Radical Formation and Peroxidative Activity of Phytotoxic Diphenyl Ethers

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Z. Naturforsch. 39c, 486–491 (1984); received September 15, 1983

ESR Signals, Spin-Trapping, Nitro/Non-Nitro Diphenyl Ethers, Chloroplasts, Electron Transport

PhenyI-β-butylnitrone can be used to trap light-induced radicals with isolated chloroplasts, measurable by ESR technique. The radical signals are dramatically amplified and their lifetime prolonged in the presence of peroxidizing diphenyl ethers. A para-substitution with –NO₂, –Cl or –I is necessary, as well as an operating photosynthetic electron transport. The nature of radicals is not yet clear; they may be alkyl or linolenic-acid radicals, but their presence indicates peroxidation. Furthermore, the ESR measurements presented strengthen our hypothesis that peroxidative activity of paraquat and diphenyl ethers are not caused by the same mechanism.

Introduction

Depending on substituents diphenyl ethers exert a multifunctional mode of action (P. Böger, this issue). The para-nitrodiphenyl ethers, such as oxyfluorfen, exhibit their phytotoxic activity by peroxidative destruction of the photosynthetic membrane [1, 2]. Light is required for these compounds to induce herbicidal activity [3, 4].

From earlier experiments [1, 5] we can assume that the photosynthetic electron transport initiates radical formation leading to radicalic chain reactions. Evolution of volatile hydrocarbons is the consequence of degradation of polyunsaturated fatty acids. No experimental evidence for radicals showing up under the influence of peroxidizing DPEs has been presented so far. This communication is to support our previous hypothesis [5] and to demonstrate the existence of radical intermediates by activity of oxyfluorfen.

Only a few reactions in (bio)organic chemistry, which proceed via (free) radical mechanisms, can be studied directly by ESR. Generally, radical intermediates are below the detection limit, and short-living species have to be trapped [6, 7]. The addition of a free radical R· to a positively charged part of an acceptor molecule is a means of observing radical formation ("spin trapping"). This technique has been applied successfully to investigations of numerous biological systems avoiding higher concentrations of organic buffers or methanol, which themselves may lead to spin adducts [8, 9]. Particularly relevant are those spin traps leading to a kinetically stable new radical (Fig. 1). Thus the addition of R· to either a nitro [10], nitrosio [11] or nitrotrone [12] produces a stable nitroxide radical suitable for appropriate ESR measurements.

Materials and Methods

Spinacia oleracea, var. Atlanta, was grown in the open during March to June and September to Octo-

Abbreviations: 1. Herbicides: acifluorfen-methyl (AFM), methyl 5-[2-chloro-4-(trifluoromethyl)phenoxy]-2-nitrobenzoate; DCMU (diuron), [3-(3,4-dichlorophenyl)-1,1-dimethylurea]; MC 15608, methyl 5-[2-chloro-4-(trifluoromethyl)phenoxy]-2-chlorobenzoate; oxyfluorfen, 2-chloro-4-trifluoromethylphenyl-3'-ethoxy-4'-nitrophenyl ether; paraquat (methylviologen), 1,1-dimethyl-4,4'-bipyridinium dichloride; RH 1939, 2-chloro-4-trifluoromethylphenyl-3'-ethoxyphenyl ether. 2. Others: DMPO, 5,5-dimethyl-1-pyrroline-1-oxide; DPE, diphenyl ether; ethoxyquin, 6-ethoxy-1,2-dihydro-2,2,4-trimethyquinoline; ESR, electron spin resonance; PBN, phenyl-β-butylnitrone.

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0341-0382/84/0500-0486 $ 01.30/0

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ber. Chloroplasts isolated according to [13] were used for the experiments described. To washed, freshly harvested leaves 50 ml homogenization medium was added: 0.4 M sucrose; 50 mM tricine, [N-tris(hydroxymethyl)methylglycine], adjusted with NaOH to pH 8.2; 10 mM NaCl; 5 mM MgCl2. The homogenate was filtered (four layers of cheesecloth, one layer of nylon tissue, 40 μm mesh), centrifuged for 1 min at 3100 × g, and the pellet washed in 2 ml of the suspension medium: 0.4 M sucrose, 50 mM tricine; 20 mM NaCl; 4 mM MgCl2, and 10 mM K2HPO4. The chlorophyll content was determined by extraction with 80% aqueous acetone [14].

