De novo design of a trans-β-N-acetylglucosaminidase activity from a GH1 β-glicosidase by mechanism engineering

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Abstract
Glycoside hydrolases are particularly abundant in all areas of metabolism as they are involved in the degradation of natural polysaccharides and glycoconjugates. These enzymes are classified into 133 families (CAZy server, http://www.cazy.org) in which members of each family have a similar structure and catalytic mechanism. In order to understand better the structure/function relationships of these enzymes and their evolution and to develop new robust evolved glycosidases, we undertook to convert a Family 1 thermostable β-glycosidase into an exo-β-N-acetylglucosaminidase. This latter activity is totally absent in Family 1, while natural β-hexosaminidases belong to CAZy Families 3, 20 and 84. Using molecular modeling, we first showed that the docking of N-acetyl-D-glucosamine in the subsite −1 of the β-glycosidase from Thermus thermophilus (TtβGly) suggested several steric conflicts with active site amino-acids (N163, E338) induced by the N-acetyl group. Both N163A and N163D-E338G mutations induced significant N-acetylglucosaminidase activity in TtβGly. The double mutant N163D-E338G was also active on the bicyclic oxazoline substrate, suggesting that this mutated enzyme uses a catalytic mechanism involving a substrate-assisted catalysis with a noncovalent oxazoline intermediate, similar to the N-acetylglucosaminidases from Families 20 and 84. Furthermore, a very efficient trans-N-acetylglucosaminidase activity was observed when the double mutant was incubated in the presence of NAG-oxazoline as a donor and N-methyl-O-benzyl-N-(β-D-glucopyranosyl)-hydroxylamine as an acceptor. More generally, this work demonstrates that it is possible to exchange the specificities and catalytic mechanisms with minimal changes between phylogenetically distant protein structures.

Key words: β-glycosidase, mechanism engineering, N-acetylglucosaminidase, substrate-assisted catalysis, transglycosidase

Introduction
N-acetyl-hexosamines are found in many natural glycoconjugates such as in oligosaccharides present as glycoproteins or glycolipids at the cell surface (Rich and Withers 2009), in bacterial and fungal cell walls as part of the peptidoglycan (Cheng et al. 2000; Vollmer 2008) or chitin polymers (Ejsink et al. 2010), in blood group antigens (Liu et al. 2007) and in human milk oligosaccharides (Bode and Jantscher-Krenn 2012). Protein O-GlcNAcylation is also an essential reversible post-translational modification in higher eukaryotes, which
is involved in numerous cellular processes such as transcription, cell cycle progression and signal transduction (Hart et al. 2011). Truncated O-glycan chains that expose the terminal GlcNAc residue, identified as Tk antigen, have been identified as carcinoma-associated antigens and as potential targets for immunotherapy (Meichenin et al. 2000). As a result, the biotechnological potential of these molecules is large but currently hampered by the difficulty of their chemical synthesis. One of the enzymatic alternatives consists in using the synthetic properties of glycosidases. These usually catalyze the hydrolysis of glycoside bonds but can also synthesize glycosides, especially through the transglycosylation reaction. Some of them naturally display interesting transfer properties but yields in oligosaccharides remain generally moderate (Ogata et al. 2007; Slámová et al. 2010).

This approach has raised more interest in the development of robust evolved glycosidases that are far more efficient than native ones. We recently applied directed evolution to the β-glycosidase of Thermus thermophilus (TtGly; CAZy GH1 family) (Feng et al. 2005; Koné et al. 2009) and the α-1-fucosidase of Thermotoga maritima (GH29) (Osanjo et al. 2007). The transglycosylation activities of these glycosidases were considerably improved, with yields ranging from 60 to 80% depending on the acceptors. Due to their broad substrate specificity, the mutant transglycosidases from TtGly can efficiently transfer either fucosyl, glucosyl or galactosyl units to the nonreductive end of oligosaccharides. However, TtGly, like all the enzymes belonging to Family 1, does not contain β-N-acetylhexosaminidase activity or the corresponding transglycosylation activity, which prevents its use in the grafting of O-GlcNAc residues. Natural β-hexosaminidases belong to CAZy families GH3, GH20 and GH84, which differ in their catalytic mechanisms (Vocadlo et al. 2000; Vocadlo and Withers, 2005). β-N-acetylglucosaminidases from Family 3 use a catalytic mechanism similar to β-glycosidases from Family 1, which involves the formation and breakdown of a covalent α-glycosyl enzyme intermediate formed on an aspartate residue (Scheme 1A) (Slámová et al. 2010). On the other hand, β-N-acetylglucosaminidases from Families 20 and 84 utilize a substrate-assisted mechanism involving the transient formation of an enzyme-sequenced oxazoline or oxazolinium ion intermediate (Scheme 1B) (Mark et al. 2001; Macauley et al. 2005). However, both mechanisms retain the configuration at the anomeric center.

