A LARGER NUMBER OF L CHAINS (Tac) ENHANCE THE ASSOCIATION RATE OF INTERLEUKIN 2 TO THE HIGH AFFINITY SITE OF THE INTERLEUKIN 2 RECEPTOR

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IL-2 is a major growth factor of mature T lymphocytes. Three distinct binding sites for IL-2, namely, low ($K_d \sim 10 \text{ nM}$), intermediate ($K_d \sim 1 \text{ nM}$), and high ($K_d \sim 10 \text{ pM}$) affinity sites, have been found on T lymphocytes (1, 2). Chemical cross-linking experiments have shown that two polypeptide chains of the IL-2-R, the L (p55 or Tac) and H (p75 or converter) chains, bind IL-2 with low and intermediate affinities, respectively (1-4). The high affinity binding complex is composed of each mole of IL-2, the L and H chains (5). The association rate of IL-2 to the L chain was estimated to be as fast as that to the high affinity site and 100 times faster than that to the H chain, while the dissociation rate of IL-2 from the L chain was 1,000 times faster than that from the H chain (6, 7).

Experiments using mutants of the L chain cDNA have shown that the L chain is not directly involved in the growth signal transduction (8), whereas the H chain alone seems to be responsible for the growth signal transduction (6). The L chain is not expressed on mature T cells until they are stimulated by antigens or mitogens (9). Stimulated T cells express a large number ($10^6$ or more) of L chains per cell (9, 10). By contrast, a small number ($10^3$ or less) of H chains are constitutively expressed on unstimulated spleen T cells (11). These findings raised a series of interesting questions. For what is the L chain required in the IL-2-R system? Why is the number of L chains of stimulated T cells always over that of H chains? Why are the H and L chains regulated in different manners?

We have proposed an affinity conversion model that can provide a reasonable explanation for the above questions (5, 12, 13). This model assumes that IL-2 would first bind to the L chain and that the complex of the L chain and IL-2 would then associate with the H chain, forming the high affinity ternary complex. According to this model, a large number of L chains are useful and essential to accelerate the high affinity binding. Only a smaller number of H chains are required because the association of the H chain with the IL-2/L chain complex should be faster than the binding of IL-2 to the L chain. As the amplification of oncogenes related to the receptors responsible for the growth signal transduction often causes cell transformation (14, 15), expression of limited and stable numbers of H chains would be required for lymphocytes to escape from transformation. Induction of a large number of L chains

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inert to the cellular activity yet efficient for binding IL-2 could be a strategy for lymphocytes to avoid transformation while transducing growth signal efficiently at physiological IL-2 concentrations that are usually very low.

On the other hand, others proposed that the high affinity site would be a preformed binary complex of the L and H chains (1, 2). These investigators have suggested that the binary complex of the L and H chains would use the faster association and the slower dissociation rates of the two chains to serve as the high affinity site (6, 7). However, the preformed binary complex model has not provided a reasonable explanation for the different regulatory systems and unbalanced numbers of the L and H chains.

In the present study we have measured association and dissociation rates of high affinity sites on T cells which express various numbers of L chains and a relatively constant number of H chains. We showed that expression of excess numbers of L chains contributed greatly to the increment of the association rate of IL-2 to the high affinity binding. These results, together with evaluation of kinetic constants, are favorable to the affinity conversion model and not compatible with the model that postulates the formation of the binary complex of the L and H chains before IL-2 binding.

Materials and Methods

**Materials.** ATL-2 and MT-1 are human T cell lines containing the HTLV-1 genome (16). YTC3 is a human thymoma cell line which has the NK-like activity (3, 4). These cells were cultured in RPMI 1640-10% FCS. PBMC isolated by Ficoll-Hypaque discontinuous gradient centrifugation were stimulated with 1 μg/ml PHA for 48 h, after which the cells were cultured in RPMI 1640-20% FCS and 0.05 mM 2-ME containing 12.5 ng/ml human rIL-2 (9). Purified rIL-2 was a gift from Takeda Chemical Industries (Osaka, Japan). 125I-labeled human IL-2 was purchased from Amersham Corp. (Buckis, England). mAb against the human IL-2-R (anti-Tac) was provided by T. Uchiyama, Kyoto University (17).

