Estimation of the instrumental band broadening contribution to the column elution profiles in open tubular capillary liquid chromatography

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References


Estimation of the Instrumental Band Broadening Contribution to the Column Elution Profiles in Open Tubular Capillary Liquid Chromatography

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Summary

In comparison with conventionally packed HPLC columns, from a theoretical point of view, open capillary liquid chromatography (OTLC) systems offer a number of advantages like high plate numbers and short analysis times. On the other hand, drastic changes have to be made to the instrumentation. In particular, the contribution to band broadening by the chromatographic equipment must be considerably reduced. In the present study an OTLC system was developed and evaluated, which yields satisfactory results for 26 µm i.d. columns. The determination of the contribution of the chromatographic equipment to the total band broadening is discussed.

1 Introduction

High performance liquid chromatography is a powerful analytical tool whose application areas are still growing. Typical packed columns of 3–25 cm length, internal diameters of 3–5 mm, and particle sizes of the stationary phase between 3–20 µm, yield 5–10,000 plates in 10–15 minutes.

In recent years several trends to miniaturization in HPLC could be observed. New types of columns like microbore, packed capillary, and open capillary columns were developed. Moreover, suitable instrumentation, which met the
specific demands of these columns, was designed [1,2]. In general, miniaturization in HPLC offers a number of advantages:
- a decreased consumption of stationary phase and eluent;
- less chromatographic dilution, which increases the sensitivity of concentration sensitive detectors;
- due to the low eluent flows, coupling with mass and infrared spectrometers, flame ionization detectors, etc. is facilitated;
- theoretical evaluations show that high separation power in short times for packed and open capillary columns can be expected [3-6].

Optimal results in OTLC, in terms of high plate numbers in short analysis times, can be reached by using columns with internal diameters between 1-10 μm [7].

This study deals with the development and evaluation of a chromatographic apparatus for OTLC. In this paper the influence and estimation of the extra-column band broadening contributions to the eluting profiles is discussed.

2 Theory

The performance of chromatographic columns can be reduced drastically by the contribution of the equipment to band broadening. In chromatographic practice, this is often underestimated. Because of the very small peak volumes in OTLC, the demands on the instrumentation are extremely high in this respect. Therefore, accurate methods must be available to determine the contribution of the equipment to the eluting profile.

The variance \( \sigma_c^2 \) in flow through smooth-walled, non-coated circular tubes is given by the Taylor’s equation [8]:

\[
\sigma_c^2 = \frac{\pi^2 \cdot r^6 \cdot L \cdot u}{24 \cdot D_m} \text{ (volume units)}^2
\]

where \( L \) is the column length (m), \( r \) the column inner radius (m), \( D_m \) the diffusion coefficient of the component \( (m^2 \text{s}^{-1}) \) in the mobile phase, and \( u \) the linear eluent velocity \( (\text{m.s}^{-1}) \).

Due to flow patterns at both ends of the columns, possible adsorption effects of components, imperfections in the inner diameter of the column and roughness of inner wall, the term \( \sigma_c^2 \) must be extended with another term \( \sigma_p^2 \) to describe more realistic situations, where \( \sigma_p^2 \) represent the above influences. So the column contribution \( \sigma_c^2 \) equals:

\[
\sigma_c^2 = \sigma_p^2 + \sigma_0^2
\]

Assuming that the different contributions are independent [9,10], the total variance \( \sigma_i^2 \) of a chromatographic profile for open capillary liquid chromatographic systems equals:

\[
\sigma_i^2 = \sigma_n^2 + \sigma_p^2 + \sigma_0^2 + \sigma_d^2 + \sigma_b^2
\]

where:
- \( \sigma_n^2 = v_n^2/k_1^2 \) = the contribution of the amount of sample and the geometry of the injector,
- \( \sigma_d^2 = v_d^2/k_2^2 \) = the contribution of the cell volume and geometry of the detector,
- \( \sigma_0^2 = \tau_e F^2 \) = the contribution of the electronic time constants,
- \( F \) = the flow rate of the eluent;
- \( k_1^2 \) and \( k_2^2 \) are profile factors depending on the sample plug profile [11].