The aim of this work was to test the possibility of rationally designing an exo-β-N-acetylglucosaminidase activity from TtGly glycosidase from Family 1 in order to understand how the active site residues control the mechanism and the specificity of the reaction and also possibly to use transglycosidase mutants for the synthesis of O-GlcNAc conjugates. The outcome of this work demonstrates that it is possible to evolve a β-glycosidase from Family 1 into functions that are naturally found only in Families 3 and 20, and that the choice of the mutations can dramatically affect the mechanism of hydrolysis. These results are also exploited to design new trans-N-acetylglucosaminidases.

Materials and methods

Strains and plasmids

Ampicillin-resistant (100 µg/mL) Escherichia. coli were selected on Luria-Bertani (LB) agar plates. Expression of the TtGly gene was performed from the pBTac2 vector in the strain DH5α/XL1 of E. coli. The expression plasmid containing the wild-type (WT) TtGly gene (1.3 kb), under the control of the Ptac promoter and between the restriction sites EcoRI and PstI, was termed pBBGly.

Site-directed mutagenesis

β-glycosidase mutants were obtained by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) with overlapping extension. Primers D (5′-CAATTATCAT CGGCTCG) and F (5′-AATCTTCTTCTCATCGGCC) flank the gene before the Ptac promoter and after the PstI restriction site. Twenty pmol of D or F primer was mixed with 20 pmol of mutagenic primers, 10 ng of plasmid pBBGly (with or without mutations N163A, N163D or E338G) in a 50-µL PCR. The reaction conditions were: 1X Dynazyme buffer, 0.2 mmol/L of each dNTP and 1.5 mmol/L MgCl2 and 2.5 U of polymerase Dynazyme Ext (Finnzymes). The sequences of mutagenic primers were the following: N163A1 (5′-TGCCACCCCTGCGCCGA GCCCTGGTG) and N163A2 (5′-CACGAGGCTGCGCCAGGG

Scheme 1. The two different catalytic mechanisms for β-N-acetylhexosaminidases. (A) double displacement mechanism used by GH Family 3 and (B) substrate-assisted mechanism of GH Families 20 and 84.
TGGCGA) for the creation of the N163A mutation. The reaction was thermocycled as follows: One cycle at 96°C, 5 min, then 30 cycles at 96°C, 30 s; 55°C, 30 s; 72°C, 5 min. Mutagenized PCR products were digested by the EcoRI and PstI restriction enzymes and cloned back into the pBTac2 vector digested by the same enzymes. The 1.3 kb DNA fragments encoding for mutant TtβGly enzymes were sequenced in both forward and reverse directions.

Random mutagenesis

Random mutations were introduced by error-prone PCR (EPP) (Leung et al. 1989), 20 pmol of primers D and F was mixed with 10 ng of plasmid in a 50-μL PCR. The reaction conditions were as follows: 1X DNAzyme buffer, 10 mmol dATP and dGTP, 50 mmol dTPP and dCTP, 350 mmol MgCl₂, 5 mmol MnCl₂ and 1 unit of polymerase DNAzyme Ext (Finnzymes). The reaction was thermocycled as follows: One cycle at 96°C, 5 min, then 30 cycles at 96°C, 30 s, 50°C, 30 s; 72°C, 2 min 30 s, 70°C, 5 min. Mutagenized PCR products were digested by EcoRI and HindIII restriction enzymes and cloned back into the pBTac2 vector. The plasmids EPP pECTorAN163A and EPP pECTorAN163E relative to families GH84 and GH20. For GH84, only one complex with NGT ligand was solved (PDB code 2CHN) involving a bacterial enzyme (Dennis et al. 2006). Among several enzymes of the GH20 family, that of Streptococcus gordoni (PDB code 2EPN) was selected due to its best resolution (1.61 Å) (Langley et al. 2008).