The samples for the ESR experiments contained chloroplasts (equivalent to 200 μg of chlorophyll) suspended in 10 mM phosphate, pH 7.4; 50 μM Fe(NO3)3-EDTA; 5 mM NaCl; 2.5 mM NH4Cl, in a final volume of 2 ml. The herbicides (98% pure), 0.10 M, stock solutions in dimethylformamide, were added to the reaction mixture keeping the final concentration of the solvent below 0.1%. Final DPE concentration had to be 0.10 mM. PBN, 0.15 mM, and DMPO, 0.02 mM [see ref. 8] were added just before starting the ESR experiments. These concentrations are generally used and have been found adequate for our purpose. Photolysis was performed according to [15] using the chloroplast-suspension medium, but without chloroplasts (see Results).

ESR spectra were recorded on a Varian E-109 spectrometer (Palo Alto, USA) at approx. 9.5 GHz and 100-KHz modulation frequency. Exact g-values and hyperfine coupling constants were determined on a Bruker B-ER 420 instrument (Karlsruhe, Germany) equipped with a frequency counter and a gaussmeter. Samples were transferred to a quartz aqueous solution cell; for anerobic experiments, the cell was evacuated and flushed with an inert gas [16].

ESR measurements were performed at room temperature in a V-4534 optical transmission cavity which allowed direct illumination (light of about 90 W/m2, passing through a 4-mm KG-1 heat filter from Schott) during signal tracing.

For the determination of C2-hydrocarbons as markers of herbicide-induced peroxidation, 2-ml aliquots of Scenedesmus cultures with a packed cell volume (pcv) of 3 to 4 μl/ml were illuminated (white light, approx. 100 W/m2) for 15 h in gas-tight vessels, using a Warburg apparatus as described [5]. Scenedesmus obliquus (formerly acutus), no. 276-3a, from the Culture Collection, University of Göttingen, Germany, had been cultivated autotrophically using light of about 30 W/m2 according to [17]. Each experiment was performed at least four times. The amplitudes of the individual ESR signals had tolerances of ±5% from the mean. In the graphs, a typical measurement is given.

Chemicals, analytical grade, were purchased from Merck, Darmstadt; DMPO and PBN, Janssen Pharmaceutica, Beerse, Belgium; and methylviologen, Serva, Heidelberg.

Results and Discussion

Para-substituted DPEs, such as oxyfluorfen, induced peroxidative degradation of the photosynthetic membrane (Table I) in light. Ethane and some ethylene produced, used as markers of peroxidation, were related to the substitution pattern of the DPEs at 3'- and 4'-position. The highest peroxidative activity was shown by acifluorfen-methyl (AFM, no. 2), having a para-NO2 group. Replacement by −Cl or −I (Nos. 3 and 4) decreased the amount of volatile hydrocarbons formed to 42% for the 4'-Cl, and 26% for the 4'-I compound, as compared to the values found with AFM. C2-production with compounds 1 and 2 is also dependent on substitution at 3'-position, as documented previously [5].

Addition of the antioxidant ethoxyquin [18, 19] strongly decreased the evolution of C2-hydrocarbons. Concurrent addition of 10 μM DCMU, known

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additions</th>
<th>(0.1 μM)</th>
<th>(+) Ethoxyquin (100 μM)</th>
<th>(+) DCMU (10 μM)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) CF3C6H4O−Cl−NO2</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) CF3C6H4O−Cl−NO2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) CF3C6H4O−Cl−OCH3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>not detectable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) CF3C6H4O−Cl−I</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to block the photosynthetic electron flow, inhibited peroxidation with all compounds shown. Addition of oxyfluorfen (1 μM) to Scenedesmus, in the presence of PBN (0.1 mM), prevented peroxidation, i.e. the concurrent formation of C₂-hydrocarbons (data not documented), a physiological evidence that radicals trapped in this study are related to phytotoxic effects. Also pigment destruction was alleviated.

