Stomatal CO_2-responses at sub- and above-ambient CO_2 levels employ different

pathways in Arabidopsis

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Running head: CO_2 concentration-dependent stomatal CO_2 responses

Abstract

Stomatal pores that control plant CO_2 uptake and water loss affect global carbon

and water cycles. In the era of increasing atmospheric CO_2 levels and vapor

pressure deficit (VPD), it is essential to understand how these stimuli affect

stomatal behavior. It is unknown whether stomatal responses to sub-ambient

and above-ambient CO_2 levels are governed by the same regulators and

whether these responses depend on VPD. We studied stomatal conductance

responses in Arabidopsis stomatal signaling mutants under conditions where

CO_2 levels were either increased from sub-ambient to ambient (400 ppm) or

from ambient to above-ambient levels under normal or elevated VPD. We found

that guard cell signaling components involved in CO_2-induced stomatal closure

have different roles in the sub-ambient and above-ambient CO_2 levels. The

CO_2-specific regulators prominently affected sub-ambient CO_2 responses,

whereas the lack of guard cell slow-type anion channel SLAC1 more strongly

affected the speed of above-ambient CO_2-induced stomatal closure. Elevated

VPD caused lower stomatal conductance in all and faster CO_2-responsiveness

in some studied genotypes and CO_2-transitions. Our results highlight the

importance of experimental set-ups in interpreting stomatal CO_2-

responsiveness, as stomatal movements under different CO_2 concentration

ranges are controlled by distinct mechanisms. Sometimes elevated CO_2 and

VPD responses also interact. Hence, multi-factor treatments are needed to

understand plant behavior under future climate conditions.

Introduction

Atmospheric CO_2 concentration has nearly doubled within the past 150 years. As a

result, the global average temperature has increased by 1.5°C and relative air humidity

decreased across many vegetated areas (Yuan et al. 2019). Increased air temperature

and decreased air humidity lead to rising values of vapor pressure deficit (VPD), the

difference between actual and saturated air vapor pressures, and this increases

transpiration from plants. In order to survive such conditions, plants need to adjust their

water management by regulating stomatal conductance. Each stoma is composed of

two guard cells and an opening formed between them; the size of the opening is

controlled by increasing or decreasing guard cell turgor pressure. Guard cells adjust

their turgor pressure in response to various abiotic stimuli to balance water loss and

CO_2 uptake for photosynthesis. Understanding how stomata respond to changing CO_2

concentrations and increasing VPD is needed for breeding climate-ready crops.

Plant stomata close in response to elevated CO_2 concentration and open in response

to decreased CO_2 concentration. Ultimately, elevated CO_2 activates S-type anion

channel SLAC1, which causes rapid stomatal closure (Vahisalu et al., 2008; Negi et

al., 2008). CO_2 can enter guard cells through the PIP2 plasma membrane channel or

by transmembrane diffusion (Katsuhara and Hanba, 2008; Wang et al., 2016).

Carbonic anhydrases CA1 and CA4 accelerate the conversion of intracellular CO_2 to

bicarbonate (HCO_3^-), which can act as a second messenger (Hu et al., 2010). In guard

cells, CO_2/HCO_3^- promotes interaction between the protein kinases MPK4/MPK12 and

the Raf-like kinase HT1, leading to HT1 inhibition, which is an essential step in the

regulation of stomatal responses to CO_2 (Hashimoto et al., 2006; Hashimoto-Sugimoto

et al., 2016; Hõrak et al., 2016; Jakobson et al., 2016; Takahashi et al., 2022; Yeh et

al., 2023). HT1 phosphorylates the CBC1/CBC2 Raf-like kinases that function

downstream of HT1 and these Raf kinases can inhibit the S-type anion channel

activation via a currently unknown mechanism (Hõrak et al., 2016; Hiyama et al., 2017;

Hayashi et al., 2020). Stomata in HT1-deficient plants do not respond to CO_2

concentration changes while carbonic anhydrase, MPK12 and SLAC1 mutants exhibit

impaired stomatal CO_2 responses (Hashimoto et al., 2006; Vahisalu et al., 2008; Hu et

al., 2010; Hashimoto-Sugimoto et al., 2016; Hõrak et al., 2016; Jakobson et al., 2016).

Elevated VPD increases transpiration and reduces epidermal turgor that due to

mechanical interactions between guard and epidermal cells in angiosperms leads to

faster light-induced stomatal opening (Mott et al., 1999; Pichaco et al., 2024). To

prevent wilting, stomata close under elevated VPD. Abscisic acid (ABA) is a drought-

induced plant stress hormone and an important stomatal regulator. VPD has a direct

effect on ABA concentration as increased ABA levels in angiosperms were observed

20 minutes after increasing VPD from 0.7 to 1.5 kPa (McAdam and Brodribb, 2015).

Considering that ABA has a major role in angiosperm stomatal closure (Cutler et al.,

2010), elevated VPD might prime plant stomata for fast closure via increased ABA

concentration.   The   protein   kinase   OST1   and   the   leucine-rich   receptor-like

pseudokinase GHR1 are activated in the presence of ABA and trigger anion efflux

through the major guard cell slow-type anion channel SLAC1 (Brandt et al., 2012; Hua

et al., 2012; Sierla et al., 2018). OST1 and GHR1 are both involved in elevated VPD-

and CO_2-induced stomatal closure response (Xue et al., 2011; Merilo et al., 2018;

Sierla et al., 2018; Hsu et al., 2021; Jalakas et al., 2021b).

