A modified sensitive palladium-copper oxide and multiwalled carbon nanotubes electrochemical sensor for detection of ametridione pesticide

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How to Cite
Bebi, V. et al. (2021). A modified sensitive palladium-copper oxide and multiwalled carbon nanotubes electrochemical sensor for detection of ametridione pesticide. Journal of Applied and Natural Science, 13(3), 798 - 806. https://doi.org/10.31018/jans.v13i3.2531

Abstract
A glassy carbon electrode modified with sensitive palladium-copper oxide and multi-walled carbon nanotubes (Pd-CuO/MWCNTs) electrochemical nanosensor was used to detect ametridione pesticide in water samples. The morphological characteristics of Pd-CuO/MWCNTs were examined by Scanning electron microscope (SEM) and Energy dispersive x-ray analysis (EDX). The ametridione pesticide under voltammetric investigation involves irreversible, four electron (4e) reduction, based on the protonation of the two carbonyl groups (>C=O). The voltammetric method was applied to detect ametridione in Britton-Robinson (BR) buffer solution at pH 5.0 as a supporting electrolyte. The limits of detection, quantification and concentration ranges of the proposed method were 0.0796 μg·mL⁻¹ (signal/noise=3), 0.5560 μg·mL⁻¹ and 0.1 to 10.0 μg·mL⁻¹, respectively. The electrochemical sensor was successfully applied to detect ametridione in tap, agricultural run-off and river water samples showing >98% mean recoveries.

Keywords: Ametridione, CuO, Morphology, Pesticide, Sensor

INTRODUCTION
Ametridione, 1-amino-3-(2,2- dimethylpropyl)-6-(ethylthio)-1,3,5-triazine-2,4(1H,3H)-dione is a triazinone group of herbicides class (Forouzesh et al., 2015). Herbicides are the fastest-growing classes of agricultural chemicals that are extensively used throughout the world, owing to their high toxicity to pests (Beckie et al., 2006; Legere et al., 200). The use of these herbicides in agriculture leads to numerous benefits in production and an increase of quality (Sephenson et al., 1990). However, due to intense usage, there is a possibility of leakage of these toxic compounds into the environment through water and/ or soil (Rich et al., 2012). The residue of the herbicides long time exists in the environment and can generate pollution problems and potential hazards in human beings and animals (Selim et al., 2003; Rayburn et al., 2005). However, the promiscu-
ometric analysis reveals residues of such pesticides in natural water and in foodstuffs (Kniis, 2017). Hence, rapid, reliable and inexpensive pesticide sensing becomes essential for public health protection in environmental monitoring. Electrochemical analysis of pesticides offers simple, rapid and cost-effective methods with a little sample pre-treatment steps (Pourakbari et al., 2020; Costa et al., 2017).

Among electroanalytical techniques, electrical conductivity is a determining factor in the choice of electrode material (Koksoy et al., 2021; Gonçalves-Filho et al., 2020; Thiago et al., 2020). For more than a decade, the use of modified glassy carbon electrodes has been reported to be a good alternative when compared to other working electrodes for electro-analysis of organic and inorganic compounds (Baghayeri et al., 2021; Vieira da Silva et al., 2021; Bhvimane et al., 2019). Hence, there is a wide variety of modified electrodes developed for the determination of pesticides such as polyaniline modified glassy carbon electrodes, nano titanium dioxide polymer film modified GCE and poly (4-aminoo 3-hydroxy naphthalene sulphon acid) modified GCE and nano TiO2/Nafion composite etc., (Khadem et al., 2020; Ha et al., 2013; Jian-Chun et al., 2011; Gamze et al., 1997; Dan et al., 2010; Esmail et al., 2020; Ben Ali Hassine et al., 2018). So, to improve the analytical figures of merit, there exists a need for highly sensitive sensors for early detection and accurate determination of ametridione pesticide in water samples. Accordingly, there are no electro-analytical reports concerning the determination of ametridione pesticide using Pd-CuO/MWCNTs modified glassy carbon electrode. The electrochemical characteristics of Pd-CuO/MWCNTs were thoroughly examined by cyclic and differential pulse voltammetry to elucidate the electro-catalytic ability of the modified glassy carbon electrode.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Apparatus
Motrohm Autolab B.V. Netherlands provided the Autolab PG STAT 101 for electrochemical measurements. The working electrode was a three-electrode setup that included a modified glassy carbon electrode. The reference electrode was saturated Ag/AgCl/KCl, while the counter electrode was Pt wire. The electrode surface morphology was carried out using a scanning electron microscope (SEM) of OXFORD INCA PANTA FET X3 CARL ZEISS from Japan. The pH meter model ELICO LI-120, supplied by ELICO Ltd. Hyderabad, India, was used to determine the pH of the buffer solution.