For tridimensional (3D) structure superimpositions, the topological comparison between structures belonging to different glycoside hydrolases (GH) families is difficult when focusing on a very specific region (here, the available room delimiting the [-1] subsite). Furthermore, in the present case, although they share the same ([βα]3) folding, they do not belong to the same clans according to CAZy classification (GH-A, GH-K and alone for GH1, GH20 and GH84, respectively). As suspected, preliminary superimpositions performed on inner β-sheets gave acceptable overall shape comparisons but incorrect 3D analyses at the subsite level. Finally, taking advantage of the inherent rigidity of the NGT inhibitor (verified in all X-ray structures where this molecule is present), the enzyme superimpositions were simply performed by pair-fitting of heavy atoms of the bicyclic structure, concerning experimental structures (2CHN, 2EPN) and a modeled one (1 double mutant of 1UG6) as well. This pair-fitting protocol is an option of the PyMOL graphic software used for molecular representation (The PyMOL Molecular Graphics System, Version 1.5.0.4 Schrödinger, LLC).

Purification of WT and mutant enzymes

Recombinant strains expressing the TtβGly mutant genes were grown in 1 L of LB medium at 37°C overnight, centrifuged and resuspended in 20 mL of lysis buffer (50 mM phosphate, 0.3 M NaCl, 10 mM imidazole, pH 8). After sonication, extracts were heated for 20 min at 70°C to precipitate most of the host proteins and centrifuged. Then the 6-His-tagged proteins were purified by immobilized ion metal-affinity chromatography; 2 L of Ni-NTA Superflow (Qiagen France, F-91974 Courtaboeuf, France) was added to the supernatant and stirred for 1 h at 4°C, then loaded onto a 10-μL column. The column was washed using 2.5 mL of washing buffer (50 mM phosphate, 0.3 M NaCl, 25 mM imidazole, pH 8), then 5 mL of elution buffer was added (50 mM phosphate, 0.3 M NaCl, 250 mM imidazole, pH 8). The purity of the protein (85–95%) was checked by sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis and protein chip (Agilent).

Molecular modeling

For the enzyme, the highly resolved structure of the native TtβGly [PDB (Protein Data Bank, http://www.rcsb.org) code 1UG6] was used. Due to the absence of any sugar substrate in its catalytic site, the structure of the covalent intermediate between the β-glucosidase of Bacillus polymyxa and β-D-glucopyranosyl fluoride (PDB code 1E41) was used as a starting template to locate any pyranose ring in the buried subsite [-1] because of the high similarity of these two enzymes at the catalytic core. This in silico replacement protocol, already described in a previous paper (Feng et al. 2005), was used here to locate NAG-thiazoline (PDB ligand code NGT), a perfect structural analog of NAG-oxazoline. As inhibitor alone, NAG-thiazoline was found in only nine structures in complex with enzymes. Due to the very rigid bicyclic skeleton, any Cartesian coordinates can be used for in silico substrate replacement on TtβGly.

For the sake of topological comparisons between the modified catalytic context of 1UG6 (GH1) and that of other β-glucosaminidases having O-GlcNAcase activity, two structures were selected belonging to families GH84 and GH20. For GH84, only one complex with NGT ligand was solved (PDB code 2CHN) involving a bacterial enzyme (Dennis et al. 2006). Among several enzymes of the GH20 family, that of Streptococcus gordoni (PDB code 2EPN) was selected due to its best resolution (1.61 Å) (Langley et al. 2008).

