Influence of Alkyl Chain Length on the Stability of n-Alkyl-Modified Reversed Phases. 2. Model Dissolution Study

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INTRODUCTION

In the foregoing, accompanying paper it is made clear that one of the most important reasons for instability of stationary phases for reversed-phase high-performance liquid chromatography (RP-HPLC) is concerned with unwanted chemical interactions between the mobile phase and the stationary phase (1). A similar conclusion was drawn in earlier publications from this (2, 3) and other (4) laboratories. Although hydrolysis and dissolution are rather slow processes in LC practice, the RP-HPLC phase deteriorates after a period of intensive use. This is observed by changes in capacity factors, selectivity, and column efficiency.

A direct, in situ study of the hydrolysis and dissolution of various n-alkyl modified phases was performed with 29Si magic angle spinning NMR spectrometry as a model for stationary phase aging in laboratory practice. With this study, the substantial effect of the ligand length on the dissolution reaction of the alkyl modified phases under aggressive eluent conditions is confirmed. As expected, longer n-alkyl ligands gradually show better substrate shielding properties. Above a certain critical ligand length, shielding by longer ligands inhibit the dissolution rate drastically by affecting the hydrolysis and dissolution processes. The type of solvent system used, in liquid chromatography practice or for dissolution studies as reported here, mainly affects the proportions of dissolved silicates in the eluent. On the basis of this in situ dissolution study a model for ligand and substrate hydrolysis and dissolution with the involved reactions is presented.

There are only a few techniques that enable in situ studies of such reversed-phase dissolution. 29Si NMR may provide useful details concerning the molecular structures of species leaving the substrate surface and forming intermediate and final reaction products (5–8). To the best of our knowledge, these studies have been confined to silica gel only, e.g., the substrate part of the stationary phases for RP-HPLC. This prompted us to perform a 29Si NMR study of the dissolution characteristics of several phases for RP-HPLC, investigated in the accompanying paper (1). The stationary phases under study were modified on the same batch of silica substrate using various ligands of increasing n-alkyl chain length.

With this study, information on the substantial effect of the ligand alkyl chain length on the various dissolution reactions was obtained. Thence, this paper emphasizes the process of stationary phase deterioration, correlated with the shielding effect of the anchored ligands at the silica surface. The influence of the eluent composition is also considered.

EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

The synthesis and physical characterization of the RP-HPLC phases with varying n-alkyl chain length are described in the accompanying paper (1).

Preparation of Solutions. The dissolutions of the reversed phases or the native silica were performed by adding ca. 350 μL of a 6 M solution of sodium hydroxide in methanol–water (50:50, v/v) to approximately 70 mg of stationary phase (this amount was corrected for the ligand content) in a zirconium oxide rotor of the Bruker double air bearing type. In this way a well mixed suspension of Na2O/SiO2 with an overall, molar composition of 1:3 Na2O-SiO2. The well-mixed suspension was introduced into the solid-state NMR spectrometer as possible.

29Si NMR Measurements. The 29Si NMR spectra were obtained on a Bruker CXP Fourier transform nuclear magnetic

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were performed with magic angle spinning fluids. The well-mixed suspensions were introduced in the zirconium oxide rotor with an outside diameter of 29Si pulse was applied for excitation. Typically, a series of 30 acquisitions. Each block represents 30 min of reaction time; filling was applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The molar Na<sub>2</sub>O/SiO<sub>2</sub> ratios applied for dissolution of chemically bonded phases in aqueous-methanol or plain aqueous systems were selected for practical reasons. The relatively high sodium content ensured hydrolysis and dissolution of the modified silicas within a reasonable time. With 29Si MAS NMR, by sequential blocks of accumulated FIDs (free induction decays) in 1K data points each and zero-filled to 8K prior to Fourier transformation. A line broadening of 15 to 25 Hz prior to zero-filling was applied.