Understanding CO_2-induced plant stomatal closure responses is essential for future

plant breeding. Due to changing climate conditions, it is also important to understand

if and how stomatal CO_2 regulation is affected by elevated VPD levels. Previous work

in grasses suggests that elevated VPD levels reduce both stomatal conductance and

stomatal sensitivity to CO_2 concentration changes (Morison and Gifford, 1983) but the

interactions of CO_2 and humidity responses in dicots remain poorly understood.

Under light, CO_2 concentration inside the leaf is usually below ambient levels and this

causes stomatal opening. Stomata close when CO_2 concentration inside the leaf

increases to ambient levels, and an additional rise in CO_2 concentration to above-

ambient levels causes further stomatal closure (Brodribb et al., 2009; Hõrak et al.,

2017). Thus, stomatal closure response exists within sub-ambient as well as in above-

ambient CO_2 levels, however it is not clear whether these responses are controlled by

the same regulators. In some studies, CO_2-induced stomatal closure is defined as the

response to an increase in CO_2 concentration from ambient to above-ambient levels

(Franks and Britton-Harper, 2016; Hõrak et al., 2017), while some studies use a [CO_2]

change from sub-ambient to above-ambient levels (Azoulay-Shemer et al., 2015;
Chater et al., 2015). Data from previous studies comparing CO_2 responses in ferns
and angiosperms suggests that stomatal responses to CO_2 are different, when
changing CO_2 levels in the sub-ambient or above-ambient ranges (Brodribb et al.,
2009; Hõrak et al., 2017). To address the underlying mechanisms of CO_2-induced
stomatal closure at different CO_2 transitions under normal and elevated VPD
conditions, we studied plants deficient either in guard cell anion channel SLAC1 and
its activation (*slac1-3*, *ghr1-3*, *ost1-3*) or in the CO_2-specific stomatal signaling branch
regulated by MPK12 and HT1 kinases (*mpk12-4*, *ht1-2*, *ht1-8D*) and carbonic
anhydrases CA1 and CA4 (*ca1ca4*). Our results show that different stomatal regulators
have a different degree of importance in CO_2-induced stomatal closure in sub-ambient
and above-ambient CO_2 levels and are also differently affected by VPD.

Materials and Methods

Plant lines and growth conditions

Arabidopsis thaliana accession Col-0 and the following mutants in the same genetic
background were used for experiments: *slac1-3* (Vahisalu et al., 2008), *ost1-3*
(Yoshida et al., 2002), *ghr1-3* (Sierla et al., 2018), *ht1-2* (Hashimoto et al., 2006), *ht1-*
8D (Hõrak et al., 2016), *mpk12-4* (Jakobson et al., 2016), *ca1ca4* (Hu et al., 2010).
Plants were grown in 4:2:3 v/v peat:vermiculite:water mixture at 12/12 photoperiod with
150 µmol m^{-2} s^{-1} light in controlled-environment growth cabinets (AR-66LX; Percival
Scientific; MCA1600, Snijders Scientific) at 70% relative humidity and day-time
temperature of 23°C (VPD 0.84 kPa) and night-time temperature 18°C (VPD 0.62 kPa).
Plant age at experiment time was ~25 days.

Gas-exchange measurements

Measurements of stomatal conductance were carried out with a temperature-controlled
custom-built gas-exchange device (Kollist et al., 2007; Hõrak et al., 2017). Plants were
inserted into measurement cuvettes and allowed to acclimate for 1-2 hours at normal
air humidity (VPD, 0.9 kPa) or at lower air humidity (VPD, 2.3 kPa), 24°C air
temperature and 400 ppm CO_2. Experiments with various CO_2 transitions were carried
out and in some cases both under normal and at high VPD conditions, as shown in

Fig. 1. The first CO_2 treatment was applied approximately at noon (11:30 to 12:30), stomatal conductance was always followed for 2 hours under each treatment (Fig. 1).

Data analysis

Magnitude of stomatal closure response was calculated as the absolute difference in stomatal conductance between last time point before treatment and at the end of 2 hours of treatment at a given CO_2 level (displayed as 'Change in g_s'). To describe the kinetic characteristics of stomatal responses, we calculated the 75% response time by scaling the two-hour stomatal responses to a range from 0% to 100% and by calculating the time when 75% of the total stomatal response was achieved. One-way ANOVA with Tukey *post hoc* test was used for statistical analysis as indicated in the figure legends, $p < 0.05$ were considered statistically significant. Statistical analyses were carried out with Past 4.0 (Hammer et al., 2001) and Statistica 7.1 (Stat. Soft. Inc).

Results

Stomatal closure kinetics are different between sub-ambient to ambient and ambient to above-ambient [CO_2] transitions

We analyzed stomatal responses to CO_2 in the sub-ambient and above-ambient concentration ranges in the model plant *Arabidopsis thaliana* to clarify whether these responses are controlled by the same or by different regulators. Four different CO_2 transition sequences were used (Fig. 1A,C,E,G); in two set-ups we applied high VPD (2.3 kPa) as an additional factor before and throughout CO_2 treatments (Fig. 1A,E). Experiments were started with ambient (400ppm) CO_2 concentration and each consecutive CO_2 treatment lasted for 2 hours. This approach allowed to investigate plant stomatal response to different CO_2 transitions – stomatal opening in response to CO_2 transition from 400 to 100 ppm (from here on referred to as 400-100) (Fig. 1A,C,G), from 800 to 400 ppm (800-400) (Fig. 1C), or from 800 to 100 ppm (800-100) (Fig. 1E), and stomatal closure in response to CO_2 transition from 100 to 400 ppm (100-400) (Fig. 1A), from 400 to 800 ppm (400-800) (Figure 1A,C,E), or from 100 to 800 ppm (100-800) (Fig. 1G).