NAG-oxazoline synthesis

A mixture of N-acetyl-D-glucosamine (1 g, 4.52 mmol), Ac₂O (9 mL) and pyridine (4.5 mL) was stirred at r.t. for 22 h. After diluting with CH₂Cl₂ (20 mL), the resulting soln. was washed successively with sat. aq. Na₂CO₃ soln. (2 × 10 mL), H₂O, then the organic layer was dried (MgSO₄) and evaporated. Crude glucosamine peracetae was used for the experiment without further purification. To a soln. of glucosamine peracetae (920 mg, 2.35 mmol) in 1,2-dichloroethane (30 mL), trimethylsilyl trifluoromethanesulfonate (0.5 mL, 2.76 mmol) was added dropwise, and the mixture was heated at 50° for 5 h. (CH₃)₂N⁺ (1 mL) was added and the mixture stirred for 10 min. After diluting with CH₂Cl₂ (30 mL), the mixture was washed with cold H₂O, the organic layer dried (MgSO₄) and evaporated, and the residue submitted to column chromatography (Merck silica gel 60 (0.0040–0.0063 mm), 1% Et₃N in ethyl acetate/petroleum ether 9/1) to obtain 763 mg of 2-methyl-1,2-dideoxy-3,4,6-tri-O-acetyl-D-glucopyranosyl (2,1-d)-oxazoline as a white solid (yield 75%). To a soln. of this oxazole derivative (160 mg, 0.49 mmol) in CH₃OH (5 mL) was added a solution of 5.3 M NaOCH₃ in CH₃OH (9 mL at 0°), and the mixture was stirred for 1 h. After the reaction had finished (1 h), the solvent was evaporated (quart). The white solid obtained was dissolved in borax buffer (50 mM, pH 9.3) and stored as aliquots of 25 mL at −80°. ¹H-nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) (D₂O, 400 MHz) δH 2.05 (d, 3H, J = 0.87 Hz, CH₃); 3.38 (dd, 1H, J = 10.02, 6.46 and 2.86 Hz, H₂; 3.60 (dd, 1H, J = 10.02 and 6.00 Hz, H₂), 3.67 (dd, 1H, J = 12.00 and 4.64 Hz, H₄); 3.81 (dd, 1H, J = 6.00 and 5.1 Hz, H₃); 3.98 (dd, 1H, J = 12.00 and 2.86 Hz, H₃a); 4.13 (m, 1H, H₃b); 6.08 (d, 1H, J = 7.6 Hz, H₁); ¹C-NMR (D₂O, 100 MHz) δC 14.01 (CH₃), 63.34 (C₆), 65.01 (C₄), 67.57 (C₂), 68.41 (C₃), 70.42 (C₄), 99.41 (C₅), 169.70 (CN).
Kinetic studies

All kinetic studies were performed with a (Tecan France S.A.S.U., Lyon, France) or Labsystem microlate reader at 40°C in phosphate buffer saline 1×. Initial reaction rates were calculated from the slope of the zero-order plot of product concentration (pNP) against reaction time, then the initial rates of reaction were plotted against substrate concentration and the resulting curves were fitted to the hyperbolic equation \( v = \frac{V_{\text{max}}[S]}{K_M + [S]} \) using Origin 7.0 (OriginLab) to obtain the \( V_{\text{max}} \) and \( K_M \) parameters. When initial rates did not exhibit saturation behavior at high substrate concentration, only \( k_{\text{cat}}/K_M \) (referred also as the catalytic efficiency) were determined. The \( k_{\text{cat}}/K_M \) parameter was evaluated at low substrate concentrations, when reaction rate can be approximate to the equation: \( v = \frac{k_{\text{cat}}[S][E]}{K_M + [S]} \). \( k_{\text{cat}}/K_M \) is then an apparent second order kinetic constant, which is determined by the initial slope of the curve \( V/E = f([S]) \).

Capillary electrophoresis measurements

Kinetics of NAG-oxazoline hydrolysis and transglycosylation activities with NAG-oxazoline as donor and N-methyl-O-benzyl-N-\((β-D\)-glucopyranosyl\()-)-hydroxylamine as acceptor were determined by capillary electrophoresis (Beckman PACE MDQ, Beckman Coulter, France with an uncoated fused silica capillary, 50 cm in length and 75 μm in diameter) (Teze et al. 2013). Typical experimental conditions were: 100 μL of medium containing 10 mM of 4-acetamidophenol (used as an internal standard), 30 mM NAG-oxazoline, 16 mM BnON(Me)-Glc and 100 μg of enzyme, which were incubated at 40°C in 50 mM 4-(2-hydroxyethyl)-1-piperazineethanesulfonic acid (HEPES) buffer at pH 7.8 in the capillary electrophoresis apparatus and analyzed every 20 min for 5 h. Separations were performed at 30 kV with 20 mM Borax pH 9.3 containing 50 mM sodium dodecyl sulfate as running buffer. Donors, acceptors and products were detected by ultra-violet (UV) absorbance at 200 nm and quantified by comparison with 4-acetamidophenol as internal standard.

