM sodium azide) to the lipid/protein and flash frozen 3–4 times in liquid nitrogen. Samples were then spun for 30 min at 200,000g in a benchtop ultracentrifuge. The pellet was transferred to a 3.2 mm thin-walled rotor with sample spacers (Agilent, Fort Collins, CO) to avoid dehydration.

5.2. Solid-state NMR spectroscopy

NMR experiments were performed using a VNMR5 spectrometer operating at a ^1H frequency of 600 MHz, with a 3.2 mm bioMAS probe [84], an MAS spinning rate of 8 kHz (ν_R), and a temperature of 20 $^\circ\text{C}$. All experiments utilized cross-polarization from ^1H (61 kHz) to ^{15}N (45 kHz) satisfying the $n = 2$ condition for 1.0 ms (PLN) or 2.0 ms (NAVL). The FDR sequence used 5.5 μsec 90° pulses (45.5 kHz) applied to ^{13}C and 11 μsec 180° pulses (45.5 kHz) centered on the ^{15}N resonances. The ^{13}C pulses were phase-cycled using MLEV-4 [61], while those to ^{15}N were cycled using XY-4 [62]. A total of 12 (1.5 ms) or 16 (2.0 ms) rotor periods were employed to achieve dipolar dephasing from ^{13}C . The ^{15}N dimension had a spectral width of 2 kHz and was evolved for 12 and 50 increments for PLN and NAVL experiments, respectively. Transfers from ^{15}N to $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ were achieved by moving the ^{13}C carrier frequency to $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ (59.2 ppm) and performing SPECIFIC-CP [65], which is related to the double cross-polarization experiment [66]. Spin-lock was applied to ^{15}N at $\frac{5}{2} \frac{\omega_R}{2\pi}$ (20 kHz) and $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ at $\frac{3}{2} \frac{\omega_R}{2\pi}$ (12 kHz) or ^{13}C at $\frac{7}{2} \frac{\omega_R}{2\pi}$ (28 kHz). The SPECIFIC-CP time was 5–6 ms utilizing either a linear ($\pm 10\%$ γB_1) or adiabatic ramp ($\frac{\Delta}{2\pi} = \sim 2$ kHz, $\frac{\beta}{2\pi} = \sim 0.6$ kHz) [89] to $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ or ^{13}C for reducing the sensitivity to instrumental instability [88]. The adiabatic ramp was used only to acquire spectra in Fig. 4 in order to achieve the optimal transfers for the ^{13}C - ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ experiment (two SPECIFIC-CP transfers). The direct ^{13}C spectral width was 100 kHz and was acquired for 20 ms under TPPM [64] ^1H decoupling at 100 kHz. For the NAVL 2D experiments, eight scans were collected with a recycle delay of 4 s. The ^{13}C - ^{13}C FDR experiment used an indirect ^{13}C spectral width of 16 kHz, 50 increments, and a DARR [85] mixing time of 100 ms set to $n = 1$ rotary resonance condition. The 2D FDR- ^{15}N - $^{13}\text{C}^\alpha$ PLN experiment used 2048 scans with a recycle delay of 2 s. The 1D FDR experiment used 20,000 scans with a recycle delay of 2 s. The CH_2 resonance of adamantane was referenced to 40.48 ppm [86] and indirectly to ^{15}N using the relative frequency ratio between ^{15}N and ^{13}C of $\Xi = 0.402979946$ [87].

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