Synthesis of Trifluoromethyl-Substituted Proline Analogues as ¹⁹F NMR Labels for Peptides in the Polyproline II Conformation**

Pavel K. Mykhailiuk, Sergii Afonin, Gennady V. Palamarchuk, Oleg V. Shishkin, Anne S. Ulrich,* and Igor V. Komarov*

The location of proline (Pro) in proteins is peculiar: it is most frequently found in loops, turns, and flanking positions of stable secondary-structure elements.^[1] Such positioning is a consequence of the structural properties of Pro: first, the lack of a second hydrogen atom on the α -amino group prevents hydrogen bonding within a polypeptide, and second, the cyclic nature of the side chain reduces the conformational freedom and typically restricts the torsion angle, φ , to $(-63 \pm 15)^{\circ,[1a]}$ Polyprolines, $(Pro)_n$, in aqueous solvents exist in a "poly-Lproline II" (PPII) conformation;^[2] this conformation is also readily adopted by various proline-rich peptides (PRPs) and protein segments, which are important as structural or recognition motifs.^[3-5]

Major obstacles in identifying and studying the native PPII conformation are 1) the lack of intramolecular hydrogen bonds, 2) the close similarity to the random coil (RC) conformation when observed by conventional spectroscopic methods, and 3) the frequent coexistence with other extended conformations.^[3c,5d] One of the very few ways to address such ambiguities experimentally is to use solid-state NMR spec-

[*]	P. K. Mykhailiuk, Prof. A. S. Ulrich Institut für Organische Chemie Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) Fritz-Haber-Weg 6, 76133 Karlsruhe (Germany) Fax: (+ 49) 721-608-48-23
	Homepage: http://hikwww8.tzk.de:8080/imb/bionmr/
	Dr. S. Atonin, Prot. A. S. Ulrich Institut für Biologische Grenzflächen
	Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)
	POB 3640, 76021 Karlsruhe (Germany)
	E-mail: anne.ulrich@ibg.fzk.de
	P. K. Mykhailiuk, Prof. I. V. Komarov
	Organic Chemistry Department
	Kylv National Taras Snevchenko University Volodymyrska 64, 01033 Kviv (Ukraine)
	E-mail: ik214@vahoo.com
	Homepage: http://418Lab.chem.univ.kiev.ua/
	P. K. Mykhailiuk, Prof. I. V. Komarov
	Enamine Ltd.
	Matrosova 23, 01103 Kyiv (Ukraine)
	Homepage: http://www.enamine.net/
	G. V. Palamarchuk, Prof. O. V. Shishkin
	SIC, Institute for Single Crystals
	Lenina ave. 60, 61001 Kharkiv (Ukraine)
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troscopy on selectively isotope-labeled peptides (by using ¹⁵N, ¹³C, ²H, or ¹⁹F isotopes). ¹⁹F NMR spectroscopy in particular benefits from the high sensitivity of the ¹⁹F nucleus and does not suffer from any natural-abundance background either.^[6] This approach is particularly well suited to study the structure, alignment, and dynamics of peptides embedded in lipid membranes.^[7] It requires the selective incorporation of a suitable ¹⁹F-substituted amino acid into the peptide backbone to serve as an NMR fluorine label (FL). Such FLs should 1) be conformationally rigid to place the ¹⁹F reporter group (preferably CF₃) in a well-defined position, 2) be compatible with standard solid-phase peptide-synthesis protocols, 3) be chemically stable in a polypeptide under the conditions of study, and 4) not perturb the native structure/function of the peptide.

¹⁹F-labeled amino acids with nonpolar side chains (**1**, **2**) have already been successfully used as FLs.^[7,8] Unfortunately, the unique properties of Pro rule out the use of **1** or **2** as a replacement for this residue. At first glance, the known CF₃-substituted proline analogues (**3**–**5**) may be considered as FLs. Though, in **3** and **4**,^[9] criterion (1) from above is not fulfilled. Amino acid **5**^[10] has no such deficiency because the CF₃ group is directly attached to the Cα carbon atom. However, the CF₃ moiety could severely alter the steric and electronic environment of the peptide backbone and could reduce the chemical reactivity of the amino acid.^[11]



Our present research was motivated by the structural and functional importance of proline in proteins and by the wish to expand the repertoire of available FLs. We have designed and synthesized the isomeric CF₃-substituted 3,4- and 4,5- methanoproline analogues **6** and **7** and compared them in order to select the best FL candidate to be used in place of Pro. Metal-catalyzed trifluoromethyl cyclopropanation of C=C bonds, by using CF₃CHN₂, was recently shown to be practically beneficial.^[12] We utilized this approach in the construction of **6** and **7**.