Stomatal closure responses had clearly different 75% response time in Col-0 wild-type plants at different CO_2 transitions: the 400-800 stomatal closure was faster than 100-400 closure under normal VPD (Fig. 1A,B). The rapid 400-800 response was

consistent throughout all experimental setups (Fig. 1A-F). The observed different kinetics of these CO_2-induced stomatal closure responses suggest that they could be regulated by different components. Stomatal opening responses to sub-ambient CO_2 levels, 400-100 (Fig. 1A-D,G,H) and 800-100 (Fig. 1E,F) had relatively slow 75% response times, whereas the 800-400 response, opening from above-ambient to ambient CO_2 levels, had lower response range and faster 75% response time (Fig. 1C,D). This suggests that stomatal opening to sub-ambient CO_2 concentrations is a much stronger, albeit slower, response than stomatal opening during the above-ambient to ambient [CO_2] change.

High VPD but not the order of CO_2 transitions affects stomatal CO_2 response kinetics

To study whether high VPD affects CO_2 responses, we conducted the 400-100-400-800 and the 400-800-100 CO_2 transitions under conditions where plants were first acclimatized to increased VPD (2.3 kPa) for approximately three hours and then subjected to changes in CO_2 levels under the elevated VPD conditions. Under such conditions, both the 400-100 and 800-100 stomatal opening responses were significantly faster than under normal VPD (Fig. 1A,B E,F). Stomatal closure in sub-ambient to ambient CO_2 concentration range was also enhanced under high VPD conditions, resulting in shorter stomatal 75% response time during the 100-400 ppm [CO_2] transition compared with normal VPD (Fig. 1A,B), whereas 400-800 ppm [CO_2] transition 75% response time was not affected by high VPD (Fig. 1A,B,E,F). These results suggest that during high VPD stress, plant stomata could be primed for faster movements in the sub-ambient to ambient CO_2 concentration range, but VPD has a minor role in above-ambient CO_2-induced stomatal closure.

In our first experiments, the 400-100 opening stimulus was applied before the 400-800 closure. To test whether the exposure to sub-ambient CO_2 levels had an effect on stomatal CO_2-responsiveness, we also applied the CO_2 transitions in reverse order (400-800-400-100, Fig. 1C). Stomatal 75% response times during the 400-100 transition appeared slightly shorter when it was the last transition (Fig. 1C,D) than when it was the first (Fig. 1A,B,G,H), whereas the 400-800 transition response speed was unaffected by previous treatments (Fig. 1A,B,C-F). Thus, there were no major effects of the order of CO_2 concentration transitions on stomatal CO_2-response kinetics.

The CO_2-specific pathway components MPK12 and carbonic anhydrases are more involved in sub-ambient to ambient than in above-ambient CO_2-induced stomatal closure

To better understand the role of the CO_2-signalling module comprising MPK12, HT1 and carbonic anhydrases CA1 and CA4 in stomatal CO_2 responses at different CO_2 levels, we analyzed the *mpk12-4*, *ht1-2*, *ht1-8D*, and *ca1a4* in a similar experimental set-up as described for wild-type plants in Fig. 1A. All the CO_2-signalling mutants showed very little stomatal closure in magnitude compared with wild-type plants, whereas 75% response time was significantly reduced only in the *ca1ca4* mutant in response to the 100-400 transition (Fig. 2A,C,E). The 75% response times for the *ht1-2* and *ht1-8D* mutants in this CO_2 transition are not informative due to hardly any stomatal response in these mutants (Fig 2A,C,E). The response of *mpk12-4* to the 100-400 transition was as fast as in wild-type, but significantly smaller in magnitude (Fig. 2A,C,E). In response to the 400-800 transition, the HT1 mutants had very weak stomatal response with small magnitude and slow speed, whereas stomatal closure in the *mpk12-4* and *ca1ca4* plants was slower than in WT, but larger in magnitude (Fig. 2A,C,E). Very weak responses of the HT1 mutants suggest that HT1 is necessary to initiate stomatal responses to CO_2 concentration changes in both ambient and sub-ambient levels. MPK12 and carbonic anhydrase mutants display stronger stomatal responses in the above-ambient than sub-ambient CO_2 range (Fig. 2A,C,E), suggesting that respective signaling components have a more important role at sub-ambient compared with above-ambient CO_2 concentrations.

Elevated VPD led to lower stomatal conductance in all studied mutants (Fig. 2A,B), and thus smaller magnitudes of CO_2-induced changes in stomatal conductance (Fig. 2C,D). Elevated VPD had some effects on the patterns of CO_2-responsiveness in the CO_2-signalling mutants (Fig 2A-F). The *ca1ca4* and *mpk12-4* stomatal response times were similar to WT in the 400-800 transition under elevated VPD (Fig. 2F), and the *mpk12-4* mutant had a significantly slower than wild-type response to the 100-400 transition only under elevated VPD. Thus, the relatively larger degree of importance of MPK12 and carbonic anhydrases in regulating stomatal responses in the sub-ambient CO_2 ranges was more pronounced under elevated VPD conditions.

Stomatal opening response to 400-100 transition in all of the studied CO_2-signalling mutants was lower in magnitude and slower in response time, irrespective of VPD, whereas the difference in response time between wild-type and mutants was larger under elevated VPD (Fig. 2A-F). Thus, stomatal opening response to sub-ambient $[CO_2]$ is affected by all of the CO_2 signaling pathway components represented in this study.