A generally accepted criterion for the contribution of the overall variance of the instrument \( \sigma_i^2 \) is that this should not exceed 10% of the column variance. This equals a loss of efficiency of 10%: so:

\[
\sigma_i^2 = \sigma_n^2 + \sigma_p^2 + \sigma_0^2 < 0.1 \sigma_c^2
\]

From eq. (4) it can be derived that:

\[
\sigma_i \leq 0.32 \sigma_c
\]

The percentage contribution of band broadening of the equipment can be expressed as [10,12]:

\[
\left( \frac{\sigma_i}{\sigma_c} \right) \leq 100\%
\]

From eq. (4) it follows that:

\[
\frac{\sigma_i}{\sigma_c} \leq 1.05
\]

This equals a maximum loss of chromatographic resolution of 5%. Under identical chromatographic conditions flow patterns can be expected to be independent of the column length. The other mentioned contributions like adsorption of components, wall roughness, etc., will depend on the column length. Therefore, the increase with the column length of the total variance \( \sigma_i^2 \) might differ from that of the calculated \( \sigma_c^2 \) as schematically presented in Figure 1.

Some of the contributions of the parts of the equipment can be derived theoretically, but others like influences of flow patterns at the entrance and exit of the column, geometry of
detector and injector, etc., can only be determined experimentally. 

Unfortunately most methods to determine the contribution of the equipment to the band broadening, provide only information about the total band broadening. These methods give less insight in the separate contributions of the different parts of the equipment. Particularly for packed HPLC systems a number of methods have been developed for the determination of \( \sigma^2 \) \([9,10,13,14]\), including the replacement of the column by a capillary tube. In this work an attempt is made to determine \( \sigma^2 \) experimentally by varying the capillary column lengths. Under constant chromatographic conditions described in the experimental section, with several lengths of the capillary columns, a number of chromatograms of phenol and 3,5-xylenol were made. From these chromatograms \( \sigma^2 \) was calculated according to the method of Foley and Dorsey \([15,16]\) in order to determine correct values. By plotting of \( \sigma^2 \) versus the different lengths of the column, a straight line is obtained.

At the same time, from eq. (1) the contribution of the capillary tube can be calculated as a function of these column lengths. The slope of this line equals \( (a^2 - r^2 - u/D_m) \). The differences between the experimentally determined line of \( \sigma^2 \) and the calculated one of \( \sigma^2 \) provide information about \( \sigma^2 + \sigma_{D_m}^2 \).

Ultimately, extrapolation to zero column length yields the contribution of the equipment \( \sigma^2 \) to the total band broadening.

For this method a number of conditions must be met:
- the injected amount of sample and the profile factor \( k^2 \) of the injector must be constant;
- the profile factor \( k^2 \) of the detector must be constant;
- the eluent flow must be constant, inter alia to keep the influences of wall roughness and flow patterns constant;
- the positioning of the column to the injector and detector must be performed reproducibly.

Under the same chromatographic conditions the above mentioned criteria are met, with the exception of the last point, where it is a matter of discussion as to how far the positioning of the column at the injector and detector can be done reproducibly.

3 Experimental

The OTLC equipment was constructed of several commercially available and custom-made parts. Fused silica columns with 26 \( \mu \)m i.d. were used (Chrompack International B.V., Middelburg, The Netherlands). A pneumatic amplifier liquid pump model DSTV-150 (Haskel Eng. and Supply Corp., Burbank, CA USA) provided with liquid pressure reducers was used for controlling a constant eluent flow. The pump system can operate between 2-1000 bar. The injection system consisted of a pneumatic actuated injection loop, internal loop volume 60 nl, model ACI 4W.06-AH 90 (Valco, Houston, TX, USA). The injector was provided with a speed-up kit model SQE (Humphrey Products, Kalamazoo, MI USA), which allowed small switching times (80-2500 ms) of the valve. By controlling the switching time of the valve sample volumes as low as 100 pl could be injected. With a vespel ferrule and liner the column was positioned directly to the sample loop, enabling 'on-top-of-the-column' sample injection.

Two home-made detectors were applied (1) A modified flame ionization (FID) detector with a cell volume of 50 pl. The eluent was deionized water and the test component 3,5-xylenol \( (k' = 0) \). The noise level \( R_n \) of the detector was 0.5.10\(^{-13}\) A. The injection volumes were 60, 16, 8.7 nl, respectively, and the sample concentration was 520 ppm. (2) A home-made 'free wall jet' amperometric detector, with a cell volume < 1 nl. The eluent consisted of 1.2 mmol sodium-phosphate buffer, ph 6.9 in water. The test component was phenol \( (k' = 0) \). The oxidation potential was +0.80 V (vs. Ag/AgCl) and the noise level \( R_n \) of the detector was 2.10\(^{-12}\) A. Injection volumes of 60 and 10 nl, and a sample concentration of 770 ppm were used. Details of the latter detector are described elsewhere \([17]\).

The detector signals were recorded on a recorder model BD 40 (Kipp & Zn., Delft, The Netherlands). The chemicals were of analytical grade (Merck, Darmstadt, FRG).

