Structural Elucidation of Intact Rough-Type Lipopolysaccharides using Field Asymmetric Ion Mobility Spectrometry and Kendrick Mass Defect Plots

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Abstract

Lipopolysaccharide (LPS) is a hallmark virulence factor of Gram-negative bacteria. It is a complex, structurally heterogeneous mixture, due to variations in number, type, and position of its simplest structural units: fatty acids and monosaccharides. Thus, LPS structural characterization by traditional mass spectrometry (MS) methods is challenging. Here, we describe the benefits of Field Asymmetric Ion Mobility Spectrometry (FAIMS) in the analysis of intact R-type lipopolysaccharide complex mixture (lipooligosaccharide; LOS). The structural characterization was performed on the *Escherichia coli* J5 (Rc mutant) LOS, an adjuvant widely used in glycoconjugate vaccine research. Rapid FAIMS gas phase fractionation improved the (S/N) ratio and the number of detected LOS ion species. Additionally, FAIMS allowed separation of overlapping isobars for better tandem MS characterization and unequivocal structural assignments. In addition to the FAIMS gas phase fractionation benefits, extra sorting of the structurally related LOS molecules was accomplished using Kendrick mass defect (KMD) plots. A custom KMD base unit of [Na-H] created a highly organized KMD plot and allowed the identification of interesting and novel structural differences across the different LOS ion families (i.e., ions with different acylation degree, oligosaccharides composition and modifications). Defining composition of a single LOS ion by tandem MS along with the organized KMD plot structural network was sufficient to deduce composition of 73 LOS species in addition to their corresponding sodiated forms (additional 106 compositions). The combination of FAIMS and KMD plots allowed in-depth characterization of the complex LOS mixture and uncovered a wealth of novel information about its structural variations.

1. Introduction

Lipopolysaccharides (LPS) extracted from the Gram-negative bacterial cell walls are complex mixtures with significant structural heterogeneity. [1-3] The three main components of an S-type LPS (smooth LPS) are lipid A, core oligosaccharide, and O-antigen. The R-type LPS (rough LPS) is missing the terminal O-antigen, and therefore consists of lipid A and core oligosaccharide only (LOS). The complexity of the LPS mixtures arises from variations in the number, type, and positions of fatty acids and sugars in their chemical structures. Moreover, variations in the number and position of additional functional moieties, such as phosphate, acetyl and phosphoryl ethanolamine groups, add more complexity to the LPS structural heterogeneity. Adequate fractionation and separation of individual components of the LPS mixtures is therefore extremely difficult using the previously tested chromatographic methods. [1] For this reason, only a few studies to date have chosen to use liquid chromatography-tandem MS (LC-MS/MS) for analysis of intact LPS or LOS complex mixtures [4-5]

The existence of most LPS and LOS ions as mixtures of isomers and/or isobars complicates their structural elucidation by tandem MS. [3-9] The co-isolation of isomeric and isobaric ions for fragmentation results in chimeric spectra that are always difficult to interpret.[10,11] For this reason, ion mobility MS is an excellent choice for separating the expected LPS and LOS isomeric and isobaric ions prior tandem MS. Field Asymmetric Ion Mobility Spectrometry (FAIMS) offers a rapid gas-phase fractionation of ions based on their charge states and mobility differences in the strong and weak electric fields. [12-14] The FAIMS fractionation mechanism is ideal for LPS/ LOS analysis as it can eliminate singly charged chemical background ions. [15] These singly charged ions suppress the expected LPS/LOS multi-charge ions intensities hindering their characterization by tandem MS. To the best of our knowledge, only one trial using capillary electrophoresis coupled to FAIMS has been reported for the analysis of the O-deacylated *Haemophilus influenzae* LOS prepared by treating the intact LOS with hydrazine. [15] Thus, this is the first report on the use of FAIMS for the analysis of an intact or untreated LOS complex mixture and its usefulness in resolving isobaric LOS ions and their characterization by tandem MS.

Most of the LPS structural elucidation by MS is traditionally facilitated by chemical extraction of either the lipid A or the oligosaccharide and polysaccharides components, followed by additional chemical degradation and/or modification. [16-25] However, chemical degradation can

lead to the loss of crucial structural information and thus interferes with attempts to understand the original LPS or LOS intact structures present *in vivo*. While a few structural studies have been done on intact LPS or LOS mixtures without any chemical treatment, [4-9] no in-depth and comprehensive profiling of the intact LPS or LOS mixtures has been reported before. As well, no work has been done to facilitate tandem MS analysis of LPS or LOS, and to create a library of possible structural variations between the LPS ions.

Kendrick mass defect (KMD) plots are one of the most valuable tools for classifying and sorting structurally related ions in complex mixtures. [26-28] Traditional KMD plots use the methylene group base unit [CH_2] to classify ions, especially in petroleomics and lipidomics. [29,30] This plot represents a relationship between the Kendrick mass defect (KMD) and the exact Kendrick mass (KM). The KM (Eq.1) and KMD (Eq.2) are calculated as follows:

$$KM = experimental\ m/z\ \ x\ \frac{14.00000}{14.01565} \qquad (1)$$

$$KMD = nominal\ \ KM - KM \qquad (2)$$

All ions with the same chemical composition but different number of CH_2 will have the same Kendrick mass defect and will align on the same horizontal line in the KMD plot, thus creating a KMD ion family. On the other hand, ions aligning on the same vertical and/or diagonal line usually differ in the number of double bond equivalents (DBE or degree of unsaturation) or the number of heteroatoms; i.e., the ion with a higher DBE or a number of heteroatoms will have a higher Kendrick mass defect. [26-28]