Table I. Most Relevant Dissolved Silane/Siloxane Species, Their Functionality, Notation, and Typical 29Si NMR Chemical Shift in the Aqueous-Methanol-Sodium Hydroxide Solution and the Aqueous-Sodium Hydroxide Solution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species in solution</th>
<th>chemical (spectral) function</th>
<th>topological (network) function</th>
<th>chemical shift (ppm downfield from TMS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n-alkyldimethylhydroxydimethylsiloxane</td>
<td>M 0</td>
<td>M&lt;sub&gt;0&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>+16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n-alkyldimethylhydroxydimethylsiloxane, dimer&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>M 1</td>
<td>M&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>+7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n-alkyldimethylhydroxydimethylsiloxane tetrahydroxysiloxane</td>
<td>Q 0</td>
<td>Q&lt;sub&gt;0&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>-70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trihydroxysiloxane, dimer&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Q 1</td>
<td>Q&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>-77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dihydroxy-siloxane, cyclic trimer&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Q 2</td>
<td>Q&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>-90.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dihydroxy-siloxane</td>
<td>Q 3</td>
<td>Q&lt;sub&gt;3&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>-93.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hydrosylloxane</td>
<td>Q 4</td>
<td>Q&lt;sub&gt;4&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>-106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>If not mentioned, the species are part of small oligomers. *The subscript refers to the number of particular sites within a dissolved silicate species. In the nomenclature these silicates are also referred to as one species: M<sub>0</sub>, 1,2-di-n-alkyltetramethyldisiloxane; Q<sub>0</sub>, hexahydroxysiloxane; Q<sub>1</sub>, hexahydroxycyclotrisiloxane.

Silica can be dissolved in highly alkaline media (pH >11), where the hydroxyl anion is considered to be a catalyst (5, 10). As such, silica dissolves in the form of monomeric tetrahydroxysiloxane, Si(=O)H<sub>4</sub> (Q<sub>4</sub>). Presumably, formation of monomeric silane anions in the solution leads to oligomerization of the monomers to hexahydroxysiloxanes (Q<sub>7</sub>), hexahydroxycyclotrisiloxanes (Q<sub>9</sub>), polymeric dihydroxy-siloxanes (Q<sub>2</sub>), and polymeric hydroxy-siloxanes (Q<sub>3</sub>). Only recently, chemical exchange between various dissolved silicates (e.g. between Q<sub>0</sub> monomer and Q<sub>1</sub> dimer or Q<sub>2</sub> trimer) was demonstrated elegantly by Knight et al. (7).

Figure 1. Dissolution of Si-C in an aqueous-methanol-sodium hydroxide solution observed with 29Si MAS NMR after (a) 0.5, (b) 1.5, (c) 3, (d) 6, and (e) 15 h: molar ratio, 1:1 Na<sub>2</sub>O-SiO<sub>2</sub>; methanol content, 50% (v/v).
methanol–water solution seemed to be rather low compared with results of silica dissolution studies published (5, 11). Possibly, the subsequent oligomerization reaction proceeded relatively fast compared with the monomer dissolution under our experimental conditions. Already after half an hour substantial amounts of various oligomers were determined. An equilibrium was reached after approximately 2 h. The ratios of the various dissolved silicates remained almost constant with time, only the signal areas of the oligomers increased slightly.

After 1 h a significant amount of n-butyldimethylsiloxysilane (M₁), as part of small oligomer species was detected in the solution. After approximately 2 h this started to decrease. It turned out that a secondary product, a di-n-butyltetra-methyldisiloxane dimer (M₂), was formed by continued hydrolysis and condensation. The reactions can be summarized in the following scheme (for nomenclature, see Table I):

(1A) Dissolution of silica substrate, hydrolysis of siloxane bonds

\[
\text{Si-O-Si} + 3\text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{SiO}_2 + \text{O}^2
\]

(1B) Oligomerization

\[
2\text{Q}^0 \rightarrow \text{Q}_2^1 + \text{H}_2\text{O}; \quad \text{Q}_2^1 + \text{Q}^0 \rightarrow \text{Q}^1\text{Q}^0\text{Q}^1 + \text{H}_2\text{O}, \text{ etc.}
\]

(2A) Hydrolysis of silica to silane bonds

\[
\text{Si-O-Si}^+ + \text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{Si}^0\text{O} + \text{O}^2
\]

(2B) Dimerization of silane

\[
2\text{M}^0 \rightarrow \text{M}_2^1 + \text{H}_2\text{O}
\]

(3A) Oligomeric dissolution of silica, e.g.

\[
\text{Si-O-Si}^+ + 6\text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{Si}^0\text{O}_3 + \text{O}^2\text{O}^1
\]

(3B) Oligomeric dissolution of silane-bonded silica, e.g.

\[
\text{Si-M}_1^0 + 6\text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{Si}^0\text{O}_3 + \text{O}^2\text{O}^1
\]

Figure 2 depicts curves of the signal intensities of several dissolved products from Si–C₄ in the aqueous–methanol solution with elapsed reaction time. Very similar spectra as for Si–C₄ were obtained from the dissolution of the trimethylsiloxysilane bonded silica (Si–C₃) in the aqueous–methanol solution under the same conditions as above. In this case, however, both dissolved ligand–silicates M₁ and M₂ were formed directly from the start (see Figure 3). An equilibrium between these two dissolved species was attained after about 2 h. Up to n-hexyldimethylsiloxysilane modified silica analogous ligand–silicates were observed upon dissolution.

