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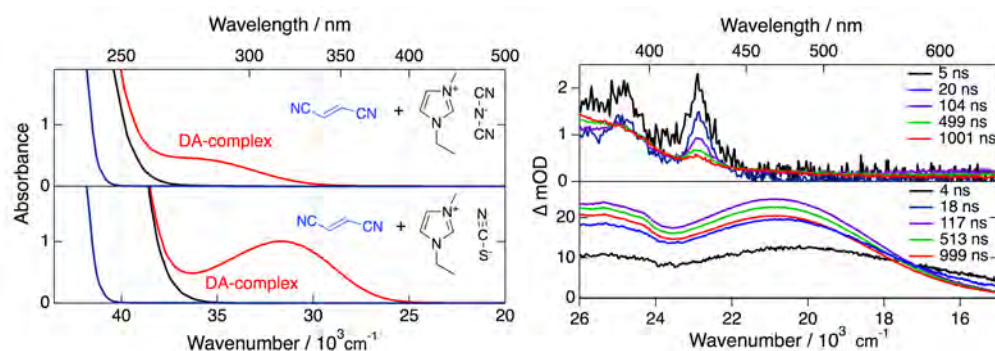
Swiss Chemical Society
Haus der Akademien
Postfach
3001 Bern
Switzerland
info@scg.ch
www.scg.ch

More than a solvent: donor-acceptor complexes of room-temperature ionic liquids and electron acceptors

A. Aster¹, E. Vauthey^{1*}

¹University of Geneva

Room-temperature ionic liquids (RTILs) are considered as green alternatives to “conventional” solvents due to their low volatility, high intrinsic conductivity and good solubility for inorganic and organic solutes. Besides their applications, the elucidation of solvation and reaction dynamics in this unusual solvent is matter of interest.^[1] The interaction of charged solvent molecules with solutes should impact the driving force, equilibrium and kinetics of elementary photochemical processes, especially those involving charged species such as electron or proton transfer reactions. The quantification of these effects, especially in bimolecular reactions, has turned out to be rather complex due to the high viscosity of RTILs which requires elaborate data analysis and may hide the impact of solvent-solute interactions on a molecular level.^[2] Furthermore, it has to be questioned if the reactivity and stability of RTILs are sufficient to treat them as inert solvent if reactive intermediates are formed during e.g. photoinduced electron transfer.



In our communication, we will show the appearance of broad charge-transfer (CT) absorption bands upon addition of electron donors (EDs) to solutions of RTILs in acetonitrile. These broad bands reveal the formation of ground-state donor-acceptor (DA) complexes between the anions of the RTILs and the EDs. Using time resolved transient absorption spectroscopy from fs to ns, we will explain the processes following the CT excitation and discuss the species involved. Based on this data we will show that the CT absorption does not only open a pathway for RTIL photo-degradation, relevant in e.g. dye sensitized solar cells, but can also lead to data misinterpretations in photoinduced bimolecular quenching experiments.

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Combined spectroscopic studies of functionalized clusters for ion sensingA. Baghdasaryan¹¹University Children's Hospital Zurich

Ultra-small thiolate-protected gold nanoclusters of the formula of $Au_m(SR)_n$ have gained tremendous interest in recent years. Several sizes have been synthesized and characterized with several physico-chemical methods [1,2]. Recently, ligand exchange reactions are commonly used for post-synthetic functionalization of gold clusters [3-5]. This reaction allows one to impart new properties to the clusters, opening the door for applications. Furthermore, the choice of ligand and control over the reaction conditions allow tailoring of optical and electrochemical properties and tuning of solubility. The aim of this research was to study the ligand exchange reaction between achiral $Au_{25}(2-PET)_{18}$ and a thiolated 18-crown-6 ligand (L). The ligand contains two thiol groups, which ensures firm anchoring to the cluster. The exchanged cluster works as a potential ion sensor for K^+ and NH_4^+ present in solution even in trace amounts. The optimized reaction conditions allow to obtain several $Au_{25}(2-PET)_{18-2x}L_x$ exchange species that are easily separated by size exclusion chromatography. The ion sensing was successfully achieved using 10-5000ppm KBr and NH_4Cl solutions. The reaction was followed in situ by NMR, UV-vis, HPLC and FTIR. MALDI-TOF mass spectrometry analyses show the presence of incorporated ions onto the crown ether macrocycle.

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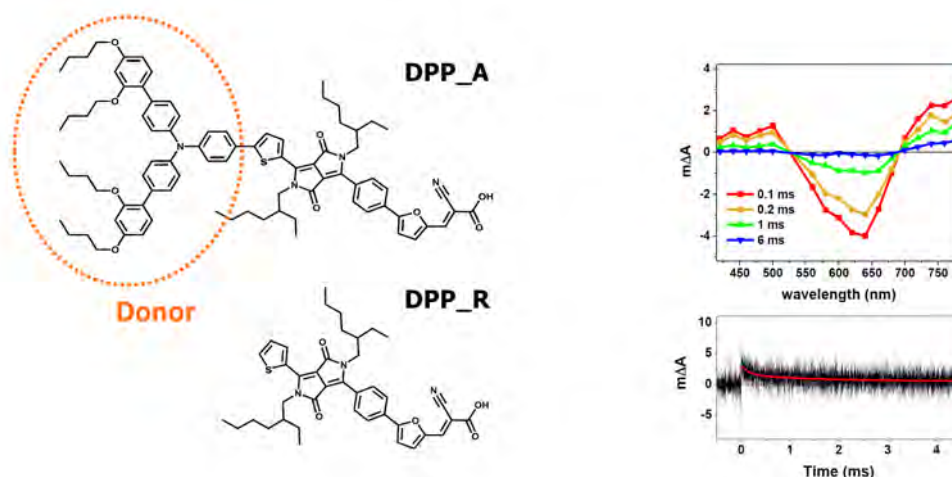
Donor Effect on Photo-induced Electron Injection Process in D- π -A Type Diketopyrrolopyrrole Dyes on TiO₂ Surface

H. Bahng¹, J. Moser^{1*}

¹Photochemical Dynamics Group, Institute of Chemical Sciences & Engineering

Blue colored diketopyrrolopyrrole (DPP) based dye, where the DPP core acts as a π -bridge in Donor- π -Acceptor (D- π -A) architecture, is an attractive redox sensitizer for dye-sensitized solar cells (DSSCs) based on mesoporous TiO₂ anodes, as it encompasses high-performance and aesthetic properties.¹ Despite its successful use in practical devices, much has still to be understood regarding the detailed mechanisms and dynamics, by which charge separate upon photoexcitation, within the molecule and across the dye-semiconductor junction. In particular, the effect of donor moiety, which is designed to enhance the dipolar characteristic of sensitizer, still need to be explored regarding to photodynamic processes. Detailed investigation in this field involve the use of steady-state and time-resolved ultrafast transient absorption measurements.

The role of donor in electron injection and recombination processes of electronic excited states of the (D- π -A)-structured dye adsorbed on a redox-active metal-oxide surface, such as TiO₂, were scrutinized by femtosecond pump-probe laser spectroscopy. Since kinetic competition between various electron transfer, charge transport, and recombination processes controls the photon-to-electron conversion efficiency in DSSCs,² these observations are expected to help determine the crucial factors that still limit the photovoltaic performances of organic dye-based solar cell systems and foster new, improved designs.³



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Crystal Structure Prediction and NMR Powder Crystallography

M. Balodis¹, A. Hofstetter¹, F. M. Paruzzo¹, G. Stevanato¹, A. C. Pinon¹, C. Widdifield², P. Bygrave³,
G. M. Day³, L. Emsley^{1*}

¹EPF Lausanne, ²Durham University, ³University of Southampton

Structure activity relationships are the basis of development in modern chemical sciences, which depends on the capacity for atomic-level characterization. While it is straightforward to determine structures from single crystals, when the sample is a powdered solid, in many cases structure determination is difficult if not impossible. This is a major handicap in the development of complex materials. For example, the drug delivery properties of a pharmaceutical compounds are governed by the three-dimensional packing in the crystal structure, and the overall architecture of the formulation.

Over the past few decades computational crystal structure prediction (CSP) methods have seen great improvement and have been successfully used to predict and confirm single and multicomponent systems [1]. Recently they have been combined with solid-state NMR and DFT chemical shift calculations to provide a tool for structure determination in powders [2-4]. The main bottleneck for these methods today is the computational cost that grows sharply as the systems get bigger and more complex.

We present how solid state NMR measurements can be used to accelerate CSP. As an example we correctly determine the crystal structure of the medium-sized organic molecule ampicillin, where the ordinary approach fails to determine the correct structure.

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Excited-State Dynamics of Radical Ions

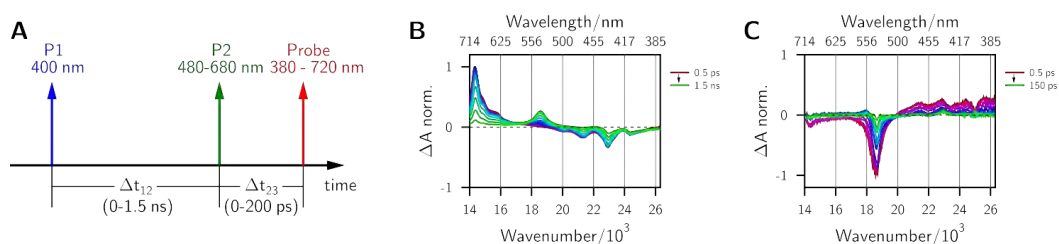
J. S. Beckwith¹, B. Lang¹, A. Rosspeintner¹, E. Vauthey^{1*}

¹Department of Physical Chemistry, University of Geneva

Excited radical ions states are relevant to many important photoinduced processes, such as enzyme-catalysed reactions[1], photosynthesis[2] and indeed all electron-transfer reactions. Despite their importance in these reactions, their excited-state dynamics in solution are little studied.

In previous studies, rapid decays of the radical excited states have often been observed. These do not appear to correlate with the energy gap - for example, the roughly 2.0 eV energy gaps of the 1,4-benzoquinone radical anion and the Wurster's Blue cation were found to have lifetimes at room temperature of "at least" 63 ns[3] and roughly 200 fs[4] respectively. The short lifetimes are instead ascribed to conical intersections or photochemical reactions that can occur on very rapid timescales.[4]

As such, questions arise about the excited-state dynamics of radical ions. How prevalent are conical intersections? Do the molecular structure and the solvent have clear systematic effects? In order to answer these questions, Pump-Pump-Probe (PPP) Spectroscopy[5] (Figure A) has been used.



This is a technique where a pump first triggers a photochemical or photophysical process - an example is shown in Figure B of a transient absorption experiment in which perylene is quenched by an electron acceptor to form the perylene cation (new band at ~540 nm). Another pump pulse, tuned to the band of interest (in this case the band at 540 nm) is then used at a given delay after the first in order to achieve transient absorption measurement on the new species. In this way, anions and cations can be generated by photoinduced electron transfer and then their excited dynamics studied. An example of this PPP spectroscopy is shown above in Figure C, where the perylene cation prepared by photochemical reaction is studied.

Here, we will present results on organic radical ions studied by PPP spectroscopy. The advantages and disadvantages of the technique will be discussed, as will the excited-state dynamics of the radicals and their implications to natural and industrial processes.

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Improving the sensitivity of DNP NMR of microcrystalline solids by flip-back recovery of bulk proton magnetization

S. Björgvinsdóttir¹, B. J. Walder¹, J. Yarava¹, L. Emsley^{1*}

¹EPF Lausanne

Solid-state NMR is an important analytical technique, commonly used for collecting information about the structure and dynamics of biomolecules and powdered solids, such as pharmaceuticals and inorganic materials. One of the main drawbacks of ssNMR is its relatively low sensitivity, especially for nuclei like ¹³C and ¹⁵N, which have low gyromagnetic ratios and low natural abundance. DNP methods can improve the sensitivity of NMR of microcrystalline solids by using ¹H spin diffusion to transfer polarization from the surface of the particles and towards the center.¹ These systems often have long polarization build-up times and require long recycling periods to reach maximum sensitivity, which imposes a practical limitation on the enhancements routinely achieved.

We have shown how the sensitivity of hyperpolarized cross-polarization experiments on microcrystalline solids can be improved by pushing the bulk proton magnetization remaining after decoupling back to the direction of the main magnetic field.² Three powdered solids, theophylline, L-histidine monohydrochloride monohydrate and salicylic acid, with build-up times spanning two orders of magnitude were used for the experiments and in all cases sensitivity gains up to a factor of three were obtained. In addition, the flip-back pulse shortens the recycle periods needed and consequently reduces experimental time.