Based on the diagnostic structural features of the studied class of compounds, other custom KMD base units instead of the traditional CH_2 can be employed to sort structurally related ion families. [27,28] In this case, the modified exact Kendrick mass (Eq.3) is calculated as follows:

$$KM = experimental\ m/z\ \ x\ \frac{nominal\ mass\ of\ custom\ unit}{exact\ mass\ of\ custom\ unit} \qquad (3)$$

Since structurally related ions always align on the same horizontal and/or vertical lines of the KMD plot (KMD ion family), KMD plots allow better visualization of the structural relationship between different ions and the in-depth profiling of complex mixtures. During data

analysis, KMD plots therefore reduce the number of tandem mass spectra needed to characterize each KMD ion family. By identifying the structural relationships between ion families across a KMD plot, confirming a specific ion's structure by tandem MS can be sufficient to propose the chemical composition of other structurally related ions. [27,28]

This work showcases the benefits of FAIMS rapid gas phase fractionation and KMD plots in the characterization of *E. coli* J5 (Rc mutant) LOS, a well-known vaccine adjuvant. [31] Analysis was accomplished using direct infusion FAIMS-electrospray ionization (ESI)-tandem MS followed by KMD plots analysis using a custom [Na-H] base unit. This combined approach allowed in-depth characterization of 179 LOS elemental compositions out of 321 present in the mixture and identification of novel structural features of the J5 *E. coli* (Rc mutant) LOS.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Direct infusion FAIMS-ESI-tandem MS

Negative ion mode ESI-MS was performed on an Orbitrap Fusion ETD Tribrid Mass Spectrometer with a FAIMS pro interface (Thermo Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA). Rough LOS of *E. coli* J5 Rc mutant (Sigma Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) was dissolved in MS-grade water: isopropanol: triethyl amine: acetic acid (80:20:0.2:0.2 v/v/v/v) at a concentration of 1 µg/µL and directly infused into the FAIMS source at a flow rate of 3 µL/min. The spray voltage was set to 2.5 kV, capillary temperature to 275 °C, and sheath and auxiliary gas to 2 a.u. The FAIMS separation was accomplished with the following settings: inner electrode temperature = 100 °C, outer electrode temperature = 100 °C, FAIMS N_2 carrier gas flow = 1.2 L/min, asymmetric waveform with dispersion voltages (DV) = +5000 V. Compensation voltages (CV) were scanned from 0 to 100 V with a step size of one volt at 120 K resolution, 150 – 2000 *m/z* ramge, 60% RF lens, 100% normalized automatic gain control (AGC) target, and 100 ms Maximum injection time (IT). The mass spectrum was also acquired with the FAIMS off mode for comparison purposes. Tandem MS was performed at selected CV voltages (50 and 61 V) that separates isobaric ions of interests (*m/z* 1085.17 and *m/z* 1085.20). Normalized high-energy collision-induced dissociation (HCD) in the 30-40% range were used for tandem MS. Pseudo-MS^3 was accomplished with source-induced dissociation (SID) at a potential difference of 100 V. The source induced dissociation fragmented LOS precursor ions into lipid A (Y-type fragments) and core

oligosaccharide fragments (B-type fragments). The resulting B-type fragments of interest were further selected for HCD MS/MS (Pseudo MS^3)

2.2. Data analysis

The Mass spectra at different FAIMS compensation voltages were viewed and deconvoluted using the *Xtract* tool in Freestyle software 1.8 SP1 (Thermo Scientific). The deconvolution parameters were: 2-4 charge range, 1% threshold relative abundance, protein isotope table, and a minimum number of detected charge of 1. Any masses below 2237.34 Da, the molecular weight of Kdo2-Lipid A (KLA), were removed from the deconvoluted mass list. The final mass list from all CVs combined (average of 100 scans) was uploaded to the Constellation online software (https://constellation.chemie.hu-berlin.de/). [32] A custom KMD base unit of [Na-H] corresponding to the exact mass of 21.981945 Da was used to create the KMD plot. One of the LOS ions annotated as ***24*** in the KMD plot **(Figure S6)** was the key to predict chemical composition of all the other LOS ions.

The chemical composition of ion ***24*** was determined by a detailed tandem MS characterization (MS^2 and Pseudo MS^3). Tandem MS fragmentation was investigated manually with the assistance of the ChemDraw software v. 21.0.0.28 (Perkin Elmer, Waltham, MA, USA). Similar dots arrangement and/or geometric pattern of different LOS ion families across the KMD plot allowed the determination of chemical composition of extra 73 LOS ions with reference to ion ***24*** chemical formula elucidated by tandem MS. In **Figure S5**, the chemical formulas of ions ***24, 25***, and ***19*** are shown as a representative example of chemical formula assignments. The alignment of ion 25 on the same vertical line with ion ***24*** indicates that ion ***25*** has an extra phosphate group compared to ion ***24***. Thus, ion ***25*** have the same chemical formula as ion ***24*** plus HPO_3 (**Figure S5**). Similarly, difference of 198.16 Da between ions ***19*** and **24** corresponds to C12:0 acyl chain plus one oxygen (**Figure S6**). Therefore, ion 19 have the same chemical formula of ion ***24*** minus $C_{12}H_{22}O_2$. All chemical composition assignments for the identified 73 LOS ions were within +/- 5 ppm (**Table S1**).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. LOS characterization by ESI-FAIMS-tandem MS