SLAC1 and GHR1 are more important for above-ambient CO_2-induced stomatal closure

The SLAC1 anion channel is a major component in the activation of stomatal closure response. Thus, we examined CO_2 responses across different CO_2 concentration ranges in plants deficient in the SLAC1 anion channel (*slac1-3*) and in OST1 or GHR1: proteins involved in SLAC1 activation (*ost1-3*, *ghr1-3*, Fig. 3). Stomatal 75% response time of *slac1-3* plants was longer in both, 100-400 and 400-800 CO_2 transitions (Fig. 3A,E) but the latter was more affected as the 75% response time difference compared with wild-type plants was notably larger in the 400-800 transition. Yet, the magnitude of stomatal closure between wild-type Col-0 and *slac1-3* was only different in the 100-400 transition (Fig. 3C), while their 400-800 response magnitude was similar. Under elevated VPD, *slac1-3* stomatal response amplitude was similar to wild-type both during the 100-400 and 400-800 transitions, although stomatal response times of *slac1-3* were still significantly longer than wild-type on both transitions (Fig. 2D,F). Together, these results show that SLAC1 is important in stomatal closure in both sub-ambient and above-ambient $[CO_2]$ ranges, but response speed tends to be more severely impacted in the 400-800 transition, suggesting a more prominent role for SLAC1 in ensuring fast above-ambient CO_2-induced stomatal closure.

Plants deficient in SLAC1 activation via OST1 or GHR1 also showed impaired CO_2-induced stomatal closure both in the 100-400 and 400 to 800 transitions (Fig. 3A,C,E). The *ost1-3* mutant had long stomatal response times in both the 100-400 and 400-800 transitions, whereas the *ghr1-3* response was similar to wild-type in the 100-400 transition, but slower and very small in magnitude during the 400-800 transition (Fig. 3A,C,E). Thus, both SLAC1-activating proteins are involved in CO_2 responses in all tested concentration ranges, but GHR1, like SLAC1, appears to contribute more towards above-ambient CO_2-induced stomatal closure.

As in other mutants (Fig. 2), elevated VPD lowered stomatal conductance and stomatal response magnitude, but tended to increase stomatal opening speed (Fig. 3). The *ost1-3* 75% response times and magnitude remained similar in both VPD conditions, in line with its VPD-insensitivity (Fig 3C-F, Merilo et al., 2013). In *ghr1-3*, stomatal response to 400-800 was either absent or extremely weak under elevated VPD (Fig. 3B,D).

Sub-ambient CO_2-induced stomatal opening response magnitude was similar to wild-type in all of the studied anion channel activation mutants, irrespective of VPD (Fig 3C,D). Stomatal 75% response time under regular VPD was similar to wild-type in all but *ost1-3* (Fig. 3E), whereas under elevated VPD conditions both *ghr1*-3 and *ost1*-3 had longer stomatal opening 75% response times (Fig. 3F). Therefore, regulation of SLAC1 is less important for sub-ambient CO_2-induced stomatal opening than the guard cell CO_2-specific signaling pathway. Only under elevated VPD, the 400-100 transition response was slower compared to wild-type in *ghr1-3* (Fig. 3F), indicating an interaction between CO_2 and VPD signaling in stomatal opening responses.

Shifting CO_2 levels from 100 to 800 ppm masks the differences between stomatal behavior in 100-400 and 400-800 ppm [CO_2] transitions

To further study how stomatal movements differ depending on CO_2 concentrations, we did additional gas exchange measurements, during which CO_2 concentration was changed directly from sub-ambient (100 ppm) to above-ambient (800 ppm). Previously, in Fig. 2 and 3 we saw different stomatal response characteristics for 100-400 and 400-800 CO_2 transitions for different mutants that we failed to detect during the 100-800 CO_2 transition (Fig. 4). For example, *mpk12-4* stomatal response was small in amplitude in the 100-400 transition, but much larger in the 400-800 transition (Fig. 2A,C), whereas in the 100-800 transition the *mpk12-4* stomatal response amplitude was similar to wild-type (Fig. 4A). Similarly, in the *ca1ca4* plants 100-400 stomatal response was smaller and 400-800 response larger than in wild-type in amplitude (Fig. 2C), yet the 100-800 response magnitude was similar to wild-type (Fig. 4C). The *ghr1-3* mutant had slower response to the 400-800 transition (Fig. 3E), whereas its 75% response time was similar to wild-type in the 100-800 transition (Fig. 4F). These results demonstrate that differences in stomatal responses between plant lines can remain undiscovered depending on CO_2 concentrations that are used for experiments.

Similar to CO_2-induced stomatal closure experiments, $[CO_2]$ ranges were important also in stomatal opening assays (Fig. 2-3 vs Fig. 5). For example, response to the 400-100 transition in *mpk12-4* was slower and smaller in magnitude compared with wild-type plants (Fig 2C,E), but in the 800-100 experiments, *mpk12-4* had normal response amplitude and wild-type-like 75% response time (Fig. 5C,E). The *slac1-3* plants had similar to wild-type 400-100 stomatal opening speed and magnitude (Fig. 3C,E), but were slower in the 800-100 response (Fig. 5F). We also observed a significantly slower opening response to the 800-400 transition in *slac1-3* (Supplementary Fig. 1F), which indicates that the reduced stomatal opening speed of the 800-100 response in this mutant is caused by slower opening in the 800-400 range. Thus, although wild-type plants have no discernible differences between the 400-100 and the 800-100 stomatal opening responses (Fig. 1A,B,E,F), the molecular mechanisms are at least partly different for these CO_2 transitions.