Transglycosylation product analysis

After the enzymatic reaction had finished, the crude product was purified by reverse phase high-pressure liquid chromatography on a C18 Nucleosil VP250/10 (Macherey-Nagel, France) (300 A, 5 μm, 10 × 250 mm) column, at a flow rate of 2.5 mL min⁻¹, with Evaporating Light Scattering Detector (Sedex 75, Sedere, France) and UV (215nm) detection. Gradient: 0% B for 5 min, 0–80% B over 25 min or 0% B for 5 min, 0–50% B over 20 min, 50% B for 10 min, respectively. Solvent system A: H₂O; solvent system B: MeOH. Analysis of the ¹H and ¹³C-NMR resonances and subsequent structure assignments were carried out using standard 2D sequences (Correlated Spectroscopy and Heteronuclear Multiple-Quantum Correlation). The spectra were recorded with a Bruker AX400 spectrometer operating at 400 MHz for ¹H and at 100.6 MHz for ¹³C. Due to their solubility, the spectra of the saccharides were recorded in D₂O or MeOD and the chemical shifts (in ppm) were quoted from the resonance of methyl 3-(trimethylsilyl)-propansulfonate (DSS), which was used as an internal reference. Mass measurements were performed on an electrospray ionization (ESI)-Q-time-of-flight (TOF) using a quadrupole-TOF hybrid mass spectrometer (Micromass Q-TOF Ultima Global mass spectrometer, Micromass Ltd., Manchester, UK). Samples were diluted in MeOH to obtain a satisfactory intensity without signal saturation. Samples were introduced at 5 μL/min and one minute of acquisition was summed to produce the presented spectra. Nitrogen was used as sheath gas (150 L/h). The MS analyses were carried out using a typical needle voltage of 3 kV and a heated capillary temperature of 150°C. The instrument was calibrated using MS/MS fragments of a commercial xyloglucan infused at 5 μg/mL.

After purification, the product (N-methyl-O-benzyl-N-\((β-2-O-\)N-acetylglucopyranosyl(1→3)-β-D-glucopyranosyl)hydroxylamine) was freeze-dried and analyzed by NMR. ¹H-NMR (MeOD, 400 MHz) δH 1.92 (s, 3H, CH₃) 2.65 (s, 3H, 3H-acetate) 3.12–3.30 (m, 4H, H₄, H₆, H₈, H₁₀) 3.36–3.47 (m, 3H, H₃, H₅, H₇) 3.54–3.61 (m, 3H, H₂, H₄, H₅) 3.77 (dd, 1H, J = 12.08 and 2.16 Hz H₆α) 3.79 (dd, 1H, J = 12.04 and 1.96 Hz H₆β) 3.97 (d, 1H, J = 8.7 Hz, H₈) 4.64 (d, 1H, J = 8.4 Hz, H₇) 4.70 (m, 2H, 2 H₂) 7.19–7.29 (m, 5H, 5 H₃α). ¹³C-NMR (MeOD, 100 MHz) δC 23.16 (CH₃) 39.19 (C₃) 57.98 (C₄) 62.68 (C₅) 62.77 (C₆) 69.73 (C₇) 71.48 (C₈) 72.14 (C₉) 76.09 (C₁₀) 76.61 (C₁) 78.11 (C₁₀) 79.28 (C₄) 88.26 (C₂) 95.42 (C₁) 103.41 (C₁) 129.30 129.48 130.31 (SCar) 138.17 (C₁) 174.43 (CN). High-resolution-ESI-MS m/z Calcd for C₂₂H₃₄N₂O₁₁ [M + H]+ 525.2060, found 525.2052.

Results

Molecular modeling of pNPGlcNAc and NAG-oxazoline in the –1 site of TtGly

The substrate specificity of TtGly is quite broad since this enzyme is able to hydrolyze various β-glycosides such as β-glucosides, β-fucosides and β-galactosides (Dion et al. 1999). However, it cannot hydrolyze β-N-acetyl-glycosides such as pNPgKNAc. This property seems to be shared by all glycoside hydrolases of family GH1 (CAZY) (Lombard et al. 2014). Natural exo-N-acetylxoxaminidases are found rather in GH Families 3, 20 and 84, which have the same overall fold (βα₆) as the glycoside hydrolases from Family 1, but belong to different clans. The structural feature that prevents GH enzymes from hydrolyzing N-acetylgalactosamine conjugates is basically the inappropriate room available in the subsite –1 as revealed by the in silico NAG-thiazoline and β-GlcNAc replacement (docking protocol described in the “Materials and methods” section). In the first case, docking revealed a strong steric conflict with Glu338 and, to a much lesser extent, with Asn282 and Asn163 within the active site (Figure 1A). In the second case, the most severe steric conflict was due to Asn163 (Figure 1B).