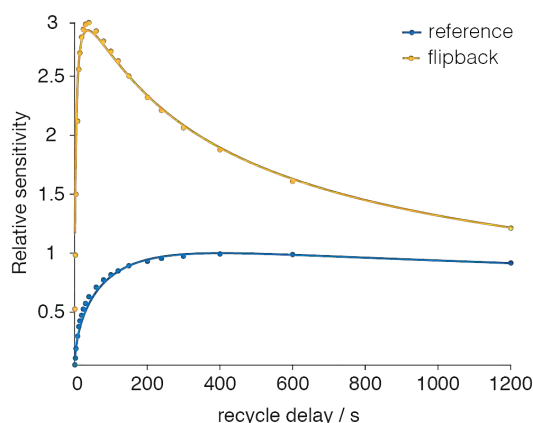


Figure 1. Experimentally observed sensitivity improvements of salicylic acid. The flip-back cross-polarization experiment (yellow) is compared to the same experiment without the flip-back pulse (blue) and the curves are fit to the data using a biexponential recovery model for longitudinal I-spin magnetization. The sensitivity is normalized to maximum sensitivity without a flip-back pulse.

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High Resolution Gigahertz and Terahertz Spectroscopy and Theory of Parity Violation and Tunneling for 1,2-dithiine ($C_4H_4S_2$) as a Candidate for Measuring the Parity Violating Energy Difference between Enantiomers of Chiral Molecules

I. Bolotova¹, S. Albert¹, F. Arn¹, Z. Chen², C. Fabri², G. Grassi², L. Horny², P. Lerch³, M. Quack^{2*}

¹ETH Zurich, ²Physical Chemistry, ETH Zurich, Vladimir-Prelog-weg 2, 8093 Zurich, Switzerland, ³Swiss Light Source, PSI Villigen, 5232 Villigen, Switzerland

Electroweak parity violation leads to a slight energy difference between the enantiomers of chiral molecules (on the order of 100 aeV to 1 feV depending on the molecule) and also to a slow time dependent intramolecular process changing parity with time on the order of *ms* to *ks* [1, 2]. Recently we have identified 1,2-dithiine (Figure 1) as a possible candidate for measuring $\Delta_{pv}E$ using the experimental set up described in [3]. Here we report spectroscopic and theoretical studies needed for the preparation of such experiments on 1,2-dithiine ([4, 5] and references therein). We shall also refer to the evolution of the biomolecular homochirality, which may be related to parity violation [6].

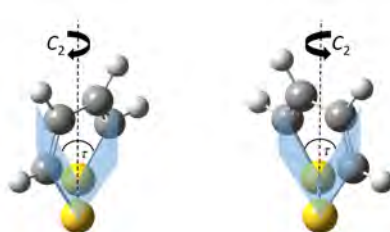


Figure 1. Two enantiomers of 1,2-dithiine ($C_4H_4S_2$), left P, right M enantiomer.

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* Further authors are G.Seyfang, A.Wokaun, D.Zindel

High-resolution FTIR spectroscopy of trisulfane HSSSH: a candidate for detecting parity violation in chiral moleculesI. Bolotova¹, S. Albert¹, Z. Chen², C. Fabri², M. Quack^{2*}, G. Seyfang², D. Zindel²¹ETH Zurich, ²Physical Chemistry, ETH Zurich, Vladimir-Prelog-weg 2, 8093 Zurich, Switzerland

According to traditional quantum chemistry involving only the electromagnetic force the ground state energies of the enantiomers of chiral molecules as well as the energies of equivalent excited quantum states are exactly identical by symmetry. When the parity violating weak "nuclear" force causing beta-decay is included in the "electroweak quantum chemistry", one predicts an energy difference $\Delta_{\text{pv}}E_0$ between the ground states of enantiomers and a corresponding reaction enthalpy $\Delta_{\text{pv}}H_0^\ominus$ for the stereomutation reaction converting *P* and *M* enantiomers in the case of axially chiral molecules, [1, 2]:

$$P = M \quad \Delta_{\text{pv}}H_0^\ominus = E_0(M) - E_0(P) = N_A \Delta_{\text{pv}}E_0 \quad (1)$$

We report the first successful high-resolution analyses of the Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectrum of trisulfane. A band centered at 861.0292 cm⁻¹ can be assigned unambiguously to the chiral *trans* conformer by means of ground state combination differences in comparison with known rotational spectra. A second band near 864.698 cm⁻¹ is tentatively assigned to the *cis* conformer by comparison with theory. The results are discussed in relation to their importance for experimental attempts to measure the parity violating energy difference $\Delta_{\text{pv}}E$ between the ground states of enantiomers of chiral molecules, [3, 4].

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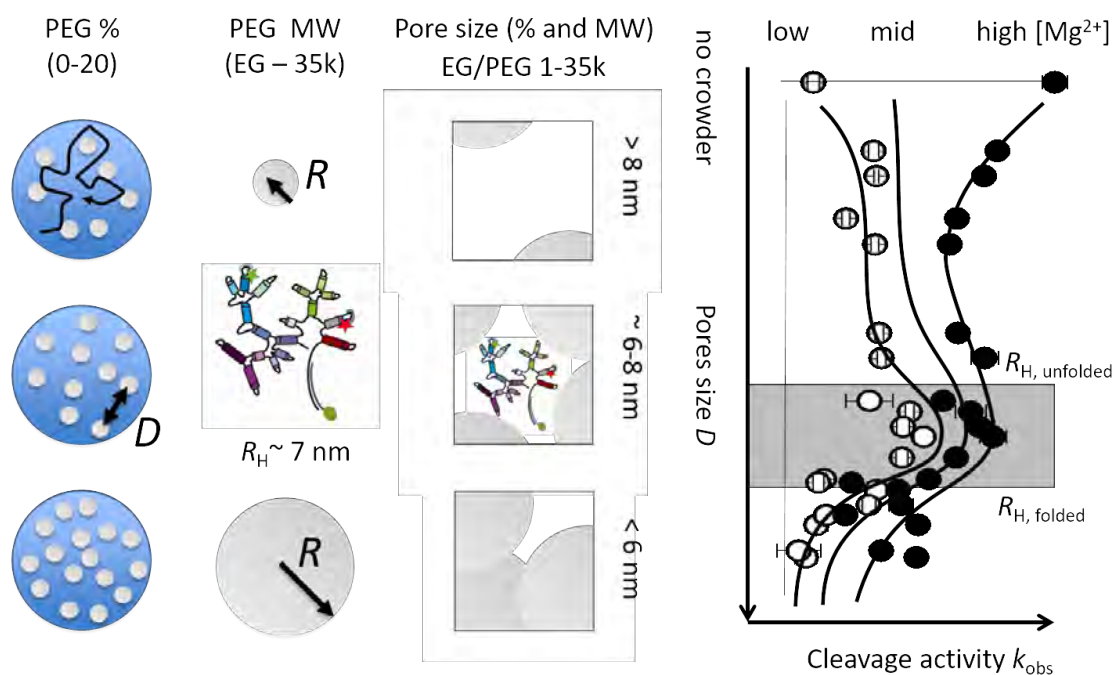
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Understanding the crowd: how specific is the influence of crowding particles on the activity of RNAs?

R. Börner¹, E. Fiorini¹, B. Köhn², M. Kovermann², R. K. Sigel^{1*}

¹University of Zürich, ²University Konstanz

Ribozymes are catalytic active RNAs requiring a high magnesium(II) concentration to show folding and function *in vitro* [1,2]. In contrast, *in vivo* conditions are characterized by a highly crowded cellular environment and much lower ion concentration. Molecular crowding agents are used to *mimic* the cellular environment. However, particular physical/chemical properties explaining the co-solutes or the macromolecular crowders influence on folding and function of RNAs are poorly understood. In this study, we gain new insights on how polymer properties like dielectric constant, viscosity, diffusion and pore size influence the activity and folding of a large non-coding RNA, the group IIB intron ribozyme of *S. cerevisiae* [3,4]. We combined bulk activity assays, smFRET and NMR diffusion experiments screening the influence of volume fraction (%) and molecular weight (MW) of different crowding particles. We unveiled an optimal pore size of the crowder, i.e. the average distance of the crowding particles in solution, that matches the size of the ribozyme to maintain its catalytic activity even at lower magnesium(II) concentration.



Financial support from the European Research Council (MIRNA N° 259092 to R.K.O.S.), the Swiss National Science Foundation (to R.K.O.S.), and the Forschungskredit Grant of the University of Zurich (FK-14-096 and FK-15-095 to R.B.) are gratefully acknowledged.

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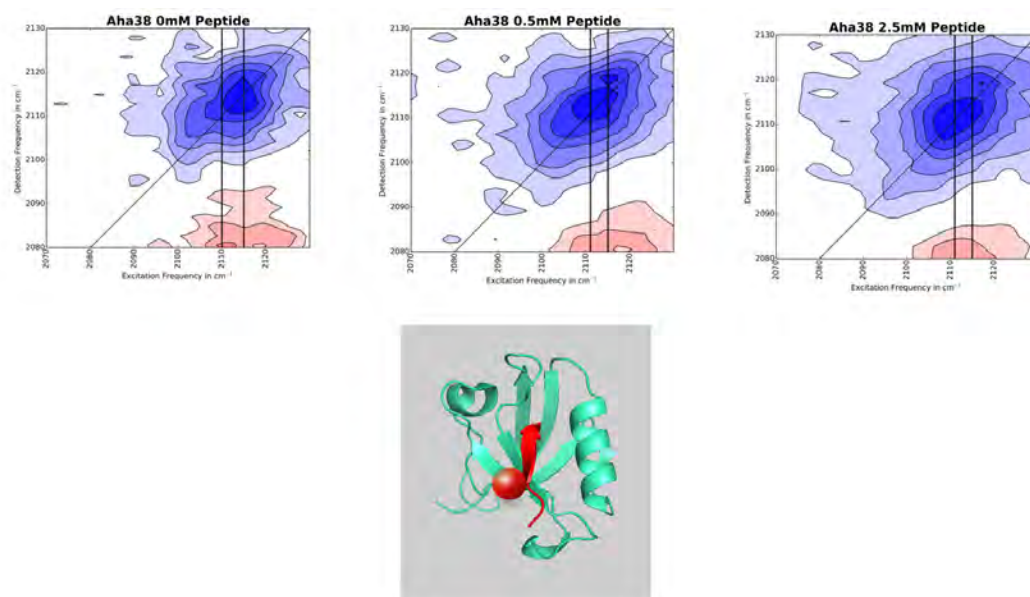
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Investigation of PDZ2/RagEF peptide interactions by 2D infrared spectroscopy using wild type and modified photoswitchable peptide ligands

O. Božović¹, C. Zanobini¹, P. Johnson¹, B. Janković¹, P. Hamm^{1*}

¹University of Zürich

Unnatural amino acid azidohomoalanine (Aha) has been shown to be an environment-sensitive infrared probe [1]. In order to monitor protein-ligand interactions between PDZ2 domain of human phosphatase 1E and its peptide ligands, two different mutants of PDZ2 domain were expressed where Aha was incorporated in two specific positions on the opposite sides of the binding groove of the PDZ2 domain. Our results have shown that a 5 wavenumber red shift of the Aha signal occurred as a consequence of peptide binding.



Furthermore, it has been previously shown that covalent bridging of alpha helical peptides by photoswitchable azobenzene molecule linked to two cysteine residues, can induce helix unfolding upon light isomerization of photoswitch [2]. After inducing the conformational change of peptide by photo-isomerization the affinity of Aha labeled PDZ2 for the given peptide may change enough to enable peptide unbinding from the protein in a controlled manner. Here we investigate two conceptually different photoswitchable peptide candidates, and their binding affinities.

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Reliable distance distributions in the nanometer range from 5-pulse Double Electron Electron Resonance (DEER)

F. D. Breitgoff¹, Y. O. Polyhach¹, G. Jeschke^{1*}

¹Laboratory of Physical Chemistry, ETH Zürich, 8049 Zürich, Switzerland.