In this study, we have investigated the benefits of FAIMS for analysis of the complex mixture of *E. coli* J5 (Rc mutant) LOS composed of lipid A and core oligosaccharide (R-type LPS). Previous studies showed that FAIMS has the ability to fractionate ions based on their charge states. [12-14] The LOS extract was therefore first analyzed by direct infusion FAIMS-ESI. When FAIMS compensation voltages were scanned from 0-100 volts, rapid gas fractionation of LOS ions was achieved, allowing identification of a higher number of multi-charged LOS ions (**Figure 1**). [33,34] In contrast, when the FAIMS voltages were not applied (FAIMS-off mode), many of the LOS multi-charged ions were suppressed in favor of singly charged background ions and phospholipid contaminants that are omnipresent in LOS extracts (**Figure S1**). The number of LOS species (> 2237.34 Da) that resulted from compensation voltage fractionation increased by approximately 1.7-fold compared to when FAIMS voltages were off (191 vs. 321 deconvoluted masses). Moreover, the use of specific FAIMS compensation voltages such as CV=57 allowed elimination of singly charged ions and enhancement of the LOS ions signal to noise (S/N) ratio (**Figure S1**). A representative example is the S/N ratio enhancement of the LOS ion at *m/z* 940 by approximately 2.4-fold at CV=57 compared to its S/N ratio when the FAIMS voltages were off. (**Figure S1**).

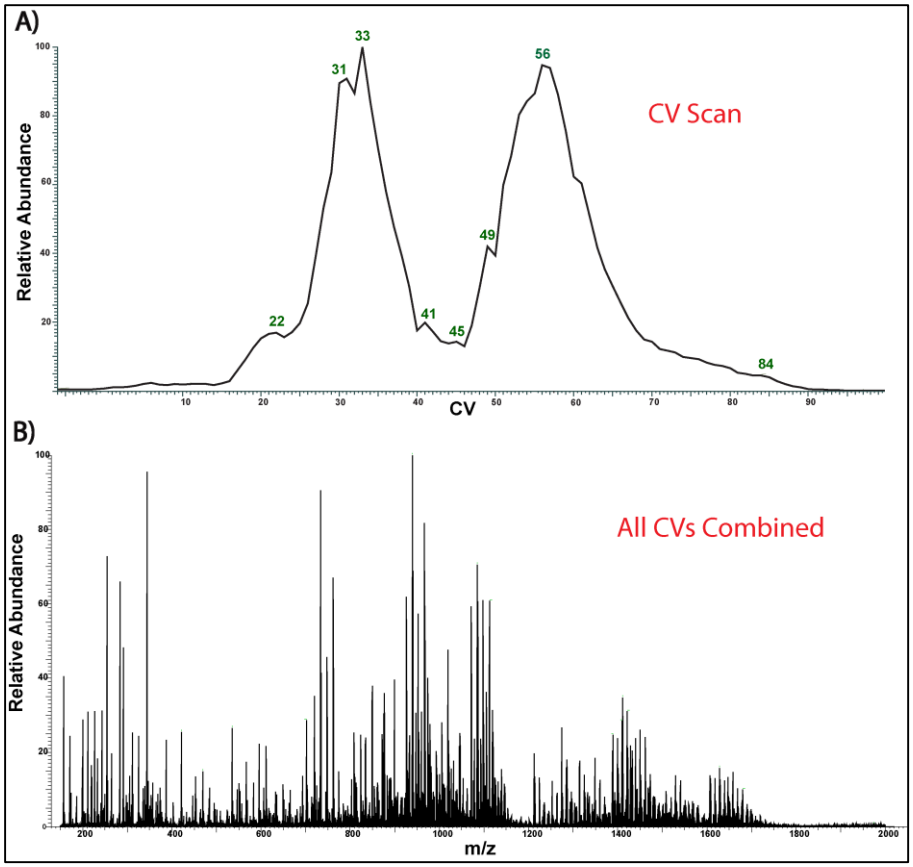


Figure 1: FAIMS- ESI-MS of the J5 *E. coli*. A) FAIMS Compensation voltage scan (0-100 V). B) Corresponding spectrum of all CVs combined (average of 100 scans)

The presence of isobars and overlapping isotopic distributions often hinder the accurate structural characterization of ions of interest by tandem MS. When FAIMS compensation voltages (CV) were scanned from 0 to 100 V, it was noted that several overlapping LOS isobaric ions were separated at specific compensation voltages (**Figure S2**). For example, the most intense LOS ion at *m/z* 1085 (*z* = -3) detected when FAIMS voltages were off had two overlapping isobars, a major ion at *m/z* 1085.17 and a minor ion at *m/z* 1085.20. This overlapping was still notable at different compensation voltages, such as CV=60, when FAIMS voltage were on (**Figure S2A**). However, at CV=61, only the minor ion at *m/z* 1085.20 was detected (**Figure S2C**). Furthermore, at CV=50, the major isobar at *m/z* 1085.17 was completely separated from any traces of the minor ion (**Figure S2B**). Careful manipulation of the FAIMS CV therefore allowed for efficient separation of the most intense LOS isobaric ions at *m/z* 1085.17 and 1085.20 for a follow up tandem MS, avoiding generation of chimeric mass spectra.