We combined information from previously analyzed CO_2 transitions in the mutants used in our study with our results (Table 1). Our findings mostly confirm previous results, where available, with the exception of some differences in response amplitude in the *slac1-3*, *ost1-3,* and *ca1ca4* mutants that can be explained by longer treatment duration in this work that allowed the slower stomatal responses of these mutants to reach amplitudes similar to wild-type plants. We also found faster stomatal response to sub-ambient to above-ambient CO_2 transition in the *ht1-2*, potentially explained by different parameters used to describe response speed in different studies. Our experiments add new information on the ambient to sub-ambient, above-ambient to ambient, sub-ambient to above-ambient, above-ambient to sub-ambient and sub-ambient to ambient CO_2 transitions that have not been systematically addressed before in all the mutants analyzed here.

Discussion

Here we show that stomatal closure in response to an increase in CO_2 concentration, which occurs both at sub-ambient and above-ambient CO_2 concentration ranges, is regulated by both the CO_2-specific and SLAC1-related pathways under all CO_2 ranges, but these pathways have a different degree of importance under different CO_2 concentration ranges. Stomatal closure in response to the 400-800 CO_2 concentration range is faster (Fig. 1B), while the 100-400 response has greater amplitude (Fig. 1A,

2C). These differences may be explained by higher guard cell volume and larger
stomatal apertures under lower CO_2 levels, leading to slower responses with larger
amplitudes, similar to slower responses of larger stomata (Drake et al., 2013;
Kübarsepp et al., 2020). However, the relative contribution of the components involved
in stomatal CO_2-signalling is also different in the 400-800 and 100 to 400 stomatal
closure responses (Figures 2-3). Increasing CO_2 abruptly from 100 to 800 masked the
presence of two processes with different kinetics (Figures 2, 3 and 4), indicating the
necessity to analyze stomatal closure responses to elevated CO_2 levels separately in
the ambient to above-ambient and sub-ambient to ambient CO_2 concentration ranges.

The HT1 kinase is required for plant stomatal CO_2 signaling; plants with impaired HT1
function are nearly insensitive to all CO_2 concentration changes (Hashimoto et al.,
2006; Hashimoto-Sugimoto et al., 2016; Hõrak et al., 2016). HT1 together with MPK12
or MPK4 forms a primary CO_2 sensing complex, where CO_2/bicarbonate triggers
interaction of MPKs with HT1 and this leads to inhibition of the HT1 kinase activity
(Takahashi *et al.*, 2022). In our experiments, *mpk12-4* plants had disrupted stomatal
response amplitude to the 100-400 CO_2 transition, while the 400-800 amplitude was
unaffected (Fig. 2A,C). In Tõldsepp *et al,* (2018) *mpk12 mpk4GC* double-mutants,
where MPK4 expression is suppressed only in guard cells, had no 400-800 CO_2
response, yet *mpk4GC* single-mutants responded to the 400-800 CO_2 transition similar
to wild-type plants. Takahashi *et al.* (2022) showed MPK12 mutants to have the 400-
800 response similar to current study, although neither of these studies tested the 100-
400 response. Thus, it seems that the MPK12/MPK4-HT1 complex largely loses
functionality if HT1 is impaired (Fig. 2), same happens if both MPK12 and MPK4 are
missing from guard cells (Tõldsepp et al., 2018), but losing only MPK12 preferentially
affects the 100-400 CO_2 transition (Fig. 2). Therefore, while in the 400-800 transition
the lack of MPK12 is likely compensated by MPK4, MPK4 cannot effectively replace
the function of MPK12 at sub-ambient CO_2 levels. This could mean that while MPK12
and MPK4 both can form CO_2/bicarbonate sensing complex with HT1, their affinity for
CO_2/bicarbonate may be different.

CA1 and CA4 also affected stomatal responsiveness more in the 100-400 CO_2 range,
with slow and shallow stomatal response in the *ca1ca4* mutant (Fig. 2). The strong
stomatal closure in above-ambient 400-800 CO_2 transition in this mutant (Fig. 2) might
be related to increased autonomous CO_2 conversion to HCO_3^- in the elevated CO_2

environment due to shifting of the reaction balance towards bicarbonate production
under above-ambient CO_2 levels; or by involvement of other carbonic anhydrases, as
recently demonstrated (Sun et al., 2022).

SLAC1 is important for stomatal closure responses to both elevated CO_2 transitions,
but compared with wild-type, the response speed of *slac1-3* in the 400-800 transition
was more affected than in the 100-400 transition (Fig. 3A,E). In *slac1-3* plants there
was small in magnitude and slow stomatal closure and opening in the 400-800-400
CO_2 transitions, yet stomatal opening in response to the 400-100 transition was strong
and similar in speed to wild-type plants (Supplementary Fig. 1B,D,F), further
supporting the major role of SLAC1 in stomatal responses under ambient to above-
ambient CO_2 concentration changes. In the 100-400 CO_2 transition, stomatal
responsiveness may be partly compensated by other ion channels that are functional
in *slac1-3*. In addition to the S-type anion channels like SLAC1, stomatal closure is
also affected by R-type anion channels, such as QUAC1 (Meyer et al., 2010; Imes et
al., 2013). Jalakas *et al.* (2021a) demonstrated that the *quac1-1 slac1-3* double mutant
and *quac1-1 slac1-3 slah1-3* triple-mutant had no response to the 400-800 CO_2
transition, while individually *slac1-3* had a weak response and *quac1-1* stomatal
response was similar to wild-type plants. SLAH3 is another S-type anion channel
contributing to stomatal closure (Zhang et al., 2016) and could potentially compensate
for the lack of SLAC1 in the 100-400 CO_2 response, although it does not affect the
400-800 stomatal CO_2 response (Jalakas et al., 2021a). Future studies should address
the 100-400 CO_2 response in mutants deficient in major S- and R-type anion channels
to better understand their potential role in the 100-400 CO_2 response.