Double Electron Electron Resonance (DEER) enables determination of distance distributions in the nanometer range by Electron Paramagnetic Resonance (EPR). In DEER, a refocused echo is recorded at the observation frequency while the distance to a partner spin is probed by time-dependent excitation at a second frequency (the pump frequency). Due to the dipolar interaction between the two spins, the observed echo is modulated with a frequency which depends on the distance between the two spins. The accessible observation window and thus distance range can be significantly prolonged by the use of dynamically decoupled multi-pulse versions of this experiment [1,2]. Such experiments, however, are not free of artefacts. On coherent spectrometers, artefacts due to additional coherence transfer pathways occur and can be removed by systematic change of the pulse phases [3]. On both coherent and incoherent spectrometers, overlap of the observer and pump frequency bands causes additional signals of dipolar origin, hereafter called band overlap artefacts. Furthermore, incomplete population inversion in the pump band gives rise to a so-called partial excitation artefact.

Using the 5-pulse DEER experiment with pulses from an arbitrary waveform generator (AWG), we show how pulse parameters can be optimized in order to suppress or completely remove the artefacts due to band overlap, so that only the partial excitation artefact remains. For removal of the partial excitation artefact, we present a data processing procedure that works without previous knowledge of the artefact amplitude or shape and without sensitivity loss. Two 5-pulse DEER traces are recorded in which the artefact position is shifted with respect to the wanted signal. Using the difference of the two traces, the artefact is identified and corrected for. Artefact removal is demonstrated for both simulated and experimental data acquired at different frequencies, for shaped as well as rectangular pump pulses, for a variety of distance distributions and spin environments. The algorithm is stable down to low S/N ratios and in the regime of moderate background decay. We show that 5-pulse DEER recorded with optimized pulse parameters and, if necessary, artefact-corrected by our algorithm gives access to correct distance distributions and a prolonged distance range.

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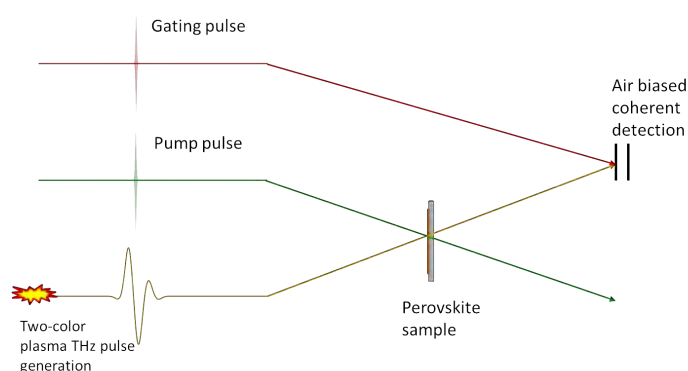
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Hybrid Organic-Inorganic Perovskites Studied with Ultra-Broadband Time-Resolved Terahertz Spectroscopy

A. Burgos-Caminal¹, A. Willauer¹, A. A. Oskoueï¹, J. Moser^{1*}

¹Photochemical Dynamics Group, Institute of Chemical Sciences & Engineering

The fundamental study of charge carrier dynamics has been shown to be central to the design of novel and improved photovoltaic systems. Understanding the mechanisms for charge carrier recombination, migration and transfer can pave the way forward for future developments. With this objective in mind, many spectroscopic techniques have been employed in the past. Particularly, THz time-resolved spectroscopy, based on optical rectification in non-linear crystals, has been used to study charge carrier and pseudo-particle dynamics in third generation photovoltaics, such as dye-sensitized solar cells[1] and perovskite solar cells [2].



A promising new technology based on gas photonics has been under heavy development for the last decade to obtain and detect broadband THz pulses [3], with early generation results dating back to the early 2000s. Improvements such as the introduction of the air biased coherent detection (ABCD) technique, and the use of different gas media [3] have greatly increased the signal to noise ratio. Thus, the technology has reached a state where optical pump-THz probe time-resolved spectroscopy can be successfully performed, providing enhanced time resolution and spectral bandwidth with respect to the classical optical rectification methods.

We present the first measurements carried out on multigrain methylammonium lead iodide perovskite thin films with optical pump-broadband THz probe spectroscopy. This technique allows us to unveil the first steps of charge carrier generation thanks to its sub-ps time resolution and extend the photoconductivity analysis up to a frequency of 20 THz.

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NMR Studies of Hierarchical Protein Dynamics

B. Busi¹, J. Yarava¹, A. Hofstetter¹, M. Geiger², H. Oshkinat², M. Blackledge³, L. Emsley^{1*}

¹EPF Lausanne, ²FMP Berlin, ³IBS grenoble

A fundamental challenge in biology is to understand the complex interaction between protein motion and function. Due to the complexity of this interaction and the wide range of timescales on which protein motion occurs, this task remains hard or even impossible. Recently, Lewandowski and coworkers have shown that temperature dependent magic angle spinning multinuclear solid state NMR relaxation measurements, at temperatures ranging from 105 to 280K, can provide a window into the hierarchy of dynamic processes in proteins.¹ Other available methods often focus only on a specific transition and are limited. In contrast, solid-state NMR allows simultaneous access to a wide range of observables (here we observe sixteen different probes (4 relaxations parameter for 4 different nuclei) within one protein).

We have reproduced those results¹ with a high accuracy, validated the previously proposed model and extended the method of this studies to a different system to conclude on the universalism of those dynamics.

The reproduced experiments allowed us to map the energies related to the “glass transition”. Similar transitions in the relaxation pattern can be observed for different probes within the protein and the solvent. We propose that internal motion can be model as a two-component system, where the higher energy motion (20-30 KJ.mol⁻¹) dominates the lower energy motion (5-10 KJ.mol⁻¹) with rising temperature.

Quantitative description of motions occurring in the protein and the solvent are dependent on the applied magnetic fields. Thus, we have validated our previous model using different fields strength, in order to obtain field-independent data: 9.4, 11.7, 14.1 and 18.8 T (400, 500, 600 and 800 MHz). Our model accurately predicts the results found for all the used fields strength.

A different protein (SH3) has also been studied, in order to see if the proposed model can predict fundamental properties shared by all soluble peptides. Our results show similar (but not identical) behavior for both proteins. We thus conclude, that small soluble protein show several similar dynamical properties, which can be accurately described by the presented model.

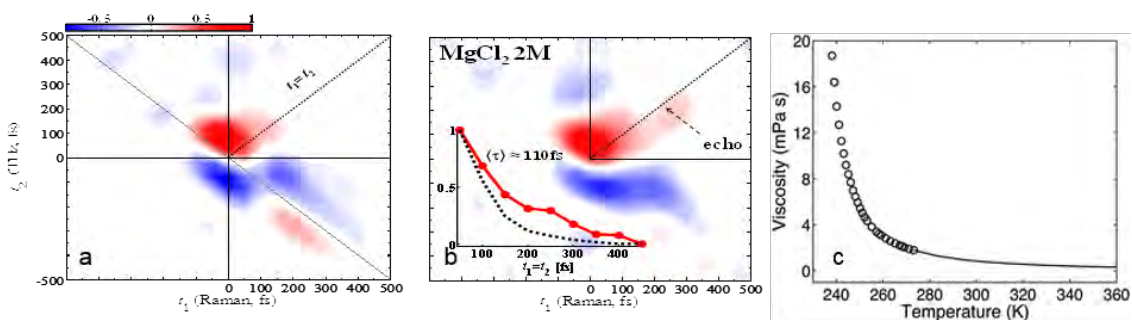
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Towards 2D Raman-THz spectroscopy of supercooled water

G. Ciardi¹, A. Berger¹, A. Shalit¹, P. Hamm^{1*}

¹University of Zurich

Two dimensional Raman-THz spectroscopy, as a new multidimensional spectroscopic technique directly in the THz regime [1], was proposed and used in our group to explore the low-frequency intermolecular modes dynamics in liquid water and aqueous salt solution [1][2]. This new approach has given new insights to the relaxation dynamic of complex collective hydrogen bond networks; the amount of inhomogeneity in the system is quantified by the time persistence of the "echo" signal along the diagonal $t_1=t_2$ [1] (Fig.1 (a)). The series of measurement of aqueous salt solution has revealed that the extent of the diagonal feature is directly related to the increase or decrease of viscosity driven by different kind of dissolved ions in water; in particular, as salts "structure" water (i.e. viscosity increases), the echo feature becomes more pronounced [2] (Fig. 1 (b)). To have a more complete picture regarding the appearance of this extended diagonal component and its connection to viscosity, next step is to measure the response of supercooled water. Cooling water below its freezing point leads essentially to the same viscosity change [3] of "structure making" salts but it comes without the addition of any external compound. For this reason and for the purpose of directly relating the appearance of the "echo" with viscosity effects, supercooled water is even a more reliable and direct probe of the structure of intermolecular hydrogen bond network.



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Photophysical Study of Perovskite Organic Blends for Applications in Light Emitting Diodes

N. Droseros¹, G. Longo², H. J. Bolink², N. Banerji^{3,1}

¹University of Fribourg, ²Universidad de Valencia, ³University of Bern

Solid-state heterojunction photovoltaic cells and white light emitting diodes are the most promising solutions in the modern, global energetic needs. Among the different materials that fulfil the desirable conditions for serving as active materials for the above-mentioned applications, a new class of materials called perovskites, has gained a lot of attention during the current decade. The numerous advantages of perovskites, including high absorption coefficient, high photoluminescence quantum yields, good transport properties, bandgap tunability and solution-processability, have situated them among the most intensively studied and the most promising candidates for solar cells and light emitting diodes.

Despite their advantages, perovskites stability and control of their synthesis conditions need to be further improved before their implementation in commercially available devices. Concerning their application in white light-emitting diodes that is less studied compared to the solar cells, except from their stability, also charge injection and light-extraction efficiencies must be improved, while the non-radiative recombination losses that lead to a decreased photoluminescence quantum yield need to be reduced.

In the present work, an attempt towards the improvement of the photoluminescence properties of methylammonium lead bromide (MAPbBr₃) thin films is attempted. For this purpose either a high molecular weight polymer or a low molecular weight Spiro Fluorene derivative was mixed into the precursor solution in different weight ratios with the perovskite and the resulted solutions were spin-coated as thin films. It is shown that additive containing films showed a large increase in their photoluminescence quantum yield of the perovskite. To further investigate the reasons for this improvement perovskite films with and without the addition of the additives were investigated with several transient techniques of ns-time-resolved photoluminescence, ns- and fs- transient absorption spectroscopy. We attribute the increase of the photoluminescence quantum yield of the perovskite to the enhanced excitonic recombination due to the creation of quantum confinement upon the addition of the additives. Furthermore, proofs for the trap passivation of the perovskite are provided.

Mechanistic elucidation on the stability of SnO₂ NPs under electrochemical CO₂ reduction condition: An *in operando* Raman Spectroscopy study

A. Dutta^{*1}, A. Kuzume², V. Kaliginedi¹, M. Rahaman¹, S. Vesztergom³, P. Broekmann^{1*}

¹Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, University of Bern, ²Institute of Innovative Research, Tokyo Institute of Technology, ³Department of Physical Chemistry, Eötvös Loránd University

In this present study we demonstrate degradation effects on the basis of a direct electro-reduction process of CO₂ taking place on a SnO₂ NP catalyst supported on reduced graphene oxide (rGO). The field of CO₂ electro-catalysis is rapidly growing due to the global demand for new technologies which allow for the reduction of CO₂ in the atmosphere and to store at the same time excesses of electric energy from wind and solar sources in form of a reduced carbon compound. In this respect, an electrochemical approach towards the conversion of CO₂ into more valuable products seems to be highly promising. The SnO₂ NP catalyst supported on reduced graphene oxide (rGO) shows a superior activity and selectivity towards the formation of formate with Faradaic efficiencies (FEs) above 80%. However, our study also demonstrates that the Faradaic efficiencies crucially depend on the applied electrode potential and the pH of the electrolyte. The SnO₂ NPs themselves undergo at cathodic potentials an electro-reduction reaction transforming the SnO₂ (Sn^{IV}) into metallic tin (Sn⁰). This chemical transition can be monitored potential and time dependent by *in operando* (this is, during an ongoing CO₂ electroreduction) Raman spectroscopy (Fig.1). This **catalyst degradation** is accompanied by a significant drop down of the Faradaic efficiency of formate formation. Highest efficiencies are actually obtained under conditions where the NP is neither fully oxidized nor fully reduced and consist of a Sn/SnO₂ composite. The post-electrolysis characterization of the catalyst material reveals a full recovery of the SnO₂. This result emphasizes once more the importance of an *in operando* identification of the catalytically active species as basis for the elucidation of reaction mechanisms.