Several lengths of the 26 \( \mu \)m i.d. capillary tube were cut off and positioned between the injector and detector. Repeated injections of the test solutions of 3,5-xylenol and phenol were carried out. The capacity factors \( (k') \) of the test components equaled zero and the diffusion coefficient, \( D_m \), in the eluent \( 10^{-5}\) cm\(^2\) s\(^{-1}\) \([4]\). To test the influence of the injection volume and injection profile, different volumes (60, 16, 10, 8.7 nl, respectively) of the test solution were injected.

To obtain a constant eluent velocity, a pressure gradient \( \Delta P/\Delta L \) of 12.25 bar/m over the column was maintained, resulting in a flow of about 800 nl/min and a linear eluent velocity of 26.0 mm s\(^{-1}\). Moreover, these conditions prevented clogging of the outlet of the column, when applying the FID detector.

From the chromatograms the values of \( \sigma^2 \) were calculated.

These values, together with the \( \sigma^2 \) values calculated from eq. (1), were plotted versus the various lengths of the capillary columns. After extrapolation to column length zero \( \sigma^0 \) can be calculated.

4 Results and Discussion

In Table 1 the minimum variances, due to the convective dispersion in the empty capillary columns used in this study, are summarized. In these values, the influences of...
### Table 1

Minimum theoretical values of $\sigma_r^2$ and $\alpha_c$ according to eq. (1) for several lengths of the columns and at a number of eluent velocities; $D_m = 10^{-5}$ cm$^2$.s$^{-1}$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column length (m) $\times$ 26 $\mu$m</th>
<th>$u$ (mm.s$^{-1}$)</th>
<th>$\sigma_r^2$ ($\mu^2$)</th>
<th>$\alpha_c$ (nl)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24.5 $\times$ 26 $\mu$m</td>
<td>0.533 (opt)</td>
<td>2.59.10$^{-5}$</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.43.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>1.26.10$^{-3}$</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.8 $\times$ 26 $\mu$m</td>
<td>0.533 (opt)</td>
<td>1.67.10$^{-5}$</td>
<td>4.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>2.51.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>8.15.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6 $\times$ 26 $\mu$m</td>
<td>0.533 (opt)</td>
<td>9.10.10$^{-6}$</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>2.55.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>4.44.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.72 $\times$ 5 $\mu$m</td>
<td>2.66 (opt)</td>
<td>7.26.10$^{-10}$</td>
<td>26.0 pl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>8.19.10$^{-10}$</td>
<td>28.6 pl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>2.73.10$^{-9}$</td>
<td>52.3 pl</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2

Contribution of the extra-column $\sigma_r^2$.values to the total variances $\sigma$ at several lengths of columns and injection volumes; column inner diameter = 26 $\mu$m; linear eluent velocity = 26.0 mm.s$^{-1}$; detector, optimized FID; $\sigma_r^2$ calculated according to eq. (1); % instrumental contribution calculated according to eq. (6), assuming $\sigma_\alpha^2 = 0$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column length (m)</th>
<th>$v_i$ (nl)</th>
<th>$\sigma_r^2$ ($\mu^2$)</th>
<th>($\sigma_r^2 + \sigma_\alpha^2$) ($\mu^2$)</th>
<th>Instrumental contribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.26.10$^{-3}$</td>
<td>3.35.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6.17.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>164.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.15.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>2.87.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4.96.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>164.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.44.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>2.47.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3.98.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>164.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3

Summary from Fig. 2 of the values of slopes, extra-column variances $\sigma_r^2$ and $\alpha_c$ calculated by extrapolation to column length zero, for three injection volumes; calculated slope of $\sigma_r^2$-curve = 5.16.10$^{-8}$ (mm$^4$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$v_i$ (nl)</th>
<th>slope ($mm^2$)</th>
<th>$\sigma_r^2$ ($\mu^2$)</th>
<th>$\alpha_c$ (nl)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>5.71.10$^{-6}$</td>
<td>2.0.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>6.53.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>2.8.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>8.8.10$^{-3}$</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4

Contribution of the extra-column $\sigma_r^2$.values to the total variances $\sigma$ for several column lengths and injection volumes; column inner diameter = 26 $\mu$m; linear eluent velocity = 26.0 mm.s$^{-1}$; amperometric detector; $\sigma_r^2$ calculated according to eq. (1); % instrumental contribution calculated according to eq. (6), assuming $\sigma_\alpha^2 = 0$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column length (m)</th>
<th>$v_i$ (nl)</th>
<th>$\sigma_r^2$ ($\mu^2$)</th>
<th>($\sigma_r^2 + \sigma_\alpha^2$) ($\mu^2$)</th>
<th>Instrumental contribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.26.10$^{-3}$</td>
<td>4.10.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8.44.10$^{-3}$</td>
<td>177.5</td>
<td>177.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.15.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>3.95.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8.79.10$^{-3}$</td>
<td>243.3</td>
<td>243.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.44.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>3.77.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>9.10.10$^{-3}$</td>
<td>363.6</td>
<td>363.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5