Previous tandem MS structural characterization of the *E. coli* J5 (Rc mutant) LOS by Oyler *et al*. showed that the chemical formula of the triply charged minor ion at *m/z* 1085.20 is $[C_{145}H_{259}N_3O_{70}P_3]^{3-}$.[7] This LOS ion was proposed to be comprised of the canonical hexa-acylated *E. coli* lipid A [24,25] and a core oligosaccharide (OS) consisting of seven monosaccharides (two 3-deoxy-D-manno-oct-2-ulosonic acid: Kdo, three heptose: Hep, one hexose: Hex and one glucosamine: GlcN) and modified with one phosphate (P) and one acetyl group (Ac): Kdo2. Hep3. Hex. GlcN. P. Ac. [7] In the current study, tandem MS analysis of this minor LOS ion at *m/z* 1085.20 (*z* = -3) (**Figure 2A**) yielded two main product ions: *m/z* 1796.20 (*z* = -1) and *m/z* 1240.33 (*z* = -1), corresponding to lipid A (Y-type product ion) and oligosaccharide [OS-H_2O-Kdo] (B-type product ion), respectively, according to the Domon and Costello nomenclature. [35] The B-type product ion at *m/z* 1240.33 was detected mainly as a singly charged ion due to the presence of a single phosphate group in its chemical composition, confirming the previous findings by Oyler et al (**Figure 2A**). [7]

The tandem MS analysis of the major LOS ion at *m/z* 1085.17 (**Figure 2B**) also produced the same lipid A Y-type product ion at *m/z* 1796.20 (*z* = -1). However, the corresponding OS B-type product ion had a different exact mass (*m/z* 1240.23) and lower intensity compared to the one detected for the minor ion (*m/z* 1240.33; **Figure 2A**). This latter B-ion at *m/z* 1240.23 showed the loss of a phosphate group (-80 Da) to give the ion at *m/z* 1160.26. Further loss of CO_2 (- 44 Da) from the Kdo sugar resulted in the ion at *m/z* 1116.27. Importantly, the same B-ion at *m/z* 1240.23 (*z* = -1) was also detected as a highly intense doubly charged ion at *m/z* 619.61 (*z* = -2) that showed a loss of CO_2 to form the ion at *m/z* 597.61 (*z* = -2) (**Scheme 1**). Based on this fragmentation pattern and presence of the highly intense doubly charged B-ion, we concluded that the major LOS (*m/z* 1085.17) ion should have at least two phosphate groups in its core oligosaccharide.

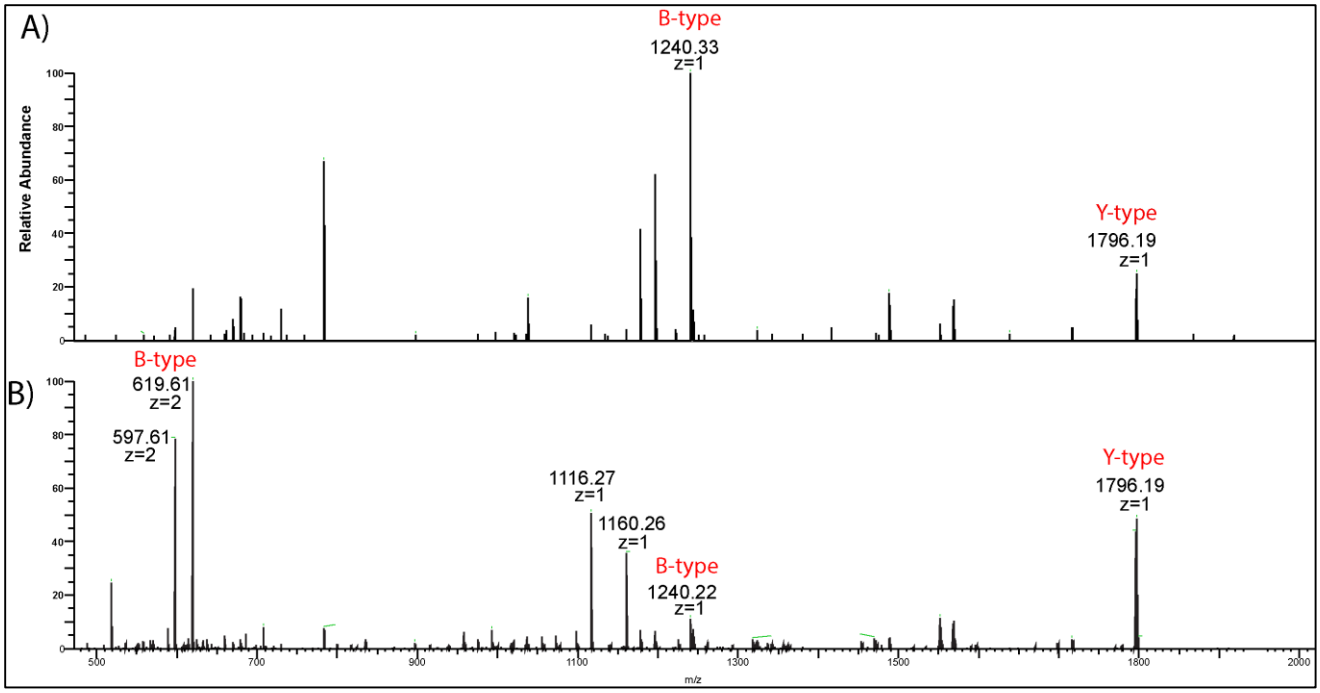


Figure 2: **A)** High-energy collision-induced dissociation HCD MS/MS of **a)** *m/z* 1085.20 isolated at CV=61. **B)** *m/z* 1085.17 isolated at CV= 50. Both spectra showed the formation of the same Y-type ion (*m/z* 1796), but the respective B-type ions differed in their exact masses

From the example above, it is obvious that tandem MS alone provided only a hint about the possible number of phosphate groups in the major LOS ion. However, it did not provide any details about its monosaccharide composition or sequence. For this reason, MS^3 was needed to elucidate the possible monosaccharide composition and sequence of the oligosaccharide. [36] Source-induced fragmentation (SID) of 100 V was utilized to create the intense doubly charged B-type ions that were further selected for tandem MS (Pseudo MS^3). Tandem MS of the B-type ion at *m/z* 597.61 that dominated the SID mass spectrum (**Figure S3**) started with loss of a phosphate group to give the intense singly charged ion at *m/z* 1116.27. This loss indicates the instability of the selected doubly charged ion that loses a phosphate group readily, hindering the identification of the monosaccharide from which this phosphate group has been lost. For this reason, this phosphate group was added to one of the monosaccharides putatively (**Figure 3** and **Scheme 1**).