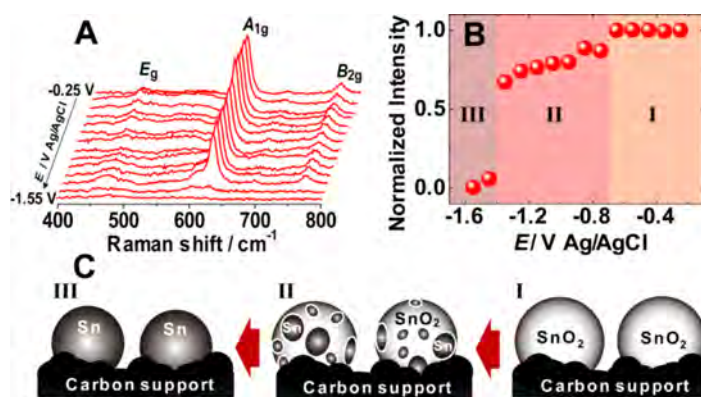


Fig.1 *In operando* Raman studies at varied potential (A) The relative intensities of the Sn^{IV}-related A_{1g} Raman peaks (B). In the three distinct potential regions represented by the shaded background, the catalyst is in the form of fully oxidized SnO₂ (I), a partially reduced compound of mixed oxidation state (II) and completely reduced metallic Sn (III), as illustrated by the scheme of (C).

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Binding Properties of Polymer Nanoparticles Encapsulating Porphyrinic Photosensitizers

I. Gjuroski¹, L. Sauser¹, J. Furrer¹, M. Vermathen¹

¹University of Berne

The concept of photodynamic therapy (PDT) for anticancer treatment is based on the formation of highly reactive singlet oxygen ($^1\text{O}_2$) via energy transfer from a light excited photosensitizer ultimately leading to localized cell death. Due to their intrinsic phototoxicity and high tumor accumulation, porphyrinic compounds including porphyrins and chlorins have evolved as important family of photosensitizers in PDT. However, one of their drawbacks originates from a high aggregation tendency of most porphyrinic compounds. Polymer systems have been identified as an elegant and simple way to cope with the undesired effects of aggregation. As an example, Photolon[®], which is a polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP) - chlorin e6 (Ce6) complex, has been approved for medical application in PDT. [1]

Previously, we have reported and characterized a series of naturally derived porphyrins by NMR spectroscopy keeping the focus on their aggregation models, propensity to form aggregates, carrier systems and their interactions with membrane models. [2, 3]

The aim of this study is to investigate the efficacy of different polymer systems regarding their disaggregating capability and binding strength of porphyrin compounds using NMR and UV spectroscopy as main techniques. A step towards understanding the loading efficiency of the polymer matrices can be accomplished by characterization of parameters such as the association (binding) constant of porphyrin-polymer ensembles. Particularly, we have calculated and compared the binding constants of polymer matrices either based on block copolymer micelles (BCMs) or PVP with a chlorin (SerCe) and a deuteroporphyrin IX derivative (DPIXDSME). The results indicate different binding motives of the polymer matrices with respect to the porphyrinic compounds. Moreover, the stability and reactivity of the polymer-encapsulated porphyrins were probed by NMR spectroscopy mimicking physiological conditions. They were found to be different for BCMs and PVP and correlated with the association constants. The protective role of the polymer carrier system towards blood plasma proteins plays an important role in the drug delivery process. The binding differences reported in this contribution may have a considerable impact on the pharmacokinetic properties of the corresponding delivery systems.

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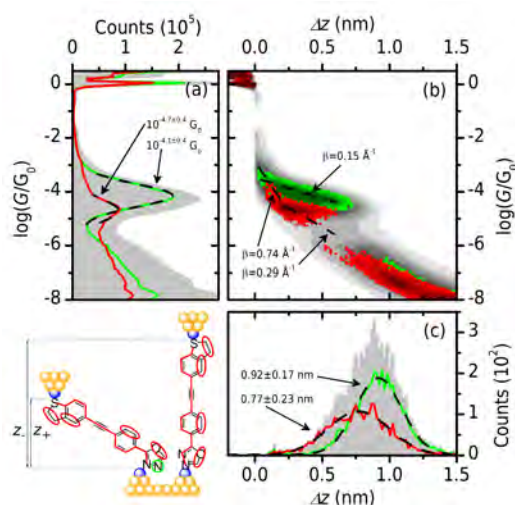
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Fast data sorting to distinguish unique single molecular break junction trajectories

J. M. Hamill¹, M. Arenz^{2*}

¹Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, ²University of Bern

A simple and fast analysis method to sort large data sets into groups with shared distinguishing characteristics is described, and applied to single molecular break junction data. The method successfully sorts data sets without the need to assert any specific hypothesis about the expected features within the data. The method is applied to mixtures of two molecules with identical anchor groups, similar lengths, but either a π (high conductance) or σ (low conductance) bridge. The mixed data is sorted into break junctions containing one molecule or the other. The method also distinguishes between two junction geometries in measurements of the π bridged molecule alone^[1].



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Quantum Logic Spectroscopy for Single Trapped Molecular IonsG. Hegi¹, K. Najafian¹, M. Sinhal¹, Z. Meir¹, I. Sergachev², S. Willitsch^{1*}¹Universität Basel, ²Alpes Lasers SA

The application of quantum techniques to the spectroscopy of single trapped particles has enabled the determination of atomic properties at unprecedented levels of precision. “Quantum-logic spectroscopy” (QLS) has enabled the next generation of atomic clocks and new precision tests of fundamental physical theories^[1]. Thus, we wish to extend the scope of quantum techniques to spectroscopically probe the properties of single isolated molecular ions^[2]. We also intend to establish a quantum toolbox for the non-destructive interrogation of single molecules by coupling to a single atom. These developments will pave the way for molecular precision spectroscopic measurements to study, e.g., a possible time variation of particle masses^[3-5] with N_2^+ which has been identified as a promising candidate system^[3]. We will report our recent progress towards these goals.

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Unravelling the Atomic-level Structure of Calcium Silicate Hydrate

A. Hofstetter¹, A. Kumar², B. J. Walder¹, A. K. Mohamed¹, B. Srinivasan^{1,4}, A. J. Rossini³, K. Scrivener¹, L. Emsley^{1*}, P. Bowen¹

¹EPF Lausanne, ²EPFL, ³Iowa State University, ⁴Ludwig-Maximilian University

Calcium silicate hydrate (CSH) is one of the most versatile and widely used substances worldwide. The main use of CSH is as primary binding component in concrete, where it forms about 50-60% by volume of the dried cement paste [1]. With cement being the most widely used construction material, so abundant that its production is the leading industrial source of greenhouse gases, contributing to about 8% of global emissions, a deep knowledge of the structure of CSH is of global priority.

Other emerging applications of CSH range from usage in dental fillings and bone repair, requiring biocompatibility, to waste water treatment, requiring a high specific surface area, to encasement of nuclear waste, requiring high structural integrity. Despite the versatile and frequent usage of CSH it is surprising that the full atomic-level structure of CSH remains unknown [2,3].

The main reasons for the unresolved atomic-level structure of CSH arise from the fact that CSH always is slightly disordered, that it occurs in nature in conjunction with other materials phases, and that previously synthetic CSH could only be produced with Ca:Si ratios below 1.6, whereas the industrially relevant ratio is greater than 1.75 [4]. Here we present a novel method which achieves the synthesis of uniform CSH phases with Ca:Si ratios between 1.0 and 2.0. We then solve the three-dimensional atomic-level structure using an approach combining dynamic nuclear polarization (DNP) enhanced solid state nuclear magnetic resonance (ssNMR) experiments, molecular dynamics (MD) simulations and chemical shift calculations based on first principle.

To solve the atomic-level structure of CSH we first determine structural constraints through one- and two- dimensional ²⁹Si DNP cross polarization ssNMR experiments, employing magic angle spinning (MAS) of the sample. These constraints, in combination with force-field based MD simulations, are then used to generate an ensemble of possible short range building blocks for the CSH structure. By combining these building blocks we then generate a set of medium to long range structural motifs, which we optimize using density functional theory (DFT). We then compare the DFT calculated ¹H chemical shifts of these motifs with experimentally measured two-dimensional {¹H}²⁹Si DNP HETCOR chemical shifts to determine the subset of structures that best describe the CSH structure. This subset in combination with additional structural constraints, resulting from the ²⁹Si chemical shift experiments, and MD simulations then allow us to propose a full atomic-level structure of CSH.

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Light induced conformational isomerisation of helical photoswitchable S-peptide and perturbation of S-protein/S-peptide complex

B. Janković¹, C. Zanobini¹, O. Božović¹, P. Johnson¹, P. Hamm^{1*}

¹Department of Chemistry, University of Zürich

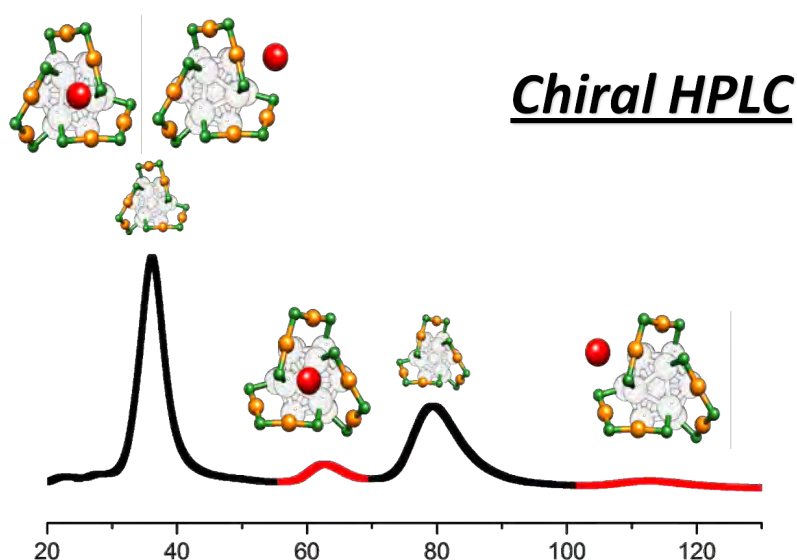
Transient infrared spectroscopy is a promising technique for time-resolved investigation of proteins' conformational changes induced by e.g. peptide binding. Model system that we are currently interested in is ribonuclease S (RNase S), a non-covalent complex composed of S-protein and S-peptide. RNase S is produced by subtilisin cleavage of ribonuclease A at specific position and consists of tightly associated S-peptide (residues 1-20) and S-protein (residues 21-124) which possess full enzymatic activity. Dissociated S-peptide has predominantly random coil conformation in solution, whereas alpha helical conformation is favored in the bound state to folded S-protein¹. Our main aim is to gain further insights in mechanism of S-peptide - S-protein binding by using different modified forms of S-peptide. By covalently modifying S-peptide, we managed to introduce a bridging photoswitchable water soluble azobenzene molecule which allows us to perturb the structure in a controlled manner. This perturbation should be large enough to lead to dissociation of the S-peptide from the complex, which would allow us to monitor time-resolved changes of S-peptide and S-protein conformation upon ligand unbinding. Furthermore, incorporation of site-specific and sensitive infrared labels, either in S-peptide or S-protein, would provide even more specific and detailed information on conformational changes that occur².

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Au₃₈Cu₁(SC₂H₄Ph)₂₄ Nanoclusters: Synthesis, Enantioseparation and LuminescenceR. Kazan¹, B. Zhang¹, T. Bürgi^{1*}¹Department of Physical Chemistry, University of Geneva, Switzerland

Gold alloy nanoparticles have recently triggered much research interest for their various applications in several fields such as catalysis and imaging. [1] Nonetheless, preparing alloy nanoparticles with atomic monodispersity has long been a major challenge, and until now only few have been attained with atomic precision and molecular purity. [2] In this study, a CuAu₃₈ bimetallic nanocluster was synthesized by adding a single copper atom to the Au₃₈(2-PET)₂₄ nanocluster. The absence of Cu_xAu₃₈(2-PET)₂₄ doped species was demonstrated by MALDI-TOF mass spectrometry. A separation of bimetallic clusters was attained for the first time where isomers of the E2 enantiomer of the Au₃₈Cu₁ adduct were successfully isolated from their parent cluster using chiral HPLC. The CD of the isolated isomers revealed a change in their electronic structure upon copper addition. The luminescence of the Au₃₈Cu₁ adduct is significantly enhanced in comparison with the parent Au₃₈ nanocluster. The stability of the newly formed adduct is strongly dependent on the coexistence of the Au₃₈ nanoclusters.



