Functional biohybrid amphiphiles

A.J. Dirks, N.S. Hatzakis, J.J.L.M. Cornelissen and R.J.M. Nolte

Department of Organic Chemistry, IMM, Radboud University Nijmegen, Toernooiveld 1, 6525 ED Nijmegen, the Netherlands

INTRODUCTION

In order to stabilize the protein structure and to make enzymes more accessible, e.g. as catalysts for (organic) synthesis, these biomacromolecules have been coupled to synthetic polymers. Enzyme-polymer conjugates are generally constructed by non-selective coupling of the polymer to peripheral enzymatic amino acid residues. Recently, the synthesis of well-defined polymer-enzyme hybrids has been reported. These compounds can act as giant amphiphiles when the synthetic polymer is hydrophobic. They display interesting aggregation behavior and the catalytic activity of the enzyme is often retained. Therefore, these biohybrids have great potential for the construction of catalytically active nano-sized assemblies. Procedures to synthesize giant amphiphiles, among others, comprise a thiol-maleimide coupling between lipase (Cal B) and maleimide terminated polystyrene (PS) and cofactor reconstitution of horseradish peroxidase by heme functionalized PS. Both procedures are selective and site-specific, yet their cost viability and general applicability is limited. Therefore, new synthetic strategies are desirable for the preparation of a range of functional giant amphiphiles. Towards this goal we investigated the application of the Cu(I) catalyzed azide-alkyne [3+2] cycloaddition reaction. This so-called click reaction is in particular efficient in water and can also be applied to polymer end groups. Moreover, terminal alkyne and azide functionalized polymers can readily be prepared and both moieties can be successively incorporated into proteins through expression of non-natural amino acids.

EXPERIMENTAL

Materials. Unless otherwise stated, chemicals were obtained from commercial sources and used without further purification. Styrene was stirred over CaH₂ and distilled under vacuum prior to use. THF was distilled under nitrogen from sodium/benzophenone. BSA was obtained from Sigma. Deionized water was used for the biological procedures.

Analytical techniques. Monomer conversions in ATRP were determined by gas chromatography. The molecular weight of PS was analyzed with size exclusion chromatography (SEC) calibrated on PS standards using CHCl₃ as the eluent. Purity and functionalization of the polymers was confirmed by ¹H-NMR and FT-IR. Protein-polymer conjugates were analyzed with size exclusion fast performance liquid chromatography (FPLC), which clearly revealed a 'click' reaction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Recently, we demonstrated that azide functionalized PS can be coupled to azide functionalized bovine serum albumin (BSA) by ‘click’ chemistry using copper sulfate and ascorbic acid as the catalyst system. BSA was used as a model protein because it can easily be functionalized via the exposed free thiol of the CYS34 residue (scheme 1).

The conjugation reaction was monitored using size exclusion fast performance liquid chromatography (FPLC), which clearly revealed a peak corresponding to a product with higher molecular weight than 2 (figure 1). In addition, the ratio of UV absorption between λ = 254 nm and λ = 280 nm is higher for the product than for BSA, indicating the presence of PS for which the absorption maximum is at λ = 254 nm while for BSA this is at λ = 280 nm.

Figure 1. Size exclusion FPLC analysis of 4.
After purification by dialysis, the aggregation behavior of the BSA-PS amphiphiles was studied with the help of transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and spherical aggregates in the range of 30-70 nm were observed (not shown).

The procedure described above holds great promise for the preparation of a host of functional giant amphiphiles, but should also allow the synthesis of more complex architectures such as giant bolaamphiphiles; e.g. a synthetic polymer that has proteins attached to both its ends. Towards this latter class of amphiphiles, hetero telechelic PS (6) with both a terminal azide and a terminal carboxylic acid moiety was prepared in three steps by atom transfer radical polymerization (ATRP) and subsequent end group modifications (Scheme 2).

A mutated lipase bearing a single primary amine was conjugated to the carboxylic acid end of the polymer by employing a standard peptide coupling reaction in a THF/buffer mixture. Formation of the product was confirmed by FPLC analysis which clearly showed a peak at higher molecular weight than the lipase (Figure 2). A fractionated sample of the higher molecular weight peak was studied using TEM and spherical aggregates in the range of 100-130 nm were observed. Furthermore, initial activity studies showed that the coupled lipase retained 86% of its original activity.

**Figure 2.** Size exclusion FPLC analysis and TEM analysis of 8.

Currently the possibilities to use the other end of the polymer for cross-linking or further functionalization with a second protein are under investigation. In the latter case, combined protein assemblies can be obtained which are potentially capable of performing cascade-type reactions.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Biohybrid amphiphiles composed of a PS and protein block can be constructed in a straightforward way from monofunctionalized proteins and polymers using ‘click’ chemistry or conventional peptide coupling methods. Starting from a mutated lipase and hetero telechelic PS, catalytically active giant amphiphile assemblies were obtained which have an extra handle for further functionalization. Current research is aimed at studying this additional modification as well as evaluating the physical and catalytic properties of the PS-lipase amphiphiles.

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**REFERENCES**