Summary from Fig. 3 of the values of slopes, extra-column variances $\sigma_r^2$ and $\alpha_c$, calculated by extrapolation to column length zero, for two injection volumes; calculated slope of $\sigma_r^2$-curve = 5.16 10$^{-8}$ (mm$^4$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$v_i$ (nl)</th>
<th>slope ($mm^2$)</th>
<th>$\sigma_r^2$ ($\mu^2$)</th>
<th>$\alpha_c$ (nl)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.43.10$^{-6}$</td>
<td>3.5.10$^{-4}$</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.02.10$^{-8}$</td>
<td>9.5.10$^{-3}$</td>
<td>97.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The effect of large injection volumes is illustrated by the apparent independency of $\sigma_r^2$ of the length of the column at 60 nl injections. From Tables 3 and 5, and Figures 2 and 3, it can be derived that the slopes of the experimental $\sigma_r^2$-lines are steeper flow patterns at both ends of the columns, adsorption effects, etc., are not taken into account.

In Tables 2 and 3 and Figure 2 the results are summarized of the calculations of $\sigma_r^2$ and measurements of $\sigma_r^2$ for different lengths of columns, applying the FID detector. Moreover, the percentage contributions according to eq. (6) are calculated.

In Tables 4 and 5 and Figure 3 the results are summarized applying the amperometric detector.

The effect of large injection volumes is illustrated by the apparent independency of $\sigma_r^2$ of the length of the column at 60 nl injections.
Instrumental Band Broadening

Figure 3

Linear extrapolation method for the determination of the equipment contribution to the band broadening. Detector: amperometric detector; eluent velocity = 26 mm.s⁻¹; Dₘ = 10⁻⁸ cm².s⁻¹; L = length of the capillary tube; P = pressure at column inlet.

compared to the \( \sigma_{c}² \)-lines. The influences of the earlier mentioned effects of adsorption, wall roughness and imperfection of the inner diameter of the column on \( \sigma_{1}² \) are dependent on the length of the capillary column, contrary to the flow pattern at the column ends. For injection volumes which are compatible with the applied capillaries, therefore, the slopes of the \( \sigma_{1}² \)-lines might be somewhat larger than the calculated values of \( (\pi²r⁵/6u)/Dₘ \) for the \( \sigma_{c}² \)-lines.

Because \( \sigma_{0}² \) cannot be estimated, the real extra-column variance must be calculated by extrapolating the length of the column to zero.

Assuming that for the 8.6 m column, \( \sigma_{0}² = 0, u = 26 \text{ mm.s}^{-1} \), injection profile factor \( k_{1}² = 1 \), the total band broadening of the equipment is caused by the injector; then it can be calculated from eq. (4), that the maximum injection volume is 6.8 nl. It could be argued that the larger steepness of the \( \sigma_{1}² \)-lines in comparison with the \( \sigma_{c}² \)-lines could also be due to injection overload. However, it can be calculated that about 30 and 40 nl can be injected, under the same conditions in 15.8 m and 24.5 m columns. In the case that profile factors are larger than one, even larger injection volumes are allowed. The data in Figures 2 and 3 fit the idea of linear regression well. So it is unlikely that only injection problems cause the deviant steepness of the \( \sigma_{1}² \)-lines.

From Tables 2 and 4 it can be seen that the lowest contribution of \( \sigma_{i}² \) to the total standard deviation is 12.5%, assuming \( \sigma_{0}² = 0 \). This is larger than the criterion of 5% in the eqs. (4) and (7). The value of 12.5% can be somewhat favourable because the real column standard deviation \( \sigma_{C}² > \sigma_{c}² \).

5 Conclusions

Under practical conditions, applying columns of 26 \( \mu \text{m} \) i. d., at lengths > 20 m, and at injection volumes of about 10 nl, the criterion of 5% loss in standard deviation may be satisfied. The approach to determine the variance of the equipment for OTLC in relation to the total eluting profile, from chromatographic experiments provides satisfying results.

Another method based on the measurement of the relative influence of the equipment band broadening on the eluting profiles of chromatographic peaks may be successful for OTLC equipment. This will be part of further study. The application of this method for equipment, designed for packed HPLC columns, was recently reviewed [18]. Current work includes the design and evaluation of instruments for capillary columns of smaller inner diameters than the 26 \( \mu \text{m} \) used in this study.

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