**Scatchard Plot Analysis.** The binding of 125I-IL-2 was assayed as described (8, 16). PBMC were centrifuged four times and incubated in IL-2-free medium for 4 h to remove bound IL-2, and were centrifuged twice. Cells were then suspended in RPMI-1640-10% FCS/25 mM Hepes, pH 7.4, containing 125I-IL-2 at various concentrations. After 30 min at 37°C, free and cell-bound 125I-IL-2 were separated by passing through an olive oil cushion and measured using a gamma counter.

**Kinetics of IL-2 Binding.** For the measurement of the kinetics of IL-2 binding, bound and free rIL-2 in medium were measured as in Scatchard plot analyses (8, 16). For association, cells were incubated with 50 pM 125I-IL-2 at 37°C in 200-μl aliquots for sampling at various time intervals. Nonspecific binding was determined by the addition of 1,000-fold unlabeled rIL-2. To measure the kinetics of binding to the H chain, YTC3 was preincubated with the anti-Tac mAb (20% ascites or 50 μg/ml antibody). MT-1 cells were used to measure the kinetics of binding to the L chain. The concentrations of cells were 8.0 × 10^9/ml for YTC3, 3.5 × 10^9/ml for ATL-2, and 5 × 10^7/ml for PBMC. The experiments were designed to fulfill the following conditions: (a) the total number of ATL-2 H chains is about equal to that of YTC3 L chains; (b) the concentration of the ligand is in excess over the concentration of receptors so that the reaction follows the pseudo-first order; (c) the concentration of IL-2 is low enough (i.e., 50 pM) to occupy only the high affinity IL-2-R without virtual binding to the low and intermediate affinity sites. For dissociation, cells were preincubated with 50 pM 125I-IL-2 at 4°C for 60 min and then 1,000-fold unlabeled rIL-2 was added. At various time intervals after shifting the temperature to 37°C, bound vs. free 125I-IL-2 was determined by centrifugation of the cells through an oil cushion.
Results and Discussion

Kinetic Predictions of the Affinity Conversion Model and the Preformed Binary Complex Model. Both models agree with the overall reaction shown below but differ in their proposed partial reactions:

\[ \text{IL-2} + \text{L} + \text{H} \xrightarrow{k_{\text{on}}/k_{\text{off}}} \text{L-H-IL-2} \]

The affinity conversion model can be shown by two partial reactions as follows:

\[ \text{IL-2} + \text{L} \xrightarrow{k_1} \text{L-IL-2} \]

\[ \text{L-IL-2} + \text{H} \xrightarrow{k_2} \text{L-H-IL-2} \]

where L and H indicate the L and H chains of the IL-2-R, respectively.

We can determine above rate constants under the pseudo-first order conditions. We have confirmed that the \( k_1 \) and \( k_1' \) values are \( \sim 1-2 \times 10^7/M/s \) and \( \sim 2-4 \times 10^{-1}/s \), respectively (6). To solve Eqs. 1 and 2 we have to introduce two assumptions as follows: (a) the \( k_2 \) value is negligible; and (b) the concentration of L-IL-2 is constant. Since the ternary complex (L-H-IL-2) is extremely stable (5), the assumption in a is reasonable. In fact, the dissociation rate (\( k_{\text{off}} \)) of the ternary complex was estimated to be \( 2.3 \times 10^{-4}/s \) (6), which is far smaller than the \( k_1' \) value. The \( k_1 \) value is probably smaller than the \( k_2 \) value because the reaction (Eq. 2) takes place on the cell surface (two-dimensional reaction). If so, the concentration of L-IL-2 will not reach equilibrium, but will remain low at the steady state, and the assumption in b is also reasonable. Under the condition that the concentrations of IL-2 and L are excess over that of H, the concentration