The N-acetylxoxaminidases from Families 20 and 84 carry out hydrolysis using a substrate-assisted catalysis, which goes through a NAG-oxazolinium ion intermediate (Williams et al. 2002; Macauley et al. 2003). As a result, NAG-oxazoline is a good mimic of this intermediate. Docking the TtGly active site with NAG-oxazoline showed that binding within the –1 site was only possible with the E338G mutant and not with the N163A mutant. On the other hand, the N163A mutation allowed β-GlcNAc docking. Such steric hindrance may explain why N-acetylglycosides are not substrates for this enzyme.

Furthermore, multiple sequence alignment within Family 20 and 84 hexoxaminidases has revealed that the acid/base catalytic residue (E in Family 20 and D in Family 84) is always preceded in the sequence by an aspartate, which is involved in hydrogen bonding of the NAG-oxazolinum intermediate (Williams et al. 2002; Getinbas et al. 2006). These Asp-Glu or Asp-Asp pairs provide sequence signatures of substrate-assisted catalysis within Families 20 and 84. In Family 1 glycoside hydrolases, the residue that precedes the acid–base catalytic residue is an Asn that, interestingly, corresponds to N163 in TtGly. It was thus tempting to postulate that N163D mutation could restore an active site in the E338G mutant similar to that of GH Family 20. Topological comparisons (Figure 2) between enzymes of families GH1, GH20 and GH84 with modeled or experimentally observed
NAG-thiazoline (E338G mutant of 1UG6, 2EPN and 2CHN, respectively) gave relevant similarities in terms of \(-1\) subsite cavity shapes and functionally equivalent residues, as summarized in Table I. Remarkably, these residues do not necessarily have the same topological locations, which explains why in this case, the local superimposition is much more appropriate than the overall one as would suggest any sequence alignment. For instance, E392 (1UG6), D376 (2EPN) and D344 (2CHN) (Table I) run on from beta sheets 8, 8 and 7 (for GH1, GH20 and GH84, respectively) although they are involved in substrate stabilization (hydrogen bonding of both O4 and O6 atoms of the substrate).

Analysis of the hydrolytic properties of TtβGly mutants

The mutations suggested by molecular modeling, N163A and N163D-E338G, were incorporated into the gene of TtβGly. After expression in E. coli, purified mutant enzymes were then tested for the hydrolysis of pNPGlcNAc and pNPGl in 100 mM phosphate buffer pH 7.0 (Table II). While WT enzyme exhibited no detectable hydrolytic activity on pNPGlcNAc, both N163A and N163D-E338G mutants gave rise to a low but significant activity toward this substrate. Saturation kinetics were not observed for these mutants since substrate saturation was prevented by the low solubility of pNPGlcNAc, and only \(k_{cat}/K_m\) parameters were determined (Table II). The appearance of a β-N-
acetylglucosaminidase activity in N163A or N163D-E338G mutants was correlated with a strong decrease in the glucosidase activity. Specificity constants $k_{\text{cat}}/K_m$ for pNP\textsubscript{Glc} showed a 190-fold and 2.2 x 10\textsuperscript{4}-fold reduction for N163A and N163D-E338G mutants, respectively. In comparison, the double mutant N163A-E338G lost both β-glucosidase and β-N-acetylglucosaminidase activities.

In order to improve the β-N-acetylglucosaminidase activity of the N163A and N163D-E338G mutants, one cycle of directed evolution was carried out by error-prone PCR. To facilitate the screening of the N-acetylglucosaminidase activity directly on colonies, the mutant enzymes were expressed in the periplasmic space using the TAT secretion system. The chromogenic X-Glc\textsubscript{NAc} substrate is not internalized in the E. coli cytoplasm but can diffuse within the periplasm, so that hydrolysis can be detected directly on colonies if the mutant enzymes are present in this compartment. No improved enzymes were detected from a library (≈60000 clones) derived from the N163A mutant, and only one improved mutant was identified from the error-prone library derived from the double N163D-E338G mutant. Gene sequencing revealed that two additional mutations (A211T/I216T) were present, which slightly increased (3-fold) the $k_{\text{cat}}/K_m$ compared with the original double mutant. However, the β-glucosidase specificity constant also increased in this evolved mutant, which resulted in a promiscuous enzyme with similar catalytic activity toward pNP\textsubscript{Glc} and pNP\textsubscript{Glc\textsubscript{NAc}}.