The ²⁹Si NMR spectra following the dissolution of the n-octadecylsiloxysilane bonded phase in the aqueous–methanol solution revealed a rather similar pattern. Figure 4 depicts curves of the signal intensities of several dissolved products with Si–C₁₈ in the aqueous–methanol solution with elapsed reaction time. The dissolution rate of tetrahydroxyxilosiloxane monomer was clearly decreased by the longer octadecyl ligands attached to the silica surface.

The dissolution characteristics of the native silica in the aqueous–methanol–sodium hydroxide solution are depicted in Figure 5. The equilibrium was attained rapidly. The proportions of dissolved silicates agreed with those of the short alkyl ligand modified phases, only the amount of dissolved monomer silicates observed was much less. Major concurrent dissolution of small oligomeric silicate species (reaction 1B) probably affected the monomer content by chemical exchange with already dissolved monomeric silicates (7).


Hydroxysiloxanes, Q°. Furthermore, the proportions of the oligomeric silicates in particular were affected by the type of solvent used for dissolution studies as is the case with silica substrates (5, 11).

As an example of this sensitivity toward solvents, the course of the dissolution of the n-butyl(dimethyl)siloxysilane modified silica in an aqueous, no modifier added, sodium hydroxide solution with a molar composition of 1:3 Na₂O·SiO₂ are depicted in Figure 6. Almost equal spectra were collected from the dissolution of Si-C₈ and Si-C₁₂ under these conditions. Due to a smaller sodium hydroxide content, the hydrolysis and dissolution of monomeric silicate started more slowly. The smaller oligomerization rate at the start of the experiment allowed a higher content of tetrahydroxysiloxane to be formed in the aqueous solution. Substantial amounts of n-alkyldimethylhydroxysiloxanes were observed with the dissolution in the aqueous buffer solution (pH >12) of the modified silicas. Condensation of this monomer to dimeric silicate was not detected. Presumably, oligomerization with large silicate oligomers results in less mobile ligands, that are hardly detectable.

Comparison of the different dissolution reactions yields the following. It can be concluded that the apparent detachment of short ligands from the modified silica surface was in fact caused by hydrolysis and dissolution of the underlying substrate silica; see reaction 3B. Thence, we conclude that with advanced monomer dissolution small oligomeric silicate species were concurrently dissolved with monomeric silicates in our aqueous–methanol solvent system.

This concurrent dissociation of oligomeric silicates could be influenced by the open structure of the silica gel studied here. The rather thin pore walls/boundaries could enhance dissolution of small silicate pieces.

A different situation prevails for the longer chain modified silicas. Fast oligomerization of the monomeric silicate reduced the amount of monomer and subsequent products of reaction 1B in the solution to a very small value. As a result relatively more polymeric dihydroxysiloxanes, Q₁, and hydroxysiloxanes, Q₂, Q³, were observed after 15 h of dissolution of silica substrate modified with the octadecyl ligand. Here again, an equilibrium for the dissolved silicates was attained after approximately 2 h.

In fair agreement with all other evidence produced in this study, the amount of dissolved ligand–silicates were relatively small for longer ligands. Furthermore, the removal of longer ligands from the silica surface occurred mainly by direct hydrolysis to form n-octadecyldimethylhydroxysilanes, M₀. Subsequent condensation with other dissolved monomeric silicates resulted in di-n-octadecyltetramethyldisiloxane dimers, M₁, reaction 2B. Presumably, steric hindrance and boundaries caused by van der Waals interactions between neighboring ligands inhibited direct dissolution of small ligand–silicate oligomeric species from the silica surface. It seemed that dissolution of oligomeric silicate species was reduced likewise. Analogous dissolution behavior was observed for the Si-C₈ and Si-C₁₈ phases.

The total amount of dissolved silicate species determined after Si-C₈, Si-C₄, and Si-C₁₈ dissolution in the aqueous–methanol–sodium hydroxide solution was significantly higher than after Si-C₁₂, Si-C₁₆, and Si-C₁₈ dissolution with a corresponding amount of stationary phase under identical conditions; see Figure 7. The n-octadecyl(dimethyl)siloxylsilane phase obviously possessed a kind of critical ligand chain length for dissolution of the modified silicas.