Stomatal opening triggered by decreased CO_2 levels, from 400 to 100 and from 800 to
100, had larger magnitude than the 800-400 response (Fig. 1A,C,E,G). Responses to
100 ppm final CO_2 concentration had a consistently large amplitude and slow response
rate in different experimental set-ups and were not affected by the order of CO_2
treatments. Thus, stomatal opening in response to sub-ambient CO_2 concentrations is
a very prominent response. This is in line with Merilo *et al.*, (2014), where two stimuli
with an opposing effect on stomata were simultaneously applied, such as darkness
and low CO_2, or low CO_2 and elevated VPD. In such combinations, Arabidopsis
stomata always opened in response to sub-ambient CO_2 levels, further indicating that
reduction of CO_2 is a strong and prevailing signal. The sub-ambient CO_2-induced

stomatal opening, similar to light-induced opening, likely involves $H^+ATPase$ activation

(Inoue and Kinoshita, 2017), changes in sugar and starch metabolism (Flütsch and

Santelia, 2021), and suppression of stomatal closure via e.g. inhibiting anion channel

activation (Marten et al., 2007). The combined activation of all these processes may

explain the slow stomatal opening rate in response to sub-ambient CO_2 levels.

Elevated VPD triggers ABA biosynthesis (McAdam et al., 2016), that can potentially

increase stomatal responsiveness to CO_2 due to interactions of CO_2 and ABA signaling

pathways (Raschke, 1975; Merilo et al., 2013; Chater et al., 2015). In previous

experiments, elevated VPD has been shown to either increase stomatal

responsiveness to elevated CO_2, potentially via enhanced ABA levels (Bunce, 1998),

or decrease it, potentially due to reduced stomatal apertures under elevated VPD

(Morison and Gifford, 1983; Talbott et al., 2003). Our results showed an enhanced

stomatal response speed in the 400-100, 100-400 and 800-100 CO_2 concentration

transitions but not in the already faster 400-800 transition (Fig. 1A,B,E,F). Elevated

VPD has been shown to accelerate stomatal opening in light in angiosperms due to

reduced back-pressure of epidermal cells on guard cells (Mott et al., 1999; Pichaco et

al., 2024), our results of faster stomatal opening in response to sub-ambient $[CO_2]$

under elevated VPD are in line with this (Fig. 1B,E). Additionally, elevated VPD also

accelerated stomatal closure responses to elevated CO_2 levels in the sub-ambient to

ambient concentration ranges in wild-type Arabidopsis (Fig. 1B). Faster stomatal

closure may be caused by increased ABA levels under elevated VPD conditions

(McAdam and Brodribb, 2015) or may be explained by the smaller steady-state

stomatal conductance caused by smaller stomatal apertures under elevated VPD that

can adjust faster in response to environmental changes.

Steady-states of stomatal conductance of all plant lines were decreased by elevated

VPD (Fig. 2A,B, 3A,B), confirming that VPD is an important factor for steady-state

stomatal conductance (Grossiord et al., 2020; López et al., 2021). Mutants with

disrupted stomatal ABA response, *ghr1-3*, *ost1-3* and *slac1-3*, also had lower steady-

state stomatal conductances under elevated VPD (Fig. 3A,B). Their high VPD-induced

decrease in steady-state stomatal conductance could be caused by ABA-independent

active processes (e.g. ABA-independent OST1 activation, whose contribution to

stomatal closure under high VPD increases in time according to Jalakas et al.,

(2021b)), or hydropassive stomatal closure. These data indicate that elevated ABA

levels alone are not sufficient to explain the decrease of stomatal conductance under
elevated VPD conditions. CO_2-induced stomatal responses under elevated VPD were
sometimes faster and mostly had a smaller amplitude (Fig. 2B,D,F and 3B,D,F).
However, response to the 400-800 CO_2 transition disappeared completely in the *ghr1-*
3 plants under elevated VPD conditions (Fig. 3B,D). GHR1 contributes to stomatal
closure in response to both elevated VPD (Hsu et al., 2021) and CO_2 (Hõrak et al.,
2016; Sierla et al., 2018). Thus, CO_2 and VPD responses may interact in *ghr1-3*: if the
relatively small elevated VPD-induced stomatal closure already occurred in the *ghr1-3*
plants subjected to elevated VPD (Sierla et al., 2018; Hsu et al., 2021), no further
response to CO_2 elevation was triggered.

Here we have focused on guard cell-specific stomatal CO_2 signaling components and
their different contribution to stomatal closure responses in the sub-ambient to ambient
and ambient to above-ambient CO_2 concentration transitions. In addition to these
components, it is likely that signal mediators outside guard cells also contribute to
different stomatal CO_2 response characteristics under different CO_2 levels. While guard
cells in isolated epidermis can respond to elevated CO_2 levels by a decrease in
stomatal aperture (Webb et al., 1996; Chater et al., 2015), signals from mesophyll are
needed for strong CO_2-induced stomatal closure (Mott et al., 2008; Fujita et al., 2013).
Mesophyll processes, e.g. photosynthesis and sugar metabolism, are known to impact
on stomatal behavior (Lawson and Matthews, 2020), and their contribution to different
stomatal CO_2 response patterns under different CO_2 concentration ranges merits
further study.