Reagents and solutions
All the reagents of analytical grade or HPLC grade used in the present work were obtained from Merck Chemicals Ltd. Ametridione (99 %) (Fig. 1.) was purchased from Siddarth Inc. Hyderabad, India. MWCNTs (i.d.*length 2-15 nm×1-10 µm) purchased from DropSens. Pesticide stock solutions (1000 ppm) and subsequent dilutions were made with ultrapure water on a regular basis and kept in the refrigerator. Britton-Robinson (BR) buffer solution (acetic, boric and phosphoric acids) was made according to the literature (Costa et al., 2017), and the pH values were adjusted (fm 2.0 to 12.0) by adding appropriate amounts of 1.0 mol L\(^{-1}\) NaOH solution, and were employed as supporting electrolyte. All solutions were prepared by using ultra-purified water from a Millipore Milli-Q system (18.2 MΩ cm\(^{-1}\)). All electrochemical experiments were performed at room temperature (25 ± 1 °C).

Sample collection and preparation of water samples
River water samples were collected in the Swarnamukhi River at a depth of water 45 cm, as well as agricultural run-off and tap water samples from randomly selected locations in the Srikalahasti rural area, Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh. Water samples were collected in the amber glass flasks, acidified with 0.5 mol L\(^{-1}\) H\(_2\)SO\(_4\), and filtered through a 0.45 µm membrane. Aliquots of standard herbicide solution prepared in acetonitrile were solubilised directly in the water samples at two concentration levels (10 and 25 µg·mL\(^{-1}\)) and these spiked samples were stored in the refrigerator. Before this analysis, the spiked samples were filtered through a 0.45 µm membrane and the pH of samples was adjusted to 5.0 and the samples were subjected to the voltammetric analysis without any pre-treatment step.

Preparation of Pd-CuO and Pd-CuO/MWCNTs
For the production of Palladium, CuO and palladium supported CuO nanoparticles Theobroma cacao L. seeds extract was used as both reducing and stabilising agent, and the nanocomposites were biosynthesised according to the literature approach (Nasrollahzad et al., 2016). For the synthesis of Pd, CuO and Pd/CuO nanocomposite, there is no surfactant, capping agent and template were utilised in this approach.

Prior to preparing Pd-CuO/MWCNTs nanocomposite, the MWCNTs were first oxidised in a 40 mL acidic combination of H\(_2\)SO\(_4\)/H\(_2\)NO\(_3\) with a 3:1 ratio, then ultrasonicated for 5 hours. The oxidized MWCNTs were filtered and washed several times with ultra-pure water to eliminate the acidic contents, and then vacuum dried at 80 °C overnight. After that, the dried oxidized MWCNTs and Pd-CuO were sonicated for 30 min in acetone. The freshly generated Pd-CuO/MWCNTs nanocomposites were filtered and dried at 80 °C for 1 h. in a vacuum oven, then heated at 1°C/min to at 200°C in an oven. For comparison, Pd and CuO supported MWCNTs nanocomposites were also synthesized.
Preparation of Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE

The GCE was first cleaned using 0.3 µm alumina powder using a BAS polishing kit followed by an ultrasonic bath in ethanol for 10 min. 10 mg of Pd-CuO/MWCNTs nanocomposites was ultrasonicated in 10 mL acetone and 10 µL of Pd-CuO/MWCNTs was then dropped on the surface of cleaned GCE and dried under the lamp for 30 minutes and rinsed in ultra-pure water several times. A similar procedure was repeated to modify the GCE with Pd, CuO and MWCNTs sensor for the electrocatalytic reduction of pesticide. Modified GCE was washed with ultrapure water and dried at room temperature for voltmometry study. A volume of 10.0 mL of Britton-Robinson (BR) buffer was added to the electrochemical cell for the experiments. Before the voltammetric measurements, the electrochemical solution was deoxygenated for 5 min using nitrogen gas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The morphology of the Pd-CuO/MWCNTs nanocomposites was investigated through the Scanning electron microscope technique (Fig. 2). The surface observed for the electrode fabricated with Pd, CuO and Pd-CuO/MWCNTs, appeared to be rougher, irregular in shape and size, which indicated that surface area was very large in SEM analysis (Fig. 2a & 2b). The palladium nanoparticles were observed in spherical shapes or clusters on the surface of MWCNTs with a diameter of around ~60 nm. However, the presence of patterned structures generated by globular crystals, which may be associated with the formation of aggregated particles. The diameter of a meandering form of carbon nanotubes was in the range of 10 nm, while the length could reach more than several micrometres. Fig. 2c clearly shows that Pd-CuO/MWCNTs with the granular structure were distributed on the GCE surface, whereas the bare GCE displayed a relatively smooth surface. Thus, MWCNTs on the electrode contributed to the enhancement of the surface area. The Pd-CuO/MWCNTs surface also was analysed by EDX and the results are shown in Fig. 3. The EDX spectroscopy showed that the nanocomposites were mainly composed of Cu, Pd, C and O elements.

The glassy carbon electrode was modified with Pd, MWCNTs, CuO and Pd-CuO/MWCNTs nanocomposites. Pd-CuO supported MWCNTs modified electrode for ametridione detection was improved in terms of sensitivity, stability and mechanical asset. The cyclic voltammograms of ametridione (6.0 µg·mL⁻¹), in Britton-Robinson buffer at pH 5.0 and scan rate 50 mVs⁻¹. Fig. 4 compares cyclic voltammograms of (6.0 µg·mL⁻¹) ametridione at bare GCE, CuO/GCE, MWCNTs/GCE, Pd/GCE and Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE. The reduction peak appeared at -1.12 V, which was due to the reduction of two carbonyl groups of the ametridione and no oxidation peak was observed in the anodic branch that suggested that the process was irreversible. The cyclic voltammogram of Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE in Fig. 4e reveals a significant background current, which indicated that the electrode had been effectively modified as seen by the substantial double-layer charging current. The CuO/GCE (Fig. 4b) did not exhibit a significant variation in their background currents compared to the MWCNTs (Fig. 4c). As shown in the figure, the peaks of pesticide at different potentials and the lowest peak potential were -1.12 V for the electrode Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE, which was significant than the unmodified GCE. When the peak current of ametridione was compared at these electrodes, the maximum peak current was 24.38 µA, corresponding to the electrode of Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE. This value was larger five times compared with the value recorded for the unmod-

Fig. 2. Scanning electron microscope images of Pd (A), CuO (B) and Pd-CuO supported MWCNTs.
ified bare GCE (Fig. 4a). The CuO/GCE (Fig. 4b) and MWCNTs/GCE (Fig. 4c) also showed improvement in the peak current of ametridione as twice as that of bare GCE, whereas the current for CuO/GCE was not significantly different to bare GCE. On the basis of the above results, the Pd-CuO, supported MWCTs was successfully immobilised on the GCE surface and synergistic electro-active character. Additionally, the electrochemical sensor provided high electro-catalytic activity because of their large surface area and an efficient electron transfer.