**NAG-oxazoline hydrolytic properties of TtβGly mutants**

β-N-acetylglucosaminidases from Families 20 and 84 use a catalytic mechanism involving a substrate-assisted catalysis, which goes through a noncovalent bicyclic oxazoline intermediate (Scheme 1), which can be easily synthesized (Shoda et al. 2002). We anticipated that if one of the TtβGly mutants with β-N-acetylglucosaminidase activity uses a substrate-assisted catalytic mechanism, it could also catalyze NAG-oxazoline hydrolysis.

NAG-oxazoline is rapidly hydrolyzed to Glc\textsubscript{NAc} at acidic pH, but hydrolyzes slowly at basic pH. Kinetics of NAG-oxazoline hydrolysis were carried out at pH 7.8, where the enzyme retains most of its activity, while spontaneous hydrolysis of NAG-oxazoline is slow ($t_{1/2} = 15$ h at 30°C) (Figure 2). When the N163A mutant was added to the NAG-oxazoline solution (50 mM), no significant change in the rate of hydrolysis was observed compared with the background reaction.
(Figure 3). In contrast, the double mutant N163D-E338G significantly increased the rate of NAG-oxazoline hydrolysis, demonstrating that this compound is a substrate for this mutant. As no saturation was observed up to 30 mM substrate concentration, only $k_{cat}/K_m$ was determined ($6.2 \pm 0.5 \times 10^{-4}$ mM$^{-1}$ s$^{-1}$). These results suggest that the double mutant N163D-E338G enzymatically involves a substrate-assisted catalysis. On the contrary, as the N163A mutant did not catalyze the hydrolysis of NAG-oxazoline and the E338 nucleophile was not mutated, this suggests that this mutant utilizes the double inversion mechanism with the formation of a covalent intermediate.

Transglycosidase activity of the N163D-E338G mutant

The ability of several transglycosylating endo-N-acetylgalactosaminidases to catalyze the efficient transfer of sugar oxazolines to various acceptors (Ochiai et al. 2009; Rich and Withers 2009; Parsons et al. 2010) prompted us to test the transglycosylation activity of the N163D-E338G mutant. The enzymatic reaction was performed using NAG-oxazoline as a donor and N-methyl-O-benzyl-N-(β-D-glucopyranosyl)-hydroxylamine as an acceptor. This glucoconjugate has previously been identified as a good transglycosylation acceptor for TtGly (Teze et al. 2013). A small excess of NAG-oxazoline donor (molar ratio of donor-acceptor, 1:2:1) was chosen to compensate for the hydrolysis (enzymatic and nonenzymatic) of the sugar oxazoline during the time scale of the experiment. The reaction was monitored by capillary electrophoresis until near complete consumption of substrates (Figure 4). We observed an almost complete consumption (>90%) of the acceptor to a single transglycosylation product, which was identified by NMR after purification as N-methyl-O-benzyl-N-(β-D-glucopyranosyl)(1→3)-β-D-glucopyranosylhydroxylamine (Scheme 2). Such a high yield of transglycosylation was possible since no self-condensation of NAG-oxazoline was observed and no hydrolysis of the transglycosylation product was detected during long-term incubation. The excess of oxazoline was converted into GlcNAc by either spontaneous or enzymatic hydrolysis.

In contrast, a similar reaction tested with the N163A mutant gave no transglycosylation product and resulted in the complete conversion of NAG-oxazoline into GlcNAc (data not shown).

### Discussion

This work shows that a rational approach based on molecular modeling was successful in broadening the substrate specificity of a Family 1 glycosidase. This is the first time that an N-acetylgalactosaminidase activity has been created from a GH1 glycosidase. Furthermore, the results suggest that the catalytic mechanism can be controlled depending on the mutations within the active site.

Based on molecular modeling, the single N163A mutation solved part of the steric conflict between the 2-acetamido group of GlcNAc derivatives and resulted in an enzyme that showed a new hydrolytic activity on pNPGlcNAc, but not on NAG-oxazoline. Furthermore, this mutant is devoid of transglycosylation activity with NAG-oxazoline as a donor. Taken together, these results suggest that this new N-acetylgalactosaminidase activity operates via a double displacement mechanism with a covalent glycosyl-enzyme intermediate, like N-acetylgalactosaminidases belonging to GH3. Accordingly, additional mutations of the nucleophilic glutamate residue (E338) into a glycine resulted in a complete loss of enzymatic activity.