The latter ion at *m/z* 1116.27 showed a loss of a phosphoryl ethanolamine group (-123 Da) to create the ion at *m/z* 993.26. This latter ion at *m/z* 993.26 showed a series of sequential losses highlighting its monosaccharide components. The first was the loss of 158.05 Da corresponding

to $C_7H_{10}O_4$, equivalent to the chemical composition of [Kdo-H_2O-CO_2]. This latter loss formed the ion at *m/z* 835.21, which lost a heptose sugar (-192 Da) to produce the ion at *m/z* 643.14. The last ion at *m/z* 643.14 experienced the combined loss of a hexose and water molecule (-180.06 Da) to create the ion at *m/z* 463.08, which in turn lost a heptose moiety (-192 Da) to produce the ion at *m/z* 271.02 corresponding to a phosphorylated heptose. Additionally, the pseudo-MS^3 fragmentation showed the presence of a pyro-phosphoryl ethanolamine group confirmed by detecting the ion at *m/z* 219.98. This latter ion showed the sequential loss of water and ethanolamine molecules to produce the ions at *m/z* 201.96 and 158.92, respectively.

The combined fragmentation patterns from the MS^2 of *m/z* 1085.17 and the pseudo MS^3 of the doubly charged B-type ion at *m/z* 597.61 showed that OS was composed of six sugars modified with one phosphate and one pyrophosphoryl ethanolamine (PPEN): Kdo2. Hep. Hex.Hep2. P. PPEN. **Figure S4** shows the proposed structure of the ion at *m/z* 1085.17 and how the Y-type (lipid A) and B-type ion fragments (OS) were created. It should be mentioned that the *E. coli* inner oligosaccharides are known to have three connected heptose sugars following the two Kdo sugars, denoted as Hep I, HepII, and HepIII. [37,38] However, to the best of our knowledge, the presence of hexose (Scheme 1) in between Hep I and Hep II have not been reported before. In summary, we clearly demonstrated the benefit of FAIMS gas phase separations for LOS isobaric ions and how they allow characterization of LOS in unprecedented detail.