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Communications

The synthesis of **6** started from optically pure 3,4dehydroproline derivative **8**.^[13] Extensive experimentation was needed to find the optimal reaction conditions with suppression of electrophilic attack of the carbene at the OtBugroup (Scheme 1). The latter reaction prevailed if CuCl was



Scheme 1. Reagents and conditions: a) excess CF_3CHN_2 , CuOTf, RT; b) column chromatography on silica gel Merck 60; c) excess CF_3CHN_2 , CuCl, RT; d) HBr (48%), reflux, 6 h; e) chromatography on Dowex-50. Tf: trifluoromethanesulfonyl, Boc: *tert*-butoxycarbonyl.

used as a catalyst; the only isolated product in that case was 9. By increasing the reaction time and applying CuOTf, we managed to isolate two diastereomeric products, 10a,b, in a modest yield (15%). The deprotected amino acids 6 were obtained after 10 was heated to reflux in 48% HBr, and the products were purified by ion-exchange column chromatography.

The synthesis of **7** turned out to be more fruitful. The reaction of **11** with 2,2,2-trifluoromethyldiazomethane in the presence of catalytic amounts of CuCl produced trifluoromethyl-substituted proline analogues **12a–c** in an overall yield of 66% (Scheme 2). The molar ratio of **12a/12b/12c** was 1.0:0.9:0.7. In contrast to the corresponding reaction with **8**, the formation of side products **13**^[14] was observed only with prolonged reaction times. The three isomers of **7** were obtained by standard deprotection methods.

The relative configurations of **6a**,**b** and **7a**-**c** were determined by NMR spectroscopy (see the Supporting



Scheme 2. Reagents and conditions: a) CF₃CHN₂, CuCl, RT; b) column chromatography on silica gel Merck 60; c) excess CF₃CHN₂, CuCl, RT; d) NaOH, MeOH, RT; e) TFA/CH₂Cl₂, RT. TFA: trifluoroacetic acid



Figure 1. Molecular structure of 12b.

Information), and the assignment was also confirmed for **7b** by X-ray analysis of the precursor **12b** (Figure 1).

In principle, each isomer of **6** and **7** could now be used as an FL. They all possess a CF_3 group, this group is sufficiently distant from the backbone to prevent perturbation, and the side chains are conformationally more restricted than in **3** and **4**. However, amino acids **6a,b** are not preferable, because of the poor total yield of their synthesis. In the case of **7b** and **7c**, the cyclopropane ring was found to be unstable at low pH values. By contrast, **7a** is stable at both high and low pH values, and it was therefore selected as a promising FL to replace Pro in peptides.

In order to address the suitability of 7a as an FL and to examine its influence on the PPII conformation, the prolinerich cell-penetrating peptide SAP (14, (VRLPPP)₃) was selected.^[15] This peptide is known to self-assemble above 50 μ M in aqueous solutions, and it is believed to exist as a mixture of the PPII and RC conformations below this concentration. The peptide VRLPPPVRLP-7a-PVRLPPP (15), containing a Pro/7a substitution, was synthesized. Neither degradation nor low reactivity of 7a was observed. No racemization was detected either.

We have also synthesized the SAP analogue VRLPPPVR-**2**-PPPVRLPPP (**16**), labeled with the previously reported FL $2^{[8c,d]}$ in the position of Leu9. Comparison of the CD spectra of peptides **14–16** at different concentrations (Figure 2) revealed that FL **2** did not affect the SAP structure, whereas FL **7a** unexpectedly stabilized the PPII conformation of SAP. It can be seen that **14** and **16** exhibit spectral changes up to 50 µM, indicating oligomerization beyond this point, while **15** oligomerized at a concentration that was twice as high. Moreover, for all concentrations of **15**, a positive band was observed at 223 nm, the hallmark of the PPII conformation. The same result is seen in the temperature series of **15** (Figure 2D). The positive band at 223 nm persisted even at 50 °C, in contrast to the results with native SAP.^[15]

In summary, **7a** was demonstrated to be a promising label for solid-state ¹⁹F NMR analysis of PRPs in the light of its chemical stability, compatibility with solid-phase peptide synthesis, and propensity to maintain, and even to stabilize,

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Figure 2. CD spectra of A) wild-type SAP peptide **14**, B) CF₃MeProsubstituted **15**, and C) **7a**-substituted **16** over a concentration range of 5–150 μM. The spectra were measured in 10 mM phosphate buffer pH 7.4 at 20 °C. D) Temperature dependence of the CD spectrum for **15** (10 μM solution in phosphate buffer). Arrows indicate direction of spectral changes.

the PPII conformation; this stabilization is probably a consequence of the conformational properties of 7a.

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