From this inactive double mutant (N163A-E338G), a significant N-acetylgalactosaminidase activity was restored by replacing the N163A mutation by a N163D mutation, while this double mutant had lost the nucleophilic residue. This mutation was suggested by the sequence signature of β-N-acetylgalactosaminidases belonging to GH20 and GH84 families, in which the two carboxylic active site residues are adjacent in the protein sequence (Asp-Glu in Family 20 and Asp-Asp in Family 84). The first Asp residue is thought to form a hydrogen bond with the nitrogen of the oxazoline ring, which stabilizes the intermediate oxazoline ring in the substrate-assisted mechanism (Scheme 1). The second carboxylic acts as a general acid–base catalytic residue. We expected that, by introducing this particular tandem Asp-Glu sequence within the active site of TtGly, we could generate β-N-acetylgalactosaminidase activity. Indeed, the N163D-E338G TtGly mutant, which possesses a tandem Asp163/Glu164 pair, exhibited β-N-acetylgalactosaminidase and trans-β-N-acetylgalactosaminidase activities. The mechanism by which this new activity appeared is likely to be a substrate-assisted one since first, this mutant accelerated the hydrolysis of NAG-oxazoline and secondly, NAG-oxazoline is a good donor for the transglycosylation reaction.

Interestingly, the transglycosidase activity of the N163D-E338G TtGly mutant was much higher than its hydrolytic activity, which resulted in a mutant enzyme that could synthesize β-GlcNAc derivatives at high yield (>90%). Until now, such a high yield of conversion from oligosaccharide-oxazoline derivatives has only been observed with endo-β-N-acetylgalactosaminidases from Families 18, 36 and 85 (Shoda et al. 2002; Ochiai et al. 2009; Parsons et al. 2010). We recently demonstrated that the mutation of highly conserved residues within the −1 site of glycosidases decreases dramatically their hydrolytic activity, while their transglycosidase activity is less affected (Teze et al. 2014). The present results also confirm this observation.

Attempts to improve the β-N-acetylgalactosaminidase activity of the TtGly mutants by directed evolution resulted in a modest improvement in the hydrolytic activity of the N163D-E338G double mutant with the addition of two new mutations A211T and E216T. These mutations are not in direct contact with the active site residues, so it is difficult to explain their effect. Furthermore, these four mutations improved in a similar ratio (∼3-fold) the glucosidase activity and the
β-N-acetylglucosaminidase activity. Examples of native enzymes presenting both these activities are quite rare. To our knowledge, only the glycosidase Nag3 belonging to the family GH3 can cleave pNPGlc and pNP-GlcNac with a similar efficiency (Mayer et al. 2006). The residual glucose activity with mutants that are thought to use the substrate-assisted mechanism is surprising. One possible explanation is that the N163D mutation could replace with low efficiency the nucleophile residue absent with the E338G mutation.

**Conclusion**

We have demonstrated that a limited number of active site mutations within a β-glycosidase from Family 1 can change both the specificity of the enzyme and its mechanism of action so that we were able to induce a β-N-acetylglucosaminidase activity, which is normally found in Families 3, 20 and 84. All these glycosidase families are supported by a similar (βα)4 fold and these results suggest that an ancestral promiscuous enzyme with both activities could have easily evolved toward one of these activities with a few occasional mutations.

Regarding the synthetic application of these mutants, we have demonstrated that this rational approach to designing β-N-acetylglucosaminidases provided enzymes with high transglycosidase activity with NAG-oxazoline as donor and low hydrolytic activity, which gave a high yield of transglycosylation product. These trans-β-N-acetylglucosaminidases may find useful applications in the synthesis of O-GlcNAc derivatives.

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**Conflict of interest**

None declared.

**Abbreviations**

EFP, error-prone PCR; ESL, electrospay ionization; GH, glycoside hydrolases; HEPES, 4-(2-hydroxyethyl)-1-piperazinethanesulfonic acid; IPTG, isopropylthiogalactoside; LB, Luria-Bertani; NAG-oxazoline: 2-methyl-(1,2-dideoxy-α-D-glucopyranosyl) [2,1-d]-oxazoline; NGT: NAG-thiazoline; NMR, nuclear magnetic resonance; PCR, polymerase chain reaction; PDB, protein data bank; pNP, product concentration; TAT, Twin Arginine translocation; TrifGly, Thermus thermophilus; UV, ultra-violet; WT, wild-type; X-GlcNAc, β-D-N-acetylglucosamine002E; 3D, tridimensional.

**References**