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Mechanistic studies of conformationally controlled ionic cycloadditions and state selective reactions

A. Kilaj¹, H. Gao¹, D. Rösch¹, U. Rivero¹, J. Küpper^{2,3*}, S. Willitsch^{1*}

¹Department of Chemistry, University of Basel, Klingelbergstrasse 80, 4056 Basel, Switzerland, ²Center for Free-Electron Laser Science, DESY, Notkestrasse 85, 22607 Hamburg, Germany, ³Department of Physics, University of Hamburg, Luruper Chaussee 149, 22761 Hamburg, Germany

Despite their significance in organic synthesis, the mechanistic details of Diels-Alder cycloadditions, in which a diene and a dienophile react to form a cyclic product, still remain an unsolved and extensively discussed question. It has proven difficult to determine whether only the *s-cis* conformer (concerted mechanism) or both conformers (stepwise mechanism) of the involved diene react to form the cyclic product. Due to their high stereo- and regioselectivity, a concerted mechanism is generally assumed [1]. For polar Diels-Alder reactions, however, where one of the reactants contains a charge, the reaction may instead favor a stepwise mechanism [2].

In order to shed light on these questions we investigate the reactivities of individual conformers by employing molecular beam technology [3]. Owing to their different dipole moments, conformers can be spatially separated in an inhomogeneous electric field. Directing a molecular beam of spatially separated conformers into a cloud of sympathetically cooled molecular ions in an ion trap allows us to study highly conformationally selective reactions such as Diels-Alder cycloadditions. Previously, this method has been successfully applied to study reactive collisions of 3-aminophenol with a Coulomb crystal of Ca⁺ ions [4][5]. As a representative example, we want to study the conformationally resolved ionic cycloaddition reaction of 2,3-dibromo-1,3-butadiene which exhibits two different conformers, *s-cis* and *s-trans*, with ionic maleic anhydride. The products of the reactive collisions are analyzed by an integrated high-resolution time-of-flight mass-spectrometer. The performance of the setup was recently confirmed by measuring the rate constant of the reaction between laser cooled Ca⁺ ions with N₂O [6]. This advancement will enable us to trace the complex mechanistic pathways of Diels-Alder reactions.

Besides conformers, our setup also enables us to study state selective reactions. In the presence of a strong inhomogeneous electric field, water molecules in a molecular beam can be separated into their two nuclear spin isomers *ortho* and *para* which correlate with different rotational states [7]. Currently we are investigating the reaction of rotational state selected H₂O molecules with N₂⁺ and N₂H⁺ ions. The flexibility of our setup allows us to access the individual spin isomers and study their reactivities.

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THz Emission Spectroscopy on organic semiconductors

P. Krauspe¹, M. Causa¹, J. Brauer¹, D. Tsokkou¹, N. Banerji^{1*}

¹University of Bern

In the terahertz emission spectroscopy (TES) sample systems are investigated on an ultrashort timescale. With optical excitation of the material with a light pulse on the order of tens of femtoseconds and subsequent acceleration of photoexcited carriers, we create electric fields in the THz frequency range. Using free space electro optic sampling (FSEOS) these fields are recorded and a full waveform is reconstructed. From that waveform we extract material properties and obtain information on the generation and recombination rates of photoexcited carriers through comparison with simulations. Assumptions for the simulations are justified with additional experiments using THz-Time domain spectroscopy (THz-TDS). Here we present a proof of concept and first measurements to show the feasibility and versatility of this novel technique.

Correlation Between Charge Carrier Lifetimes and Cation Dynamics in Mixed Double A-Cation Lead Halide Perovskites Revealed by Solid-state NMR

D. J. Kubicki¹, D. Prochowicz², P. Péchy², S. M. Zakeeruddin², M. Grätzel^{2*}, L. Emsley^{1*}

¹Laboratory of Magnetic Resonance, Institute of Chemical Sciences and Engineering, Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), ²Laboratory of Photonics and Interfaces, Institute of Chemical Sciences and Engineering, Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL)

Mixed cation organic lead halide perovskites emerged as an attractive alternative to silicon-based solar cells. Currently, one of the best performing materials contains 4 cations and provides power conversion efficiencies up to around 22 %.[1] Here, we report the first quantitative, cation-specific data on cation rotational dynamics in hybrid double-cation formamidinium (FA)/methylammonium (MA) lead iodide perovskites using ¹⁴N and ²H MAS NMR. Our findings suggest that the excellent photovoltaic properties of perovskite materials are directly correlated to cation reorientation dynamics, and corroborate the polaronic nature of charge carriers in these materials.

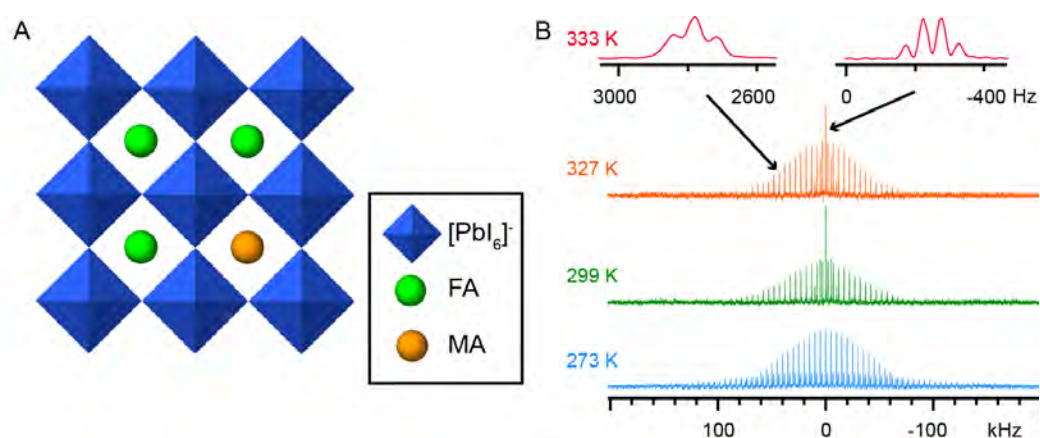


Fig. 1. A) A cartoon showing the structure of the double-cation three-dimensional perovskite phase of $\text{FA}_{0.67}\text{MA}_{0.33}\text{PbI}_3$, B) and the corresponding solid-state ¹⁴N echo-detected variable-temperature 5 kHz MAS NMR spectra. The top insets (red) show a close-up of the isotropic peak at 333 K and 20 kHz MAS, conditions under which a characteristic splitting due to the *J*-coupling between the nitrogen and the proton is resolved, making the signal assignment straightforward. The arrows indicate the corresponding SSB manifolds.

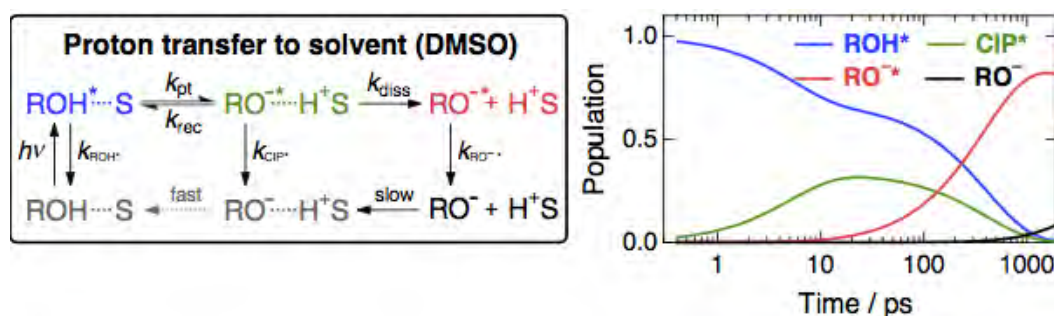
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An Excited-State Proton Transfer Disentangled by fs Broadband Spectroscopies

T. Kumpulainen¹, A. Rosspeintner¹, B. Dereka¹, E. Vauthey^{1*}

¹University of Geneva, Department of Physical Chemistry, Sciences II, CH-1211 Geneva, Switzerland

Proton transfer is undoubtedly one of the most significant reactions in chemistry and biology. The discovery of excited-state acids, also known as photoacids, has enabled detailed time-resolved investigations on the mechanism and kinetics of the dissociation process.[1] Despite the wealth of investigations on excited-state proton-transfer (ESPT) reactions, some aspects are still under discussion. For example, the influence of solvent environment on ESPT is recognized both from experimental and theoretical viewpoints but only a few studies have explicitly accounted for the dynamic solvent relaxation in the excited-state. Second, ESPT reactions are usually modeled according to the Eigen-Weller scheme which consists of an initial short-range proton-transfer step producing contact ion pairs followed by a diffusion-controlled separation into free ions (**Figure**). However, the model is often discussed only qualitatively and detailed investigations resolving all microscopic rate constants and relaxation pathways are scarce. Lastly, data obtained using different spectroscopic techniques have sometimes resulted in differing interpretations of the studied processes.



In our communication, we report on the ESPT from a 1,8-naphthalimide-derived "super" photoacid[2] to solvent (DMSO) investigated using three fs broadband techniques: visible and IR transient absorptions, in addition to fluorescence up-conversion. We will demonstrate how a combination of these techniques gives much deeper insight into the overall photocycle including both ground- and excited-state species. Broadband fluorescence up-conversion gives us direct access to the solvent relaxation reported by the dynamic Stokes shift of the fluorescence band which is modeled using a recently developed global analysis scheme based on time-dependent band-shape functions.[3] Transient absorption, on the other hand, yields valuable information about the additional decay channels to the ground-state species. Lastly, the use of a target model based on the reaction scheme (**Figure**) enables recovery of all the individual rate constants and concentrations of the different intermediates.

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The Study of Electrolytes for Li-Air Batteries

N. Kwon¹, Y. Sheima¹, K. M. Fromm^{1*}

¹University of Fribourg

Rechargeable lithium-air batteries potentially provide higher energy densities than the conventional rechargeable batteries due to the redox combination of light lithium metal anode and oxygen cathode. However, the redox reversible reactions and cyclability of those batteries remain a challenge. Among the possible set-ups of Li-air batteries, using an aqueous electrolyte provides a higher efficiency and cyclability due to the high ionic mobility and the solubility of discharge products [1]. However, water must not contact the lithium metal anode to avoid a violent reaction, producing heat and gas evolution. Thus, we apply an organic electrolyte on the lithium anode to protect the metal and an aqueous electrolyte on the cathode side to allow reversible electrochemical reactions. Another scientific issue is that during discharging, the value of pH increases due to the formation of LiOH, which damages the membranes [2,3] and leads upon saturation to LiOH precipitation [4]. Therefore, suppressing high pH in an aqueous electrolyte is a key parameter to improve the redox reversible reactions.

The solubility of O₂ in a mild pH of the aqueous solution was studied by adding H₃PO₄ in a half cell Li-air system. Fig. 1 shows the comparison of redox reactions in aqueous and organic electrolytes using different salts in Ar and O₂ atmosphere. In case of using organic electrolyte, the oxidation current intensity was affected by the lower limit voltage. The further discussion will be presented in the conference.

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A Mechanosensitive Dye as Surface Second Harmonic Generation Probe of Biomimetic Interfaces

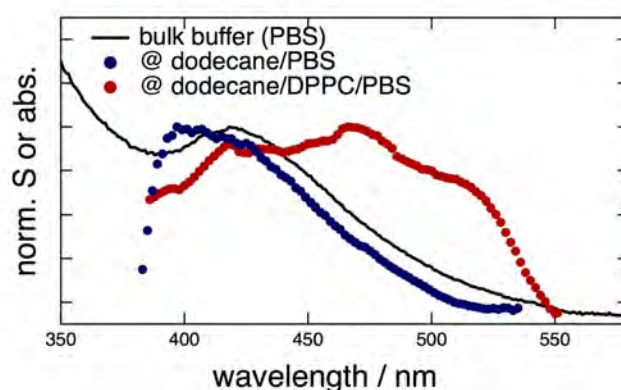
G. Licari¹

¹University of Geneva

The development of well-designed fluorescent probes has enabled the visualization of various natural processes, particularly in biology, with improved detection limits and high specificity. However, for environments such as interfaces where the response is hidden by the bulk, the fluorescence technique is not adequate and more specific methods need to be employed. Here, a stationary and ultrafast time-resolved Surface Second Harmonic Generation (SSHG) technique,^{1,2} which provides the required interface specificity, is applied.

A new dithienothiophene derivative, the best mechanosensitive membrane probe so far,³ is investigated at different interfaces using SSHG. For example, the figure demonstrates that the interfacial spectrum of this compound is shifted to lower energy in the presence of the ordered phospholipid monolayer, revealing the sensitivity to membrane pressure.