Figure 2 demonstrates the loss of chlorophylls and colored carotenoids after addition of 0.1 μM DPEs as indicated. In contrast to compounds of the m-phenoxybenzamide type, which inhibited carotenogenesis [20], DPEs of the oxyfluorfen type, as used here, degrade carotenoids and chlorophylls. Again ethoxyquin alleviated this effect, at least partially, indicating that peroxidative radical mechanisms are responsible for pigment destruction.

![Fig. 2. Influence of different diphenyl ethers (0.1 μM) on chlorophylls and carotenoids of autotrophic Scenedesmus after a 24-h cultivation time. The hatched bars of both figure parts I, II show the protection by ethoxyquin (0.1 mM) against peroxidative destruction of the pigments. Control is with ethoxyquin, without herbicide. The cells without any additions (100%) had 11 mg chlorophyll/ml packed cell volume (pcv) and 1 mg/ml pcv total carotenoids. Acifluorfen-methyl, AFM = methyl 5-[2-chloro-4-(trifluoromethyl)phenoxy]-2-nitrobenzoate; MC 15608 = methyl 5-[2-chloro-4-(trifluoromethyl)phenoxy]-2-chlorobenzoate.](image)

To trace the radicals induced by 4'-substituted DPEs the spin traps PBN and DMPO were used. Only in the presence of molecular oxygen and in the light radical concentration was substantial to be measured. In Fig. 3, a set of spin-trapping experiments with chloroplasts and the nitrone PBN is illustrated. In the dark, the chloroplast suspension (see Methods) with oxyfluorfen present did not show ESR signals (A). Upon illumination, but with oxyfluorfen absent, a small signal was observed with a hyperfine splitting typical for a PBN-spin adduct [21, 22] (B), which disappeared after about 30 min illumination time. An amplified, but identical signal, centered at $g = 2.005$ ($A_N = 15.83, A_H = 3.31$ G) was formed immediately after illumination in the presence of oxyfluorfen (C). In contrast to (B), the signal amplitude was enlarged by a factor of 5 to 6 and observable for about 3 h. In the light DMPO was not effective with DPEs.

The same experiments carried out with a DPE having a –Cl (Fig. 4, E) instead of a 4'-NO₂ group showed the same signal of marked longevity as detected with oxyfluorfen (C). The lower phytotoxic
activity of the Cl-DPE vs. the NO₂-DPE (Table I, Fig. 2) and the identical height of their signals are due to the high herbicidal concentration used throughout for both DPEs to obtain the ESR spectra (see Methods). This concentration, by far exceeding the dosis needed for phytotoxic effects, was necessary to produce radicals enough to be measurable in the ESR instrument. Photosynthetic electron transport is involved in radical formation as seen by signal D of Fig. 3, since inhibition of electron flow by diuron (10 μM) abolished the weak signal of the control as well as the amplified signal of the p-NO₂ and p-Cl-DPEs (Figs. 3, 4; C, E). With the diphenyl ether RH 1939, having a hydrogen in 4’-position, no peroxidative activity was evident [23], and no amplified ESR signal was seen (Fig. 4, F). Both amplitude and shape of the small basic signal obtained were the same as observed in the light without herbicide present (see Fig. 3, B).

These experiments show a nitro [23] or halogen [24] substituent in 4’-position as necessary for the generation of radicals, as was concluded previously by assaying peroxidative activity. Our hypothesis for the activation of para-substituted DPEs is that radical intermediates (a DPE-anion radical?), generated by photosynthetic electron transport, abstracts a hydrogen atom from a polyunsaturated ω-fatty acid (here: ω-linolenic acid) leading to a radical center at a β-carbon. After conjugation of two double bonds, giving a linolenic-acid radical followed by a reaction with molecular oxygen, a free peroxo radical is formed. This again reacts with another linolenic-acid molecule, starting a peroxidative chain reaction [25].