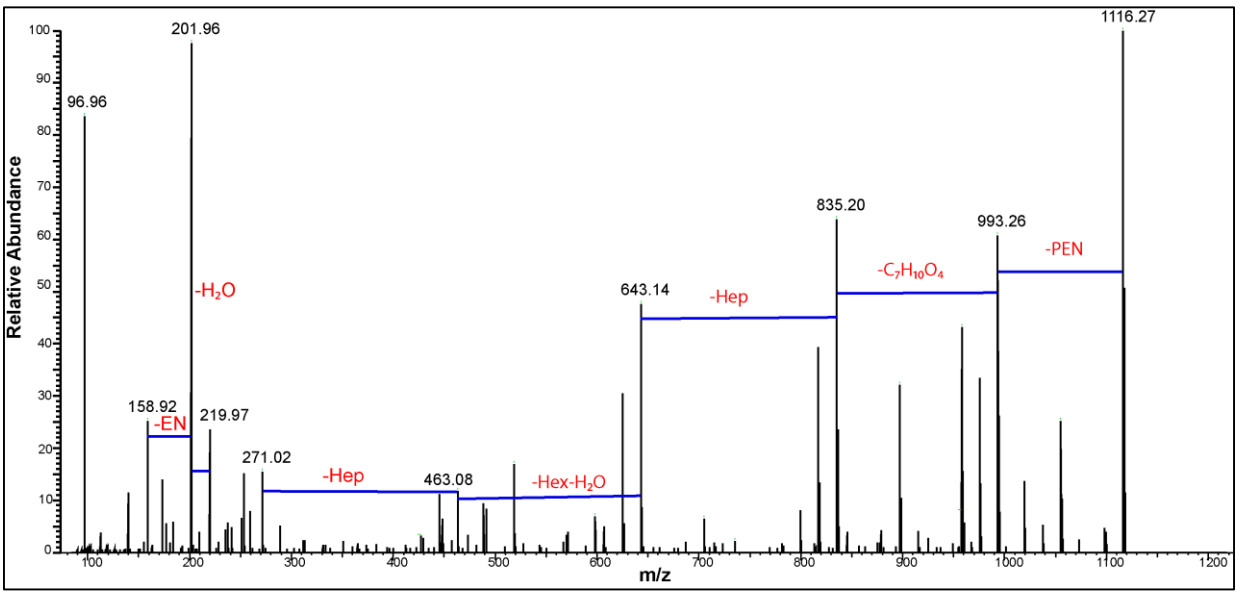
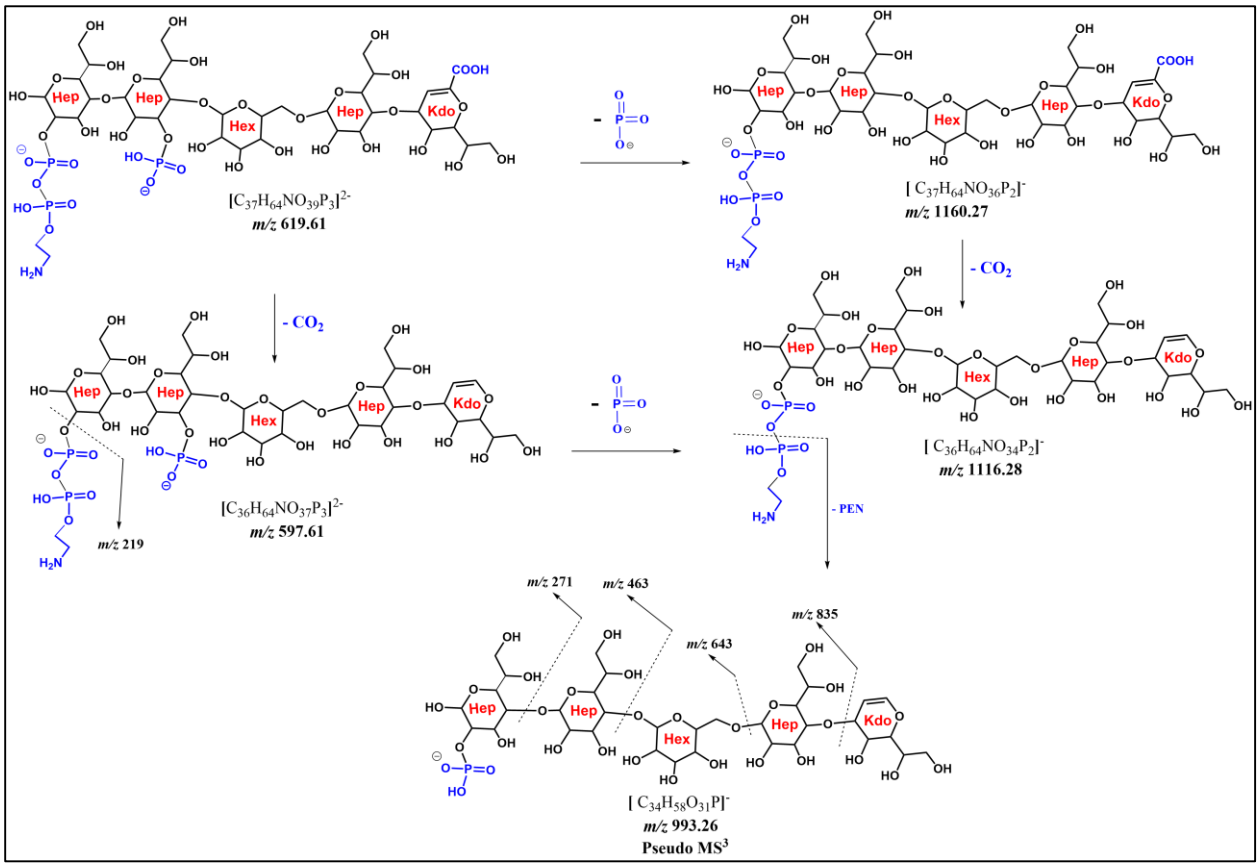


Figure 3: HCD MS/MS (Pseudo MS^3) of *m/z* 597.61 created by source induced dissociation of 100 V

While FAIMS-ESI tandem MS data generation was quite simple, tandem MS data analysis was not straightforward. For example, the neutral losses in tandem MS and pseudo MS^3 and their relation to the selected precursor ions had to be carefully inspected. One of the apparent complexities is the presence of two main modifications (i.e., phosphate and pyrophosphryl ethanolamine) that can be distributed randomly over the six monosaccharides identified in the major ion at *m/z* 1085.17. Thus, several possible structures must be investigated manually to find the most likely structure or chemical composition. These challenges were the driving force for explaining the detailed tandem MS fragmentation mechanisms (**Scheme 1**) (*vide supra*) for future use in LPS and LOS structural characterization in other *E. coli* strains and other bacterial species.



Scheme 1: MS^2 and Pseudo MS^3 fragmentation mechanism of B-ions originating from *m/z* 1085.17.

3.2. In-depth LOS characterization by Kendrick mass defect (KMD) plots

The previous section demonstrated that analysis of LOS structures by tandem MS data alone is challenging and complicated by the lack of software for automated data analysis, thus hindering in-depth characterization of individual LOS molecules. Kendrick mass defect plots were therefore used to streamline analysis of structural variations across the different LOS species. The LOS ions were detected mostly as deprotonated ions with the formula $(M - zH)^{-z}$ along with some minor sodiated clusters with the formula $[M - zH + n (Na - H)]^{-z}$ (n =1, 2 and 3). A highly organized KMD plot was therefore created with [Na-H] base unit of 21.981945 Da [27,28]. In this plot, ions with different number of sodium ions were arranged on the same horizontal line, while ions with different number of phosphate groups were arranged on the same diagonal lines (**Figure 4**). The alignment of sodiated clusters on the same horizontal line allows the visual differentiation between the major unsodiated ions and their sodiated analogues. Thus, it facilitates the identification of structural relationships between the different intense unsodiated LOS ions arranged across the KMD plot.