The differential pulse voltammetric response of 6.0 μg·mL⁻¹ ametridione studied at Pd-CuO/MWCNTs with Britton-Robinson buffer at pH 5.0 as a supporting electrolyte the pulse amplitude of 30 mV and scan rate of 50 mV s⁻¹ is shown in Fig. 5. At bare GCE (Fig. 5a), no obvious reduction peak was attained for 6.0 μg·mL⁻¹ ametridione pH 5.0. At fabricated CuO/GCE (Fig. 5b) and MWCNTs/GCE (Fig. 5c), the small reduction peak current was observed expressively significant than the bare GCE reduction current. The Pd/GCE (Fig. 5d) showed a respectable reduction peak current that appeared due to great electron mobility. Furthermore, the enrichment of the reduction peak current of the Pd-CuO/MWCNTs modified GCE, was acquired owing to the expectant area and great electrical conductivity of the ametridione (Fig. 5e). Therefore, the differential pulse voltammograms were observed for bare GCE, CuO/GCE, Pd/GCE, and MWCNTs/GCE. It was found not to be so effective for reducing ametridione.

**Optimum parameters on the response of ametridione**

The influence of pH of the medium significantly enhanced the reduction of the peak current of ametridi-
The effect of pH on the reduction peak current of ametridione investigated in the range of pH 2.0-12.0 with Britton-Robinson buffer indicated that process, responsible for this behaviour, must be the reduction of the carbonyl group in the ametridione and the maximum peak, which was observed at pH 5.0 on Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE. It indicates that the proton concentration in the acidic solution was superior for the reduction of carbonyl group of ametridione. Moreover, the peak potential of ametridione shifted negatively constantly with the increase of pH and as seen in Fig. 6. As a result, Britton-Robinson buffer (pH 5.0) was considered as the most suitable accompanying electrolyte for further investigation. Through the electrochemical reduction of ametridione, the pH implies protonation of the reactive portion of the molecule. This behaviour suggests that protons are involved in chemical processes during the electrochemical reduction of ametridione. Based on these results, Scheme 1 depicts an electrochemical reduction of ametridione involving the same number of protons and electrons.

The optimisation of the differential pulse voltammetry parameters is essential to achieve the best conditions of the electrochemical analysis of ametridione at Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE electrode. The effect of scan rate on the differential pulse voltammetric responses at Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE using Britton-Robinson buffer as a supporting electrolyte showed that the scan rate, the
current response, and increasing the scan rate from 0 mVs$^{-1}$ to 150 mVs$^{-1}$, such gave the maximum response at 50 mVs$^{-1}$. The reduction peak of ametridione is observed in the potential range of -0.5 to -1.6 V shifting more towards negative potential with an increasing scan rate. The deposition potential was chosen at -1.11 V, which corresponds to the reduction potential for ametridione under optimum conditions (Fig. 7). This intriguing study indicated electrochemical reduction of ametridione pesticide products on DPV’s maximum peak current. Hence, the enhanced absorption and the accumulation of ametridione on the Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GC electrode after its pre-treatment at -1.1 V can be exploited here to increase the sensitivity of the DPV significantly. Fig. 8 shows that the signal has a prolongation of the accumulation time up to 100 s. The peak current increased rapidly with the increase of accumulation time and almost reached a platform after 100 s. For analytical purposes, Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GC electrode was initially pre-treated for 100 s into the solution of 6.0 µg·mL$^{-1}$ of ametridione. Before it was used for measuring the concentration of ametridione to achieve down to the low ppm-level, Britton-Robinson buffer solution was used. The additional preconcentration time of 100 s was employed before each measurement. The selected pre-treatment time is enough to obtain a stable analytical signal. Accordingly, the optimum conditions for recording a maximum developed and sharpened peak for ametridione are accumulation time 100 sec, accumulation potential -1.1 V, scan rate 50 mVs-1, pulse amplitude 30 mV, and optimum temperature 25 ºC. Furthermore, it should be noted that Pd-CuO nanoparticles are electro-catalyst which in synergism with a developed surface area of MWCNTs enables the successful application of this sensor for the determination of ametridione pesticide.