Elevated temperatures caused by climate change increase evaporative demand of the
atmosphere manifested as higher VPD levels, which increases transpiration, and
triggers stomatal closure to avoid wilting. Together, changes in atmospheric VPD and
CO_2 levels are perhaps the greatest agricultural challenges of the future, yet how both
these stimuli together affect plant stomatal behavior is poorly understood. Here we
show that while elevated VPD negatively affects steady-state stomatal conductances,
it has little effect on stomatal CO_2-responsiveness. Nevertheless, in some genetic
backgrounds, we found an interaction between CO_2 and VPD treatments, indicating
that the simultaneous effects of these factors on stomatal behavior merit further study.
We also show that stomatal response to elevated CO_2 has different kinetics under sub-
ambient and above-ambient CO_2 concentration ranges and its known regulators

contribute to a different degree under different CO_2 concentration transitions. Thus, to better understand stomatal responses to CO_2 it is necessary to carefully consider CO_2 levels and experimental set-ups.

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Author Contributions

H.H. designed the study, H.H., K.K. and E.M. performed experiments, H.H., K.K., E.M. and H.K. analyzed data, H.H., K.K. and H.K. wrote the manuscript, all authors commented, edited and approved the final manuscript.

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Figure Legends

Figure 1. Kinetics of CO_2-induced stomatal responses in wild-type Arabidopsis with regular and elevated VPD.

Col-0 wild-type Arabidopsis stomatal response to sequential changes in CO_2 concentration under regular **(A,C,E,G)** and elevated **(A,E)** VPD conditions. Mean stomatal conductance ± SEM is shown. **(B,D,F,H)** Boxplot of 75% response time (minutes) of stomatal response to CO_2 concentration changes. Boxes represent 25-75

% quartiles and median as the horizontal lines, whiskers indicate the smallest and largest values, points show individual plant values. **(B,F)** Statistically significantly different groups are indicated with different letters (Two-way ANOVA with Tukey *post-hoc* test). **(D,H)** Statistically significantly different groups are indicated with different letters (One-way ANOVA with Tukey *post-hoc* test). Sample size was 5 in **(A,B,C,D,E,F)** and 14 in **(G,H)**. Start of first treatment was between 11:30 to 12:30.

Figure 2. CO_2 pathway mutants retain response patterns under regular and elevated VPD conditions

(A) and **(B)** Stomatal response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 100 ppm, 100 to 400 ppm and 400 to 800 ppm under regular **(A)** and elevated **(B)** VPD conditions, mean stomatal conductance ± SEM is shown. **(C,D)** Boxplot of stomatal conductance (g_s) change (mmol m^{-2} s^{-1}) in response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 100 ppm, 100 to 400 ppm and 400 to 800 ppm, respectively. **(E,F)** Boxplot of 75% response time (minutes) of stomatal response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 100 ppm, 100 to 400 ppm and 400 to 800 ppm, respectively. **(C-F)** Boxes represent 25-75 % quartiles and median as the horizontal lines, whiskers indicate the smallest and largest values, points show individual plant values. Statistically significantly different groups are marked with different letters (One-way ANOVA with Tukey *post hoc* test). **(A-F)** Sample size was 5 for all plant lines. VPD during experiments was 0.9 kPa in **(A,C,E)** and 2.3 kPa in **(B,D,F)**. Start of first treatment was between 11:30 to 12:30. Col-0 data is same as used in figure 1, experiments with Col-0 and mutant lines were done together.

Figure 3. CO_2 response patterns in anion channel activation mutants are affected by VPD conditions

(A) and **(B)** Stomatal response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 100 ppm, 100 to 400 ppm and 400 to 800 ppm in regular **(A)** and elevated **(B)** VPD conditions, mean stomatal conductance ± SEM is shown. **(C,D)** Boxplot of stomatal conductance (g_s) change (mmol m^{-2} s^{-1}) in response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 100 ppm, 100 to 400 ppm and 400 to 800 ppm, respectively. **(E,F)** Boxplot of 75% response time (minutes) of stomatal response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 100

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Figure 4. CO_2 transition from 100 to 800 ppm masks different responses present in 100 to 400 and 400 to 800 ppm CO_2 transitions

(A) and **(B)** Stomatal response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 100 ppm and 100 to 800 ppm, mean stomatal conductance ± SEM is shown. **(C,D)** Boxplot of stomatal conductance (g_s) change (mmol m^{-2} s^{-1}) in response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 100 ppm and 100 to 800 ppm, respectively. **(E,F)** Boxplot of 75% response time (minutes) of stomatal response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 100 ppm and 100 to 800 ppm, respectively. **(C-F)** Boxes represent 25-75 % quartiles and median as the horizontal lines, whiskers indicate the smallest and largest values, points show individual plant values. Statistically significantly different groups are marked with different letters (One-way ANOVA with Tukey *post hoc* test). **(A-F)** Sample size was 14 for Col-0; 6 for *ht1-2*; 7 for *ht1-8D*; 8 for *ghr1-3*, *mpk12-4* and *ost1-3*; 9 for *slac1-3* and *ca1ca4*. VPD during experiments was 0.9 kPa in **(A-F)**. Start of first treatment was between 11:30 to 12:30. Col-0 data is same as used in figure 1, experiments with Col-0 and mutant lines were done together.