Moreover, several ion families had similar geometric patterns across the KMD plot; e.g., the ion families annotated as ***1-5*** (**Figure 4B**, in blue) and ***6-10*** (**Figure 4B**, in red). Careful visual inspection of these similar geometric patterns allowed the determination of interesting structural difference and/or relationships between the different LOS ion families. For example, the mass difference between individual ions of the two families **(*1-5*** and ***6-10*)** was a constant of 272.03 Da; thus, the difference between ions ***6*** and ***1*** is the same as the difference between ions ***2*** and ***7***, and so forth. This 272.03 Da difference can be explained by an addition of a single phosphorylated heptose or by addition of one heptose and one phosphate to different positions of the core oligosaccharide. This may indicate that this ion cluster ***(1-5)*** represents a set for structures form a defined biosynthetic modification pathway that created a new ion family ***(6-10)***. An addition of a phosphorylated heptose is more likely in this case, as it was previously described in *E. coli*. [39,40] Briefly, heptosyl transferases (Waac, Waaf and WaaQ) are responsible for addition of heptose sugars, while LOS kinase (WaaP) and LOS phosphatase (WaaY) add phosphate groups to heptoses. [39,40]

Besides the core oligosaccharides structural differences, various degrees of acylation in the lipid A moiety were detected from KMD structural network: hexa-acylated, penta-acylated, tetra-

acylated, and minor tri-acylated LOS ion clusters. It should be noted that tri-acylated LOS species were identified previously in similar LOS mixtures such as the *E. coli* R3 LOS. [4] As an example for the LOS different acylation degree, **Figure S5** shows the difference of 198.16 Da corresponding to C12:0 (182 Da) plus oxygen (16 Da) between ions cluster ***(16-20)*** and ***(21-25)*** representing penta-acylated and hexa-acylated LOS species, respectively.

Additional interesting structural differences (**Figure S6**) were also detected, such as 81.10 Da indicating the replacement of a phosphate group with a glucosamine sugar between ion clusters ***(21-25)*** and ***(31-35)***. Differences in the number of phosphoryl ethanolamine and/or ethanolamine groups were also identified, as there were a few minor ions containing up to three ethanolamine groups. Additional minor differences were acetylation (+42.01 Da) and missing C_2H_4 units of the lipid A (-28.03 Da) indicating the presence of a shorter acyl chain. Moreover, a difference of 42.03 Da was detected between two minor ions, which is likely to be an addition of C_3H_6 (trimethylation), indicating either a longer lipid A acyl chain and/or methylation of the core oligosaccharide. All the structural differences deciphered from the KMD structural network are listed in **Table 1**. The previously described examples demonstrate how the created KMD plot can provide meaningful insights into the structural relationships and/or organization between the different LOS species.

It is important to note that the detailed structural elucidation of a single ion ***24*** (*m/z* 1085.17) by tandem MS allowed prediction of chemical compositions of other 72 LOS ions (**Table S1**) with the help of the KMD structural network as explained previously in detail in the data analysis method (**Section 2.2)**. This clearly shows the usefulness of KMD plots in reducing the number of the challenging tandem mass spectra that need to be interpreted manually. It also assists in proposing possible chemical compositions of low abundant ions (***35-40***, **Figure S7**) that are challenging to characterize by tandem MS. The identified structural differences could be in turn used to characterize mechanisms of LPS/LOS biosynthesis and modification. The detailed knowledge about LPS biosynthesis, modifications, and structural variations will definitely allow the in-depth understanding of the function of the Gram-negative outer membrane. [41]

Lastly, it should be mentioned that the identified 73 LOS ions (**Table S1**) were comprised of 23 hexa-acylated LOS, 15 penta-acylated LOS, 27 tetra-acylated LOS, and 8 tri-acylated LOS. In addition, the corresponding sodiated clusters of each one of these 73 ions (ions arranged on the same horizontal line with the main unsodiated ion, **Figure 4B**) can be also identified bringing up

the total identified chemical compositions to 179 LOS species. Moreover, the relative signal intensity between the most intense ion from each LOS family (annotated in **Figure 4A**) was approximately 12:8:15:1 for hexa-acylated, penta-acylated, tetra-acylated, and tri-acylated LOS, respectively. The comprehensive information provided by the KMD plot about the LOS acylation degree and/or heterogeneity may open a way for understanding the structure-immunoactivity relationship of LOS-based vaccine adjuvants in unprecedented detail.