The present work shows the remarkable performance of this dye as a SSHG probe and, for instance, the possibility to use it in SHG microscopy, which could in the future give a deeper insight into biologically relevant questions.



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Carbon coating for nano-rattle Sn@C composite anode material for alkali metal ion batteries

S. Maharajan¹, N. H. Kwon¹, K. M. Fromm^{1*}

¹Department of Chemistry, University of Fribourg, Chemin du Musée, CH-1700 Fribourg, Switzerland e-mail: sivarajakumar.maharajan@unifr.ch

Tin based alloy anode material undergoes huge volume expansion upon lithium ion insertion (up to 360%) which causes cracking of the active material, consequently leading to capacity fading. This greatly hinders the practical application of Sn as anode material in lithium ion batteries¹. 'Nano-rattle' type Sn nanoparticles (NPs) encapsulated in a carbon shell are proposed here as they feature a buffer volume (void) to cope with the volume expansion problem.

Carbon coating: A reverse micelle micro emulsion technique has been adopted to form SiO₂ NPs in the first step², followed by hydrothermal carbonization to form carbon coating on silica NPs. The nano-rattle morphology is however difficult to obtain if the intermediate hydrothermal carbonization step does not yield a uniform carbon coating on the silica surface. This is why this study emphasizes on the variation of the pH, the concentration and the respective surface polarity values which influence the wettability, adsorption and aggregation properties³.

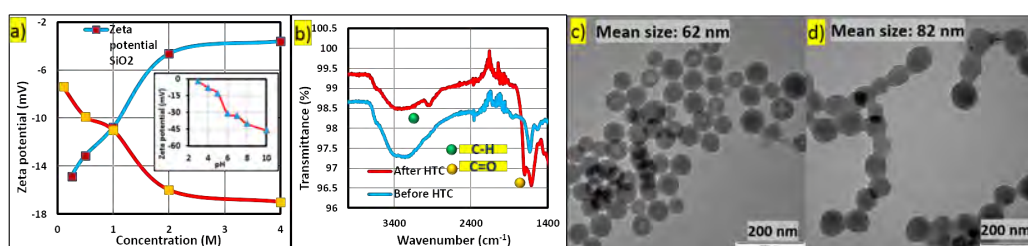


Figure 1: Graphs showing Zeta potential analysis (a) and FTIR (b), TEM images showing SiO₂ NPs before (c) and after (d) hydrothermal carbonization. Figure 1a shows the zeta potential measurements as a function of the concentration of silica and sucrose, which was used as carbon source. The inset graph shows that the silica suspension is more stable at high pH. The FTIR graph in figure 1b shows the presence of C=O and C-H bands after coating of sucrose on the surface of silica. The TEM images 1c and 1d show the as-formed silica NPs before and after hydrothermal carbonization, respectively. The particle size increased after the hydrothermal process, probably due to formation of a porous, spongy carbon shell.

Conclusion and perspectives: A thin and homogeneous carbon coating on the surface of single silica sphere can be formed by controlling silica surface and a well-dispersed suspension. Further steps are on-going to obtain Sn@C nano-rattles after the substrate etching process and Sn impregnation process. Finally, the electrochemical properties of the nano-rattle Sn@C composite electrode will be analysed by cycling at different C-rates.

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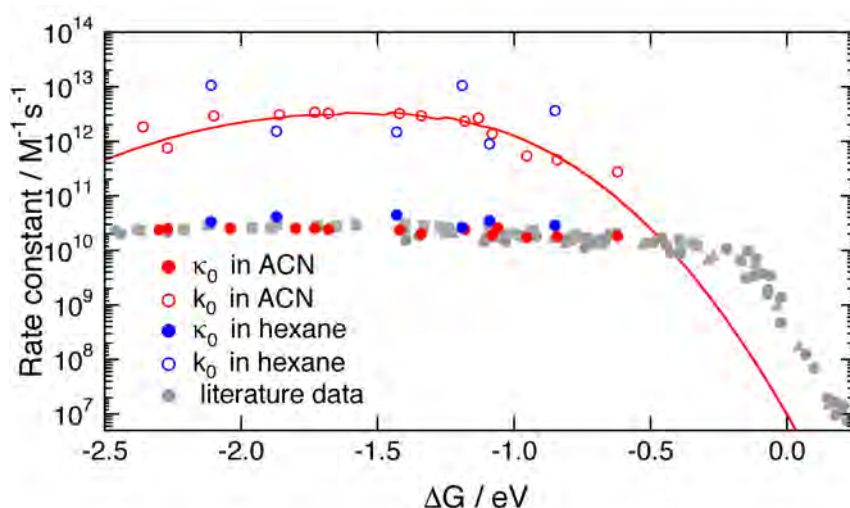
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Bimolecular Photoinduced Electron Transfer: the effect of the reorganization energyC. Nançoz¹, A. Rosspeintner¹, E. Vauthey^{1*}¹University of Geneva

Electron transfer (ET) is one of the simplest chemical reactions, as it does not require the formation or the breaking of a chemical bond. Moreover, photoinduced ET it is one of the most investigated photochemical reactions.¹ ET processes are usually described theoretically in terms of the Marcus model, which connects the driving force of the reaction with its rate constant.² The latter depends on several additional parameters such as the temperature, the reorganization energy and the electronic coupling between the initial and final states.

We will present a study focussing on the reorganization energy, which is composed of the contribution from the solvent, λ_s , and from intramolecular modes, λ_i . The effect of λ_s was investigated by measuring the dynamics of bimolecular photoinduced ET reactions in an apolar solvent and by comparison with previous results in a polar solvent.³ The effect of λ_i was studied by performing measurements with perdeuterated compounds.



The above figure illustrates the driving force dependence of the ET rate constant in hexane and in acetonitrile (ACN). Here, κ_0 is the intrinsic, diffusion-free, bimolecular ET rate constant, whereas k_0 is the diffusion-controlled rate constant. Surprisingly, the observed ET dynamics does not exhibit a significant dependence on the solvent polarity, despite very different λ_s . This result suggests that the intramolecular modes play a predominant role in the ET dynamics.

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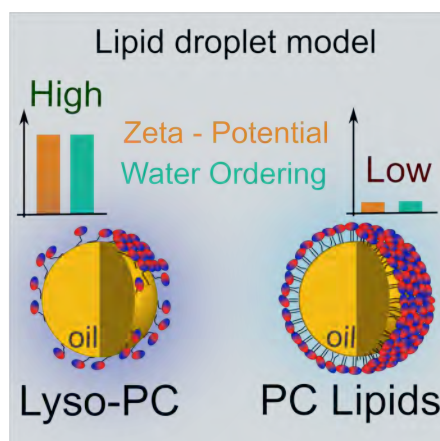
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Molecular Insights on the 3D Lipid Monolayers of Lipid Droplet Organelle

H. I. Okur¹, Y. Chen¹, N. Smolentsev¹, S. Roke^{1*}

¹Laboratory for Fundamental BioPhotonics (LBP), IBI, IMX, STI, LACUS, EPFL, CH-1015 Lausanne, Switzerland

Three-dimensional (3D) phospholipid monolayers at hydrophobic surfaces are omnipresent in nature as adiposome organelle, also known as lipid droplets, or in man-made materials such as drug delivery systems. Nevertheless, the molecular level understanding of such monolayers remains elusive. We investigate the molecular structure of phosphatidylcholine (PC) lipids forming 3D monolayers on the surface of hexadecane nanodroplets. The influences of acyl chain length, saturation, and number of acyl tails per lipid were studied with vibrational sum frequency, and second harmonic scattering, interface sensitive non-linear optical techniques. We find that 1,2-dihexadecanoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine (DPPC; 16:0) lipids form tightly packed, liquid-condensed-like monolayers.[1] Upon shortening the tail length to 1,2-dimyristoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine (DMPC; 14:0) and 1,2-dilauroyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine (DLPC; 12:0), more gauche defects in the lipid tails are observed. Monolayers of unsaturated 1,2-dioleoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine (DOPC; 18:1) and single acyl tailed 1-palmitoyl-2-hydroxy-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine (lyso-PC; 16:0) contain more disorder. Despite these variations in the packing of the tail region, the headgroup orientation remains approximately parallel to the nanodroplet interface. Remarkably, the lyso-PC lipids uniquely form more diluted and “patchy” 3D monolayers.[2] These results are supported by zeta-potential measurements and fluorometric analysis of Nile-red dye adsorption to these 3D phospholipid monolayers. Our findings suggest a vital role for the presence of single-tailed lipids on the lipid droplet organelles. Specifically, these lipids enhance the accessibility of the hydrophobic non-polar core by the water soluble enzymes; i.e. lipases, present in the cytosol.



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Application of Reactive Molecular Dynamics on Astrochemical interest systems.M. Pezzella¹¹University of Basel

The combination of quantum and classical methodologies is a winning strategy for studying astrochemical phenomena, making possible to explain telescopic observations. In this work two reactive events are studied in this way, using Reactive dynamics performed using MS-ARMD (Multi-Surface Reactive Dynamics) [1] module present in CHARMM[2].

The first study regards the formation of O₂ in the Interstellar Media (ISM): this species is considered the first reservoir of atomic Oxygen, but there are only few observations that support this hypothesis. Mass-spectrometric observations of comet colas suggest that O₂ is highly correlated with water ice grains[3]. After characterizing the ice structure at ISM temperature regime, 50 K, reactive simulations are performed inside the ice bulk and on top of its surface, using a MRCI Potential Energy Curve to describe O₂. The majority of the reactions are observed within the first 5 ps of simulation, showing the ability of the ice morphology to catalyze the reaction. The scarce interaction between O₂-H₂O has as consequence a slow relaxation of the new formed molecule that is estimated on the 100 ns time scale., in the meanwhile it acts as a heat source for the bulky ice increasing the temperature of 15 K during a 5 ns time scale.

The second example investigates the interaction of fullerene cations with hydrogen (C₆₀H⁺ and C₆₀H₂⁺). It results of particular interest in both astrochemical (as can be used to trace the fullerene contributions to the Carbon abundance in the Universe) and technological (due high capacity of these species of storing Hydrogen) fields. The energetic profiles are characterized via B3LYP/6-31g(d) calculations. The chemisorption of one hydrogen atom on fullerene results in 85.87 kcal/mol stabilization, and consequent possibility of diffusion on top of the adsorbate specie (barrier of 29.45 kcal/mol). Nanosecond MD simulations shows the equivalence between the different adsorption sites. In agreement with previous studies on Carbon Nanotubes [4], H₂ bond is broken during the chemisorption.

In both example the use of MS-ARMD techniques shows up to be important: Ab-Initio levels results can be easily reproduced at cost of a classical simulations. The inclusion of possibles diabatic crosses between PES is planned as further improvement of this module, opening the possibility to study more complicated photochemical processes.

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Using pulsed EPR dipolar spectroscopy for the coarse-grained localisation of a residue in the intrinsically disordered domain of hnRNP A1

L. Ritsch¹, M. Yulikov¹, E. Lehmann², F. Allain^{2*}, G. Jeschke^{1*}

¹Laboratory of Physical Chemistry, ETH Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland, ²Institute of Molecular Biology and Biophysics, ETH Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland

The regulatory function of the human protein hnRNP A1 in splicing is believed to be mediated by multimerisation of individual hnRNP A1 units on long RNAs via an intrinsically disordered C-terminal domain [1]. The two N-terminal domains of hnRNP A1 are known to fold in a well-defined structure, which has been solved by X-ray crystallography, and more recently by solution NMR (pdb: 2LYV). The high degree of flexibility of the C-terminal domain, however, makes it inaccessible for both structural techniques. Using site-directed spin labelling, we determine distance distributions from residues in the structured domains, termed beacon sites, to individual residues in the disordered domain using the DEER pulsed EPR technique [2]. Together with a set of distances measured between the beacon sites themselves, it is then possible to calculate a spatial distribution of the position of a given residue in the disordered domain, which can be visualised as an isosurface of the probability density [3]. This analysis approach is included in the current version of the modelling software MMM [4].



Figure 1. NMR sub-ensemble structure (2LYV) of hnRNP A1 with visualisation of spin label rotamer clouds (purple) at the beacon sites and the 50% probability density isosurface (green and red) of finding residue 231. The distances between all possible pairs were measured using the DEER pulsed EPR experiment on samples of doubly labelled (MTSL) hnRNP A1.