Figure 5. Stomatal opening in 800 to 100 ppm CO_2 transition masks different responses present in sub-ambient and above ambient CO_2 concentrations

(A) and **(B)** Stomatal response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 800 ppm and 800 to 100 ppm, mean stomatal conductance ± SEM is shown. **(C,D)** Boxplot of stomatal conductance (g_s) change (mmol m^{-2} s^{-1}) in response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 800 ppm and 800 to 100 ppm, respectively. **(E,F)** Boxplot of 75% response time (minutes) of stomatal response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 800 ppm and 800 to 100 ppm, respectively. **(C-F)** Boxes represent 25-75 % quartiles and median as the horizontal lines, whiskers indicate the smallest and largest values,

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Supplementary figure 1

(A) and **(B)** Stomatal response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 800 ppm, 800 to 400 ppm and 400 to 100 ppm, mean stomatal conductance ± SEM is shown. **(C,D)** Boxplot of stomatal conductance (g_s) change (mmol m^{-2} s^{-1}) in response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 800 ppm, 800 to 400 ppm and 400 to 100 ppm, respectively. **(E,F)** Boxplot of 75% response time (minutes) of stomatal response to CO_2 concentration changes from 400 to 800 ppm, 800 to 400 ppm and 400 to 100 ppm, respectively. **(C-F)** Boxes represent 25-75 % quartiles and median as the horizontal lines, whiskers indicate the smallest and largest values, points show individual plant values. Statistically significantly different groups are marked with different letters (One-way ANOVA with Tukey *post hoc* test). **(A-F)** Sample size was 5 for all plant lines. VPD during experiments was 0.9 kPa in **(A-F)**. Start of first treatment was between 11:30 to 12:30. Col-0 data is same as used in figure 1, experiments with Col-0 and mutant lines were done together.

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(A) and **(B)** Stomatal response to CO₂ concentration changes from 400 to 100 ppm and 100 to 800 ppm, mean stomatal conductance ± SEM is shown. **(C,D)** Boxplot of stomatal conductance (g_s) change (mmol m⁻² s⁻¹) in response to CO₂ concentration changes from 400 to 100 ppm and 100 to 800 ppm, respectively. **(E,F)** Boxplot of 75% response time (minutes) of stomatal response to CO₂ concentration changes from 400 to 100 ppm and 100 to 800 ppm, respectively. **(C-F)** Boxes represent 25-75 % quartiles and median as the horizontal lines, whiskers indicate the smallest and largest values, points show individual plant values. Statistically significantly different groups are marked with different letters (One-way ANOVA with Tukey *post hoc* test). **(A-F)** Sample size was 14 for Col-0; 6 for *ht1-2*; 7 for *ht1-8D*; 8 for *ghr1-3*, *mpk12-4* and *ost1-3*; 9 for *slac1-3* and *ca1ca4*. VPD during experiments was 0.9 kPa in **(A-F)**. Start of first treatment was between 11:30 to 12:30. Col-0 data is same as used in figure 1, experiments with Col-0 and mutant lines were done together.

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(A) and **(B)** Stomatal response to CO₂ concentration changes from 400 to 800 ppm and 800 to 100 ppm, mean stomatal conductance ± SEM is shown. **(C,D)** Boxplot of stomatal conductance (g$_s$) change (mmol m⁻² s⁻¹) in response to CO₂ concentration changes from 400 to 800 ppm and 800 to 100 ppm, respectively. **(E,F)** Boxplot of 75% response time (minutes) of stomatal response to CO₂ concentration changes from 400 to 800 ppm and 800 to 100 ppm, respectively. **(C-F)** Boxes represent 25-75 % quartiles and median as the horizontal lines, whiskers indicate the smallest and largest values, points show individual plant values. Statistically significantly different groups are marked with different letters (One-way ANOVA with Tukey *post hoc* test). **(A-F)** Sample size was 5 for all plant lines. VPD during experiments was 0.9 kPa in **(A-F)**. Start of first treatment was between 11:30 to 12:30. Col-0 data is same as used in figure 1, experiments with Col-0 and mutant lines were done together.

Table 1. Stomatal CO_2 responses for the studied mutants from the previously published studies (Hashimoto et al., 2006 [1]; Vahisalu et al., 2008 [2]; Hu et al., 2010 [3]; Xue et al., 2011 [4]; Laanemets et al., 2013 [5]; Merilo et al., 2013 [6]; Hu et al., 2015 [7]; Matrosova et al., 2015 [8]; Hashimoto-Sugimoto et al., 2016 [9]; Hõrak et al., 2016 [10]; Jakobson et al., 2016 [11]; Sierla et al., 2018 [12]; Takahashi et al., 2022 [13]; Yeh et al., 2023 [14]) and from this study.

	ambient to sub-ambient		sub-ambient to ambient		ambient to above-ambient		sub-ambient to above-ambient		above-ambient to ambient		above- ambient to sub-ambient	
	amplitude	speed	amplitude	speed	amplitude	speed	amplitude	speed	amplitude	speed	amplitude	speed
ht1-2	+[1,10]/+	+[1,10]/+	na/+	na/-	+[1,8-10]/+	+[1,8-10]/+	+[4]/+	+[4]/-	na/+	na/-	+[8,9]/+	+[8,9]/+
ht1-8D	+[10]/+	+[10]/+	na/+	na/+	+[10,13]/+	+[10,13]/+	na/+	na/+	na/+	na/+	+[13]/+	+[13]/+
mpk12-4	+[14]/+	+[14]/+	na/+	na/-	+[11,14]/+	+[11,14]/+	na/-	na/+	+[14]/+	+[14]/+	-[13]/-	-[13]/-
ca1ca4	+[3,7,8]/+	+[3,7,8]/+	na/+	na/+	+[3,7]/+	+[3,7]/+	+[3,7]/-	+[3,7]/+	na/+	na/+	+[3,7]/+	+[3,7]/+
slac1-3	-[5]/-	-[5]/-	na/+	na/+	+[2,6]/-	+[2,6]/+	na/+	na/+	+[2]/-	+[2]/+	na/-	na/+
ghr1-3	na/-	na/-	na/+	na/-	+[12]/+	+[12]/+	na/+	na/-	na/+	na/-	na/-	na/-
ost1-3	+[4]/-	+[4]/+	na/+	na/+	+[4,6]/-	+[4,6]/+	+[4]/+	+[4]/+	+[6]/+	+[6]/+	+[4]/-	+[4]/+

published results/our results += different from WT