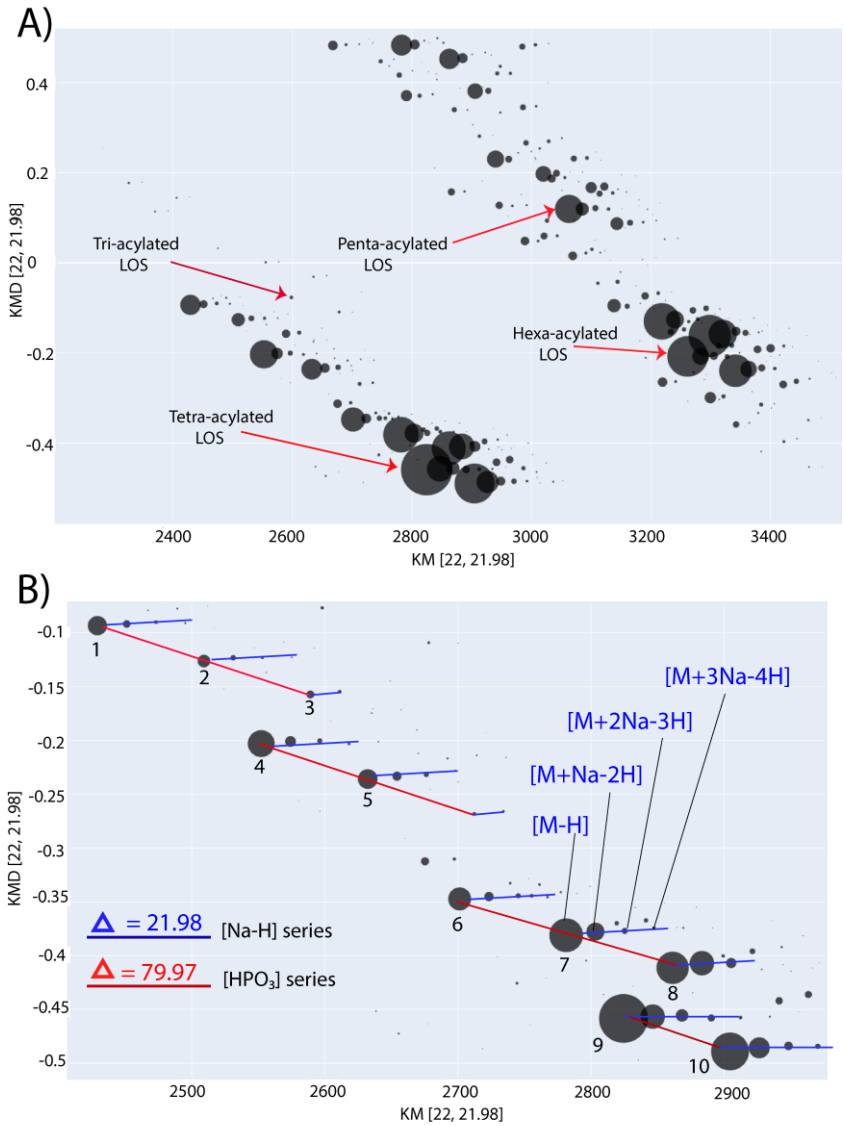


Figure 4: KMD plot of the *E. coli* J5 (Rc mutant LOS) using [Na-H] base unit. **a)** Simplified KMD plot showing LOS families with different acylation degrees in the molecular weight range of 2200-3600 Da and their relative ion intensities. **b)** KMD plot region showing horizontal ion series (blue lines) differ by 21.98 Da [Na-H] while vertical ion series (red lines) differ by 79.97 [HPO3]. Ion clusters **(1-5)** have similar KMD arrangement/geometric pattern as ions cluster **(6-10)** demonstrating a constant structural difference of 272.03 Da corresponding to the combined incorporation of one phosphoate and one heptose.

Table 1: Structural differences deciphered form the KMD plot analysis of the J5 E. coli LOS (Rc mutant). Abbreviations used are Heptose: Hep, Glucosamine: GlcN, phosphate: P, ethanolamine: EN, Oxygen: O, 3-hydroxy-tetradecanoic acid: C14:0(3-OH), dodecanoic acid: C12:0, tetradecanoic acid: C14:0

Structural Difference (Da)	Corresponding structure
41.91	PEN+P-GlcN
42.01	Ac
42.04	C_3H_6
43.03	EN
44.02	CH_2CH_2O
45.84	Hep + P - [C14:0(3-OH)]
73.87	Hep + P - [C12:0 + O]
79.96	P
81.10	GlcN - P
121.87	PEN+ 2P-GlcN
123.00	PEN
157.12	[C14:0]+ C_2H_4 + GlcN- P
164.36	[C14:0] + [C14:0(3-OH)] - Hep- P
198.16	[C12:0 + O]
238.23	[C14:0] + C_2H_4
272.03	Hep + P
307.30	[C14:0(3-OH)] + GlcN - P
353.14	Hep + GlcN
390.55	[C14:0] + [2 x C14:0(3-OH)] - Hep- P
436.40	[C14:0] + [C14:0(3-OH)]
464.42	[C14:0] + [C14:0(3-OH)] + C_2H_4
510.26	[C14:0]+ C_2H_4 + Hep+ P
517.50	[C14:0] + [C14:0(3-OH)] + GlcN - P
662.58	[C14:0] + [2 x C14:0(3-OH)]
708.42	[C14:0] + [C14:0(3-OH)]+ Hep + P
743.68	[C14:0] + [2x C14:0(3-OH)] + GlcN - P
789.52	[C14:0] + [C14:0(3-OH)] + Hep + GlcN

4. Conclusion

We presented for the first time the valuable benefits of using FAIMS rapid gas-phase fractionation and KMD plots in intact LOS characterization. The combined use of ESI-FAIMS-MS/MS and KMD plots allowed the in-depth characterization of the *E. coli* J5 (Rc-mutant) LOS complex mixture. The FAIMS isobaric ion separation facilitated LOS detailed structural elucidation by tandem mass spectrometry. On the other hand, the custom KMD plot using [Na-H] offered a great tool for visualizing the structural relationships between the different LOS species. The ions organized arrangements across the KMD plot along with the detailed tandem MS characterization of one ion allowed the determination 73 unique LOS ion compositions in addition to their sodiated analogues. This approach allowed the development of a list of interesting structural differences that may highlight a biosynthetic step and/or explain the biological activity behind the current and future *E. coli* LOS-based glycoconjugate vaccine adjuvants.

The ESI-FAIMS-MS/MS and KMD plot approach and the data presented here could serve as a foundation stone for creating a library of structural differences for LPS from various bacterial strains. This method may open the road for developing software utilizing the structural differences list revealed by KMD plots for an automated MS data analysis. Future work will focus on the analysis of other rough or smooth type LPS from different bacterial strains. The main target is to develop simple methods and/or structural libraries to facilitate more efficient characterization of LPS complex mixtures.

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