The translation of the dissolution studies described here to the aging of RP-HPLC stationary phases can be made as follows. The model dissolution studies were performed as a batch process in limited volume rotors (350 μL) with rather high pH solvents (pH >12). The relatively high sodium content ensured hydrolysis and dissolution of the modified silicas within a reasonable time. In this small volume under the experimental conditions, saturation of the solvent may well affect the further dissolution of the reversed-phase materials. A comparison of dissolution and stationary phase hydrolysis in daily chromatography practice is subject to certain restrictions. The oligomerization reactions observed in the sodium hydroxide solution may be promoted as a consequence of a high concentration of the primary dissolution products. Probably, when freshly prepared eluents are used, only hydrolysis and dissolution of ligands and silica without subsequent oligomerization will be the main causes of stationary phase degradation. Thence, the primary dissolution reactions observed with ²⁹Si NMR spectroscopy here reflect
the main course of the dissolution process that occurs under RP-HPLC conditions in practice. Factors affecting this process should be considered for stationary phase hydrolysis and dissolution.

CONCLUSIONS

Two fundamentally different ligand dissolution processes are observed in an aqueous–methanol solution. Short alkyl ligand modified silica gels degrade by concurrent dissolution of monomeric tetrahydroxysiloxane (reaction 1A) and small oligomeric silicate particles of subcolloidal level (<1–3 nm) (5). The process of oligomer dissolution (reactions 3A and 3B) enhances the degradation rate of short alkyl modified silicas drastically.

Longer alkyl ligand modified silicas degrade mainly by monomeric dissolution of silica (reaction 1A). Surface attached ligands are hydrolyzed and dissolved as n-alkyldimethylhydroxysilanes (reaction 2A).

The use of water as a solvent promotes monomeric dissolution, also with short alkyl ligand modified silicas.

The n-octyl bonded phase exhibits the critical ligand alkyl chain length upon modification of the silica substrate used in this study, with respect to direct oligomer dissolution in aqueous–methanol solvents.

For short alkyl ligand bonded phases multidentate surface attachment will not prevent dissolution of the ligands, due to oligomer dissolution. Polymer coated stationary phases or neighbor attached silanes, cross-linked across the silica surface may prevent severe dissolution of the short ligands by oligomer dissolution. Specific surface shielding groups (e.g. pre- or end-capping with trimethylsiloxysilanes) may contribute also to prevent degradation of the stationary phases. Longer n-alkyl ligands with large enough surface concentration should be preferred with aggressive eluents. Preliminary experiments involving dissolution of bi- and trification and derivatized silicas ("polymeric") indicate that product ratios are formed, considerably different from those of the monofunctional phases.

LITERATURE CITED


Prediction of Retention Times in Serially Linked Open-Tubular Gas Chromatographic Columns and Optimization of Column Lengths

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The serial gas chromatographic theory, first advanced and then further developed by Purnell and Williams, is used to optimize the analysis of a nine-component phenol mixture by use of linked capillary columns. The capacity factors of sample components with the system serially coupled in either mode, column A/column B or column B/column A, and of different relative length, are shown to agree essentially exactly with those predicted by theory. The window analysis procedure devised by Laub and Purnell is then used to calculate the relative and overall length of the columns required to achieve baseline resolution. The experimental chromatograms are shown to correspond precisely to prediction. When the methodology is applied generally, it is shown that the requisite data can be determined easily and rapidly and the subsequent calculations can be carried out via an equally simple computer program. The consequent techniques and procedures should help the development of serial-coupled open-tubular column chromatography (SCOTCH).

INTRODUCTION

Early interest in the analytical use of serially linked gas chromatographic columns led to the observation that retentions of mixture components were not simple averages of the values for the individual columns and, further, depended also on the column sequence. This work was reviewed in detail in the pioneering study of Hildebrand and Reilley (1) who, in 1965, developed an approximate theory adequate to explain the above effects, although it failed quantitatively in most cases of application. Interest in the topic then waned, except for the brief studies by Buys and Smuts (2) and Krupcik, Guiochon, and Schmitter (3). However, the potential of linked capillaries attracted fresh interest (4, 5) in the early 1980s; unfortunately, the inadequate theoretical basis available led to failure to account for retention variation, and therefore column optimization for particular analyses also failed.

In 1984, Purnell and Williams (6) returned to the theoretical problem and, in a series of subsequent papers (7–12), generated the general theory and consequent optimization procedure for serial-column analyses. They showed, using packed columns, both that the theory was valid and that simple procedures could be devised to permit the accurate prediction of retentions with serial columns. In addition, they showed how the window diagram procedure devised by Laub and Purnell (13–16) could be used to evaluate very precisely the relative and total column lengths required to provide optimized separations.

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