Under the voltammetric conditions, the selectivity of the Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE sensor was evaluated by testing its electrochemical response to 6.0 µg·mL$^{-1}$ (pH 5.0) ametridione pesticide in the presence of interfering substances. The known amounts of NH$_4^+$, Na$^+$, K$^+$, Ca$^{2+}$, Ag$^{+}$, HCO$_3^-$, SO$_4^{2-}$, PO$_4^{3-}$, Cl$^-$, NO$_3^-$, urea, ascorbic acid and thiodicarb on the determination of ametridione in water samples indicated that the thiodicarb is one of the most common compounds that interacted with ametridione in water samples. The electrochemical reduction of ametridione had negligible influence with a twenty-fold excess of thiodicarb and the results are summarised in Table 1. The developed sensor behaved selectively with respect to ametridione because there were no significant changes in the peak current for ametridione reduction (< ±5%) in the presence of interfering species.

![Scheme 1. Electrochemical reduction mechanism of ametridione.](image)

Table 1. Results for the interference study regarding some inorganic and biomolecules on the voltammetric reduction of 6.0 µg·mL$^{-1}$ at Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE.

| Interfering species | Tolerance (µg·mL$^{-1}$) |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Na$^+$, NH$_4^+$    | 1000                    |
| OH$^-$, CO$_3^{2-}$, SO$_4^{2-}$, PO$_4^{3-}$, Cl$^-$ | 1000 |
| Citric acid         | 500                     |
| Ascorbic acid       | 400                     |
| Urea                | 300                     |
| Thiodicarb          | 20                      |

*the level with maximum concentration of foreign for deviation less than ±5%.*
Voltammetric performance on the determination of ametridione

Based on the optimised parameter, a typical differential pulse voltammogram recorded in various concentration ranges from 0.10 μg·mL\(^{-1}\) to 10 μg·mL\(^{-1}\) at Pd/MWCNTs/GCE as shown in Fig. 9. The peak currents showed a linear dependence on the concentration range from 0.10 μg·mL\(^{-1}\) to 10 μg·mL\(^{-1}\) of ametridione on Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE. Fig. 10 represents the calibration plot recorded using the standard addition method. The linear equation was \(I (\mu A) = 0.169 + 4.614 C\) with a correlation coefficient of 0.998. The detection limit (LOD = 3(sd)/b) and quantitation of limit (LOQ = 10(sd)/b) were determined, where sd being the standard deviation of the intercept and b denoting the slope of the calibration graph. On Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE electrochemical sensor, the LOD and LOQ of ametridione were found to be 0.0796 μg·mL\(^{-1}\) and 0.5560 μg·mL\(^{-1}\) respectively.

The practicality of the developed method was validated by measuring ametridione in spiked samples of tap, agricultural runoff and river water. To avoid the matrix effect, the standard addition method was used to carry out the quantitative assays. Moreover, the determinations were performed in quintuple to check the precision of the assays. In order to check the precision of the method, five replicate analyses of each sample, were carried out. The average recoveries obtained in water samples were 97.6–99.9% (Table 2) with a relative standard deviation of 1.69%, respectively. The suggested electrochemical characteristics, such as dynamic range, LOD and LOQ are compared with other conventional metaloxide-based sensors as shown in Table 3. Obviously, the proposed Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE electrochemical sensor had an excellent linear range, LOD, and LOQ values comparable to reported values in the literature. Therefore, the CuO/MWCNTs/GCE sensor has good constancy and high electron kinetics to consider as an alternative electrochemical sensor. The repeatability of the established Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE sensor was verified by taking five successive determinations with a fixed amount of 6.0 μg·mL\(^{-1}\) of ametridione on the same day under ideal conditions. The Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE sensor achieved in retaining 98.0% of the initial peak response on average peak current. These findings validated the advanced Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE sensor high repeatability, large surface area, and precision. The difference between measurements taken under different conditions on a subject is referred to as reproducibility. In the voltammetric signals, minimal variations with an equivalent standard deviation value (RSD) of 1.72% were observed within the day at ambient temperatures. In addition, the electrode reproducibility was persistently ex-