The ESR parameters of the spin adducts of PBN, obtained in this study, indicate that the signal may be due to either an alkyl radical, or a radical originating from linolenic acid. This interpretation is mainly based on the large value of 3.31 G found for the proton-coupling constant $A_N^p$. Thus, $A_P^p$ for the methyl adduct is 3.45 G [6], for the adduct of linolenic acid 3.35 G [22], whereas 2.75 G were determined for the hydroxyl-radical adduct of PBN [15]. In this context it should be mentioned that the magnitudes of both $A_N^p$ and $A_P^p$ are solvent dependent to some extent: $A_N^p$ of PBN-OH in benzene was reported as 2.88 vs. 2.75 G in water [15]. Apparently, a transient radical of the peroxidative diphenyl ether itself is not observed here. Only a light-induced (trapped) signal of illuminated control chloroplasts is amplified (Fig. 3, B, C; Fig. 4, E, F).

Bipyridylium salts, like paraquat, reduced by photosystem I to radical cations, are reoxidized by O₂ [26], which can be easily measured as oxygen...
uptake. The originating reactive oxygen species cause peroxidative destruction of the photosynthetic membrane [27, 28]. Oxygen uptake is also observed with paraquat in the dark, when electrons are denoted by NADPH (via ferredoxin [29]). These two oxygen-uptake systems do not work with peroxidizing DPEs, which—in addition to the ESR measurements reported here—gives clear evidence that DPEs and paraquat have a different mode of driving radical (chain) reactions.

Figure 5 illustrates the results of spin-trap experiments with DMPO and isolated spinach chloroplasts plus herbicides. Similar to PBN, no significant amounts of ESR-active species were measured in the dark (signal G). Upon illumination a small signal, centered at \( g = 2.006 \), was observed (H). In contrast to signal (C) of Fig. 3 using PBN, with oxyfluorfen plus DMPO, no increase concentration was detected as compared to the herbicide-free control (see signals H and J).

Illumination of chloroplasts in the presence of paraquat (10 \( \mu \text{M} \)) gave a strong signal at \( g = 2.006 \), which was split into four equidistant lines (signal I). This was only observed for about 5 to 6 min. Thereafter, a new signal appeared. The first signal with a splitting of 15.3 G originated most likely from the hydroxyl-radical adduct of DMPO [15]. The second signal, exhibiting a more complex hyperfine pattern than the first one, was identical with the one described [30] and arises from the paraquat-radical cation produced by electron transport after consumption of oxygen in the reaction mixture. The same signal was found with paraquat, when reducing equivalents were delivered by NADPH through a system of hepatic microsomes from rats. Addition of paraquat and diuron (10 \( \mu \text{M} \)) abolished the signals due to inhibition of the photosynthetic electron transport (data not shown).

For the standardization of the radicals trapped in our experiments with DMPO and PBN, we used the photolysis of 1 and 15% (v/v) \( \text{H}_2\text{O}_2 \) [15]. The signals generated thereby with DMPO present (Fig. 6M) were similar to those found with illuminated chloroplast material plus paraquat (Fig. 5, I). Again PBN did not show a spin adduct in 1% \( \text{H}_2\text{O}_2 \) (Fig. 6, K), but a small signal showed up using 15% \( \text{H}_2\text{O}_2 \) (signal L). Nevertheless, the amplitude of this signal was 2 to 3 times less than that generated by PBN plus oxyfluorfen (Fig. 3, C).

Acknowledgments

This study was supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Bo 310/13-1). We are grateful for the supply of pure experimental compounds to Landwirtschaftliche Versuchsstation Limburgerhof and Hauptlabor of BASF AG, Ludwigshafen, Germany; Rohm and Haas, Spring House, PA, USA; Rhône-Poulenc Agrochimie, Lyon, France; and SOCAR and MAAG, Switzerland. We appreciate the excellent technical assistance of Marlies Klett.