Support: This work is supported by SNF grant 200020 157034.

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How good is the generalized Langevin equation to describe the dynamics of photo-induced electron transfer in fluid solution?

A. Rosspeintner¹, G. Angulo², P. Pasitsuparoad², E. Vauthey^{1*}, J. Jedrak², A. Ochab-Marcinak², C. Radzewicz², P. Wnuk²

¹University of Geneva, ²Polish Academy of Sciences

The dynamics of unimolecular photo-triggered reactions can be strongly affected by the surrounding medium for which a large number of theoretical descriptions have been used in the past. An accurate description of these reactions requires knowing the potential energy surface and the friction felt by the reactants. Most of these theories start from the Langevin equation to derive the dynamics, but there are few examples comparing it with experiments.[1]

Here we explore the applicability of a Generalized Langevin Equation (GLE) with an arbitrary potential and a non-markovian friction.[2] To this end we have performed broadband fluorescence measurements[3] with sub-picosecond time resolution of a covalently linked organic electron donor-acceptor system in solvents of changing viscosity and dielectric permittivity. The free energy surface (FES) of the reaction is established using stationary electronic spectroscopy, while the dynamics of a non-reacting reference provide the calibrating tool for the non-markovian friction over the FES. In addition, the simpler and computationally faster Generalized Smoluchowski Equation (GSE) is also applied for comparison.[4]

While both approaches reproduce the measurements in most of the solvents reasonably well, the GSE shows larger discrepancies whenever the dynamics become slow. At long times some differences arise from the intrinsic shortcomings of the solvatochromic model and at short times from the excess excitation energy.

The here applied method can be used to predict the dynamics of any other reacting system, given the FES parameters and solvent dynamics are provided. Thus **no fitting parameters** enter the simulations, within the applicability limits found for the model in this work.

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The interfacial structure of water droplets in a hydrophobic liquid

N. Smolentsev¹, W. J. Smit², H. J. Bakker², S. Roke^{1*}

¹Laboratory for fundamental BioPhotonics (LBP), Institute of Bioengineering, and Institute of Materials Science, School of Engineering, and Lausanne Centre for Ultrafast Science (LACUS), EPFL, Lausanne, ²AMOLF, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Nanoscale and microscopic water droplets and ice crystals embedded in liquid hydrophobic surroundings are key components of aerosols, rocks, oil fields and the human body. The chemical properties of such droplets critically depend on the interfacial structure of the water droplet. Here, we report the surface structure of 200 nm sized water droplets in mixtures of hydrophobic oils and surfactants as obtained from vibrational sum frequency scattering measurements. The interface of a water droplet shows significantly stronger hydrogen bonds than the air/water or hexane/water interface and previously reported planar liquid hydrophobic/water interfaces at room temperature. The observed spectral difference is similar to that of a planar air/water surface at ~50 K lower temperature. Supercooling the droplets to 263 K does not change the surface structure. Below the homogeneous ice nucleation temperature a single vibrational mode is present with a similar mean hydrogen bond strength as for a planar ice/air interface.

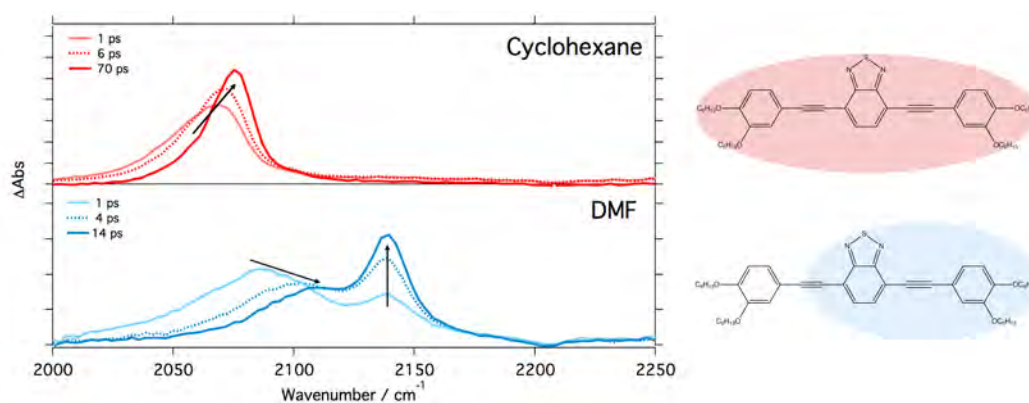
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Investigating Excited-State Symmetry Breaking in Quadrupolar Compounds using Time-resolved Infrared spectroscopy.

M. Söderberg¹, E. Vauthey^{1*}

¹University of Geneva

Quadrupolar molecules, comprising of D- π -A- π -D or A- π -D- π -A motifs, are mostly studied for to their strong two-photon absorption cross section. These compounds show almost no solvatochromism in their electronic absorption spectra but fluorescence reveals that the emitting state is greatly affected by the solvent. This phenomenon has been ascribed to excited-state symmetry breaking, i.e. to the unbalanced distribution of the excitation over the molecule due to fluctuations of the solvent or of the geometry of the molecule [1]. Whereas time-resolved electronic spectroscopic techniques do not provide much insight into the dynamics of the symmetry breaking of these compounds, time-resolved infrared spectroscopy constitutes an excellent tool to study this phenomenon. We are currently studying different quadrupolar compounds consisting of alkoxybenzenes as weakly donating groups and either benzothiadiazoles or anthracene moieties as central acceptors [2]. The D and A moieties are linked together with a carbon triple bond, which serves as an excellent IR active probe. We will discuss whether the solvation is the dominant factor determining the extent of symmetry breaking or whether conformational changes alone can induce symmetry breaking in these compounds.



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On the Photoelectron Spectrum and Heat of Formation of the meta-Xylylene Biradical

M. Steglich¹, P. Hemberger¹, V. B. Custodis², A. Trevitt³, G. daSilva⁴, A. Bodi¹

¹Paul Scherrer Institute, ²ETH Zürich, ³University of Wollongong, ⁴University of Melbourne

The meta-xylylene biradical *m*-C₈H₈ represents a prototypical organic triplet that serves as a model compound for the test and refinement of quantum theoretical calculations and is a promising building block for organic molecule-based magnets. We used flash vacuum pyrolysis of 1,3-bisiodomethyl-benzene (*m*-C₈H₈I₂) to produce *m*-C₈H₈ in the gas phase and photoelectron spectroscopy to probe the first two electronic states of the radical cation. The ionization energy was found to be (7.27±0.01) eV. From that, the heat of formation of the biradical is derived indirectly by investigating the C-I bond dissociation behavior of the precursor ion. We obtain $\Delta H_{f,298K} = (321.3 \pm 10)$ kJ/mol, which is slightly below the value of a previous study applying a different experimental approach.

Radical geometry: a key to efficient Dynamic Nuclear Polarization.

G. Stevanato¹, D. J. Kubicki¹, L. Emsley^{1*}

¹EPF Lausanne

Dynamic nuclear polarization (DNP) is becoming an essential tool to dramatically improve the sensitivity of numerous experiments in nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) including those involving the elucidation of surface structure of advanced materials¹ and the characterisation of polymorphs in organic solids². The method is based on the transfer of polarization from electron to nuclear spins by saturation of the electron spin transitions. The upper limit of transferable polarization, at equilibrium, is dictated by the ratio of the gyromagnetic values of electron and nuclear spins: about 660 for ¹H and even more for other low abundant nuclei such as ¹³C, ¹⁵N. The primary parameter to perform an efficient DNP experiment remains by far the choice of the radical³. Several factors have been identified to affect the efficiency of the polarising agent: rigidity, bulkiness, relaxation properties to name a few.

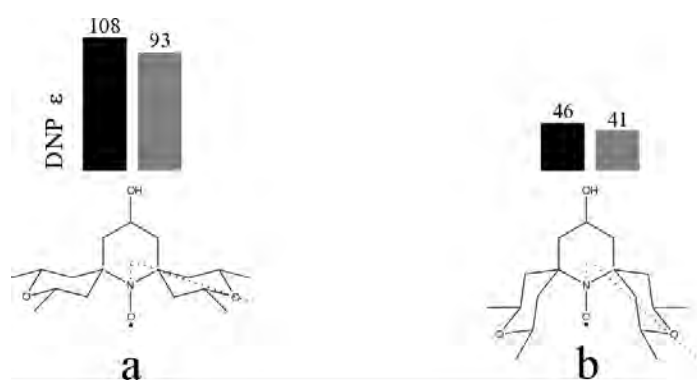


Fig. 1: Nitroxide monoradicals used as polarizing agents for MAS ssDNP experiments at 9.4T, ~100 K, MAS=8000 Hz. The displacement of the cyclohexane sidearms from the nitroxide axis is larger for the open than for the closed configuration (panel a) and b) respectively). The rectangles indicate the MAS ssDNP enhancement obtained via ¹H-¹³C cross polarization when the solvent used is glycerol-d₈:D₂O:H₂O (black) and TCE (grey).

Here we show for a set of nitroxide mono- and bi-radicals how the local geometric conformation, especially in the vicinity of the unpaired electron spin, leads to considerably different enhancement factors for MAS ssDNP (Magic Angle Spinning solid state DNP) experiments conducted at 9.4 T and ~100K in 1,1,2,2-tetrachloroethane (TCE), glycerol-d₈:D₂O:H₂O, and DMSO-d₆:D₂O:H₂O. Given the impact on the experimental enhancement factor we include the local geometry among the set of important variables to consider in the design of new polarising species. The *open* configuration (Fig 1a) leads always to a better DNP enhancement either for the nitroxides mono- and bi-radicals irrespective of the solvent used. The different DNP performance between *open* and *closed* is currently accounted for by postulating a difference in solvent accessibility to the unpaired electron caused by the bulky substituents.

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Conformational effects in radical reactions

P. Stranak¹, L. Ploenes¹, H. Gao¹, S. Willitsch^{1*}

¹Department Chemie, Universität Basel, Klingelbergstrasse 80, 4056 Basel

Revealing the dynamics of hydrocarbons reacting with free radicals is of major relevance for understanding atmospheric processes and combustion chemistry [1]. Despite their significance demonstrated by the vast body of literature, the conformational dependence of radical reactions still remains largely unexplored. Only a few studies demonstrate conformational effects in these reactions [2, 3]

To gain detailed insights into reaction dynamics, a crossed-molecular-beam apparatus with integrated conformer-selector is being built. The molecular beam technique allows us to study single-collision events under well controlled initial conditions. Due to different dipole moments, conformers can be spatially separated in a molecular beam using an inhomogeneous electric field. This technique of separation has been previously successfully implemented to study conformationally resolved reactions of 3-aminophenol with Ca⁺ ions [4].

We are now extending this approach to neutral reactions. Our first target is the reaction of conformationally selected 1,2-bis(trifluorosilyl)ethane with chlorine radicals [5]. Calculations of the potential energy surface suggest that the abstraction of hydrogen by chlorine is more favourable from the gauche-conformer because of the sterical hinderance exerted by the SiF₃ groups. In a first stage, we aim to measure conformer-specific reaction rates which yield information about the activation energies of different conformational reaction pathways. At a later stage, the experiments will be extended for measurements of product state and angular distributions and different radical species, e.g., fluorine.

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Computational modeling of band gaps in perovskites

O. Syzgantseva¹, U. Röhrlisberger^{1*}

¹EPF Lausanne

Finding new semiconductor materials with specific band gaps, in particular within the class of perovskite compounds, is essential for the development of optoelectronic and photovoltaic applications. The screening of a wide compositional range of potentially suitable candidates requires elaboration of an accurate and fast computational methodology for the band gap evaluation. In this work, the band gaps in a series of doped perovskite materials are computed within the Density Functional theory. The impact of spin-orbit coupling, temperature and excitonic effects (BSE calculations) on the band gap value is analyzed as a function of dopant type and concentration. The applied methodology is iteratively assessed by dint of comparison with the experimental data for these systems. This approach is demonstrated to provide a close estimate of band gaps in doped perovskite compounds.

Characterization of the Platinum/liquid (gas) Catalytic Interface

G. Tek¹, D. Paleček¹, P. Hamm^{1*}

¹Department of Chemistry

Hydrogen Evolution Reaction (HER) taking place at Pt electrodes is among the most studied electrochemical processes regarding its importance for the hydrogen economy and fundamental understanding of the heterogeneous catalysis.¹ Surface sensitive spectroscopy, such as Attenuated Total Reflectance-Fourier Transform Infrared (ATR-FTIR) Spectroscopy proved to be useful in characterization of the chemical species present at interfaces.² Regarding the HER at the Pt electrode, adsorbed hydrogen atom is the primary intermediate and it is known to have vibrational bands (Pt-H) between 2000-2100 cm⁻¹.³ However CO, which poisons Pt surfaces, is also known to have IR bands in the same spectral region.⁴ Such overlap makes the unambiguous assignment of the Pt-H band a non-trivial task.

Thin films (< 5nm) of Pt were sputter coated on right-angle prism substrates. The experiments involve either (1) adsorption from gas phase or (2) electrochemical adsorption in solution phase: (1) Gas phase adsorption is induced by admission of high purity H₂ and D₂ gases into the sample cell. Effect of H₂/D₂ and CO adsorption alone, as well as coadsorption of H₂/D₂ to CO covered Pt surface were examined. (2) Spectro-electrochemical measurements have been performed both in 0.5 M H₂SO₄ (in H₂O) and D₂SO₄ (in D₂O) at potentials where HER takes place.

ATR-FTIR results from both set of experiments indicate appearance of bands, which are assigned to adsorbed CO, whose spectroscopic appearance is affected by hydrogen. Previous FTIR experiments have attributed these bands to Pt-H, excluding the possibility of CO formation.³ 2D ATR IR spectroscopy shows similar lineshapes for all the bands, even though higher anharmonicity is expected from the Pt-H vibration in comparison to that of Pt-CO. Finding the source of CO affected by hydrogen is an important step towards the unambiguous assignment of the Pt-H vibrational band.

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DNP Jelly

J. Viger-Gravel¹, P. Berruyer², D. Gajan², J. Basset³, A. Lesage², P. Tordo⁴, O. Ouari⁴, L. Emsley^{1*}

¹EPFL, ²Centre de RMN à Très Hauts Champs, ³KAUST Catalysis Center, ⁴Aix Marseille Uni, CNRS

Dynamic Nuclear Polarization (DNP) is a hyperpolarization method that can deliver an increase in NMR signal intensity by up to 2 orders of magnitude, thereby permitting unprecedented atomic-level characterization of systems that were previously inaccessible such as cements or nanoparticles.[1] Dynamic nuclear polarization (DNP) experiments usually rely on the transfer of polarization from a radical containing matrix to a target of interest. Today, the matrix is either a glycerol-*d*8/D₂O/H₂O (6/3/1 v/v) mixture, so-called "DNP Juice"[2] or an organic liquid such as 1,1,2,2-tetrachloroethane[3] or *ortho*-terphenyl.[4] While these matrices work well, they present limitations in many cases, where solubility is partial, aggregation occurs at low temperatures, or if the substrate reacts with the matrix. Expanding the water based formulations range of matrices that can be used for DNP experiments is of considerable interest.

We present water based acrylamide gels as polarizing matrices for DNP. We observe that an increase in cross linker ratio combined with low concentration of biradical provides high enhancements comparable ($\epsilon = 200$ for DNP Jelly) to the popular matrices available today, "DNP Juice". The aqueous acrylamide gel allows the characterization of core-type CdTe-COOH quantum-dots using surface-enhanced NMR spectroscopy methods. The gels introduced here prevent aggregation while maintaining high enhancements, and Cd-113 spectra are acquired in minutes.

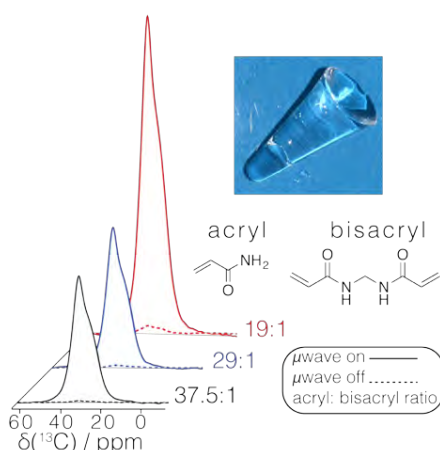


Figure 1. DNP enhancements in polyacrylamide water based gels as a function of pore size which decreases with the acryl: bisacryl ratio (given on the right).

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Cold ion-molecule collisions in a cryogenic hybrid trap

C. von Planta¹, D. Haas¹, D. Zhang¹, S. Y. van de Meerakker², S. Willitsch^{1*}

¹University of Basel, ²Radboud University Nijmegen

In recent years, collisions of cold atoms with atomic and molecular ions have been studied intensively [1]. The development of “hybrid traps” which allow for the simultaneous trapping of cold neutral atoms and ions have paved the way for gaining insights into the nature of ion-atom collisional processes at very low temperatures [2].

We are currently developing a cryogenic trap for the simultaneous confinement of cold neutral molecules and cold molecular ions. Translationally cold neutral molecules are produced by Stark deceleration and loaded into a magnetic trap [3]. The magnetic trap’s center can be mechanically displaced and superimposed with the center of an RF ion trap. The interaction of room temperature black body radiation (BBR) results in rotational excitation of the OH leading to trap loss after few seconds. To alleviate this effect, the hybrid trap is cooled down to 15 K to be shielded from room temperature BBR, which increases the lifetime of the trapped molecules by several orders of magnitude, commensurate with the trap lifetime of the ions.

This new setup will allow for the first time studies of ion-molecule collisions in the millikelvin regime. We will present a detailed characterization of the experiment and first results.

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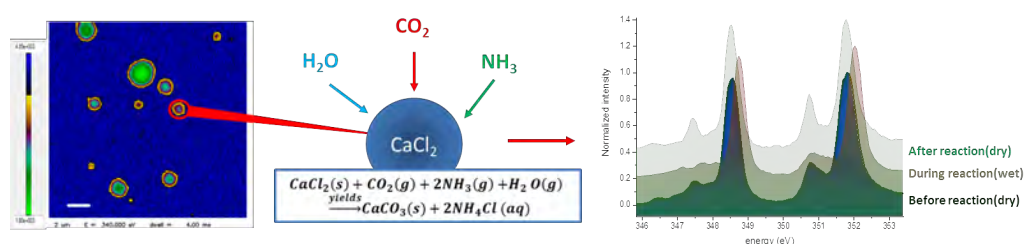
In-situ studies on the early stages of calcium carbonate nucleation from supersaturated micro droplets.

J. Xto^{1,2}, K. Henzler¹, C. Borca¹, J. A. van Bokhoven^{2,1*}, T. Huthwelker^{1*}

¹Paul Scherrer Institute, ²ETH Zurich

Calcium carbonate is one of the largest reservoirs of the earth's CO₂ which forms in nature through the reaction of calcium ions and carbon dioxide. Although biominerals have mastered the art of utilizing calcium carbonate to form functional materials ranging from eye lenses to protective shells through the careful control of the early stages of nucleation, a full understanding of these processes still pose a challenge to scientists despite years of research. Recent studies have shown that the nucleation process of calcium carbonate follows a multistep process involving formation of amorphous calcium carbonate (ACC) as intermediate[1][2]. However, stability of ACC and their subsequent transformation to more stable crystalline phases is still an open question. In particular the pathway of ACC dehydration, which is the critical route of transformation from ACC to crystalline materials is not well understood.

By utilizing a well-designed *in-situ* cell for probing microdroplets, the early stages of nucleation of calcium carbonate and subsequent dehydration of ACC were studied through the diffusion controlled reaction of calcium chloride with gas phase water, carbon dioxide and ammonia[3]. The structural changes occurring during the reaction were monitored *in-situ* using synchrotron based STXM (scanning transmission X-ray microscopy) and infrared spectroscopy. The results obtained confirmed the formation of ACC[4] as an intermediate step and further structural changes were observed in the formed ACC during dehydration under different relative humidity conditions.



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Ionic Liquids based on Crown Ethers as electrolytes additives for batteries

H. Yao^{1,3}, K. M. Fromm²

¹SCCER Heat and Electricity Storage, ²University of Fribourg, ³Chemistry Department, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Room temperature ionic liquids (RTILs) are salts that are liquid at room temperature and that are usually composed of an asymmetrical organic cation and a large charge-delocalized anion which is poorly coordinated. They are non-flammable, and thermally as well as electrochemically stable. These properties make them very interesting for many applications including green solvents for synthesis, catalysis, and electrolytes for ionic and electronic devices

Crown ethers are able to strongly interact with alkali metal cations (Li^+ , Na^+ , K^+) and have been used as additives in battery electrolytes in order to increase the ionic conductivity of the latter and to prevent electrolyte decomposition²⁻³. However, few studies have been done on crown ethers in the field of electrolytes.

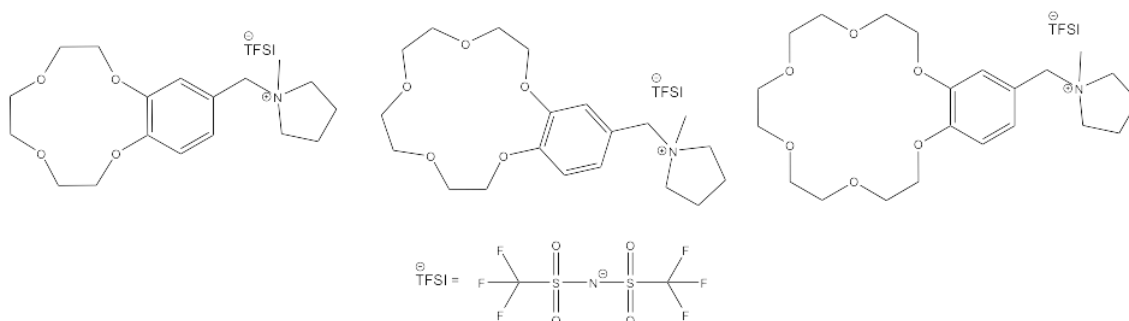


Figure 1: New Ionic liquids based on crown ether building blocks

This is why we propose to integrate them covalently as an alkali cation carrier⁴⁻⁵ in the ionic liquid system. The aim of the project is thus to design and synthesize new Room Temperature Ionic Liquids (RTILs) based on crown ether moieties, to investigate their properties (flammability, thermal and electrochemical stability, conductivity, Li/Na-ion diffusion) and then to use them as electrolytes for rechargeable batteries. We will present their synthesis, structures and properties in this contribution.

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Studying Synthetic DNA using Molecular Dynamics Simulations

P. Diamantis¹, U. Röthlisberger^{1*}

¹Laboratory of Computational Chemistry & Biochemistry, EPFL

Recently, the creation and stable growth of a semisynthetic organism (SSO) originating from *E. Coli* was reported [1]. Besides the natural guanine-cytosine (G-C) and adenine-thymine (A-T) base pairs, its DNA also contains an unnatural base pair (UBP), X-Y. The bases used in the UBP are named NaM (X) and 5SICS/TPT3 (Y) respectively [1], [2], [3]. The X-Y base pair is hydrophobic, and the two bases are stabilized via packing interactions instead of hydrogen bonds. In the present work, the conformational dynamics of a large DNA fragment (39 base pairs) containing a X-Y base pair is investigated using classical molecular dynamics simulations. Both NaM-5SICS (moderate SSO growth, only under restricted conditions [1]) and NaM-TPT3 (robust SSO growth [1]) UBPs have been considered. Two different simulations were ran for each UBP, placing it in an A-T rich and a G-C rich region of the DNA fragment, respectively. Preliminary analysis (UBP in the A-T rich region) indicates that both UBPs adopt a configuration that resembles the natural Watson-Crick base pairing, and each base is stabilized via packing interactions with its neighboring bases. This finding is in agreement with a recent computational study of a DNA 11mer containing a NaM-5SICS pair [4].

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Electronic structure calculations of Br-based halide perovskites

M. Mladenovic¹, J. Wiktor², A. Pasquarello², U. Röthlisberger^{1*}

¹Laboratory of Computational Chemistry & Biochemistry, EPFL, ²Chair of Atomic Scale Simulation, EPFL

Halide perovskites have gained large interest during the last years due to their rapidly growing solar cell photoconversion efficiency. However, it is still challenging to find a perovskite compound which provides high efficiency and good stability at the same time. In this work we investigate the electronic structure of several perovskites which are not much studied so far: perovskites with FA, Cs and Rb cations in combination with Br anions. For all of the compounds, we calculate band gaps with a PBE functional, both with and without spin-orbit interactions. We also calculate band gaps using GW calculations, which are shown to give band gaps closest to the experimental values. Additionally, we compare the electronic structures of FASnBr₃ and FAPbBr₃ and comment on the possible origins of the unusual gap inversion observed for these compounds.