| Sample                  | Amount added (μg·mL\(^{-1}\)) | Amount found (μg·mL\(^{-1}\)) | Recovery* (%) | Standard deviation |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Tap water               | 10.0                          | 9.80                          | 98.0          | 0.014             |
|                         | 25.0                          | 24.6                          | 98.4          | 0.025             |
| Agricultural run-off Water | 10.0                          | 9.99                          | 99.9          | 0.450             |
|                         | 25.0                          | 24.9                          | 99.6          | 0.160             |
| River water             | 10.0                          | 9.92                          | 99.2          | 0.065             |
|                         | 25.0                          | 24.4                          | 97.6          | 0.020             |

\(n=5\) (no. of determinations)

| Technique | Modified electrode | Linear concentration range | Limit of detection | Ref.            |
|-----------|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| DPV       | CPE                | 6.7-117.4 μM               | 2.04 μM            | Papp et al., 2009 |
| CV        | NH\(_2\)-SBA-15/CPE| 0.3-18 μM                 | 0.05 μM            | Thiago et al., 2016 |
| SWV       | PGC                | 1.25-100 μM               | 2.8 μM             | Brahim et al., 2018 |
| CV        | GCE                | 10.9-1956 μM              | 30.1 μM            | Guzsvany et al., 2005 |
| SWV       | MWCNT/GCE          | 0.2-60 μM                 | 0.08 μM            | Salehzadesh et al., 2016 |
| DPV       | SiO\(_2\)/MWCNTs/RuPc | 3-66 μM              | 1.62 μM            | Canevari et al., 2016 |
| DPV       | Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE  | 0.1 to 10.0 μg·mL\(^{-1}\) | 0.0796 μg·mL\(^{-1}\) | Present Work |

CPE: carbon paste electrode; NH\(_2\)-SBA-15/CPE: Amino-functionalized SBA-15/carbon paste electrode; SWV: Square wave voltammetry; PGC: pre-treated glassy carbon electrode; SiO\(_2\)/MWCNTs/RuPc: ruthenium phthalocyanine on silica-coated multi-walled carbon nanotubes.
amined over the course of three days, and the RSD level was discovered to be ~1.4%. This study exposes the modification of glassy carbon electrodes with Pd-CuO/MWCNTs nanoparticles, showing greater constancy and reproducibility.

**Conclusion**

The electrochemical reduction of ametridione pesticide in water (river water, tap, agricultural run-off) samples were achieved successfully by differential pulse voltammetry. An electrochemical sensor of Pd-CuO/MWCNTs can be easily prepared and fabricated on a glassy carbon electrode for ametridione detection. The proposed sensor has shown to be a fairly efficient technique for rapid and sensitive determination of ametridione pesticide at a glassy carbon electrode improved with palladium supported multiwalled carbon nanotubes. The obtained Pd-CuO/MWCNTs sensor possessed a decent morphology with fast electron-transport and enabled advantageous electrocatalytic behaviour to reduce ametridione with relatively low detection and quantitation limits. Sensing features of Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE towards ametridione were found to be superior in comparison to the bare GCE, MWCNTs/GCE, CuO/GCE and Pd/GCE, respectively. The Pd-CuO/MWCNTs/GCE electrochemical sensor offered a low detection limit, quantification limit, good reproducibility, easy construction and short response time for the reduction of ametridione.

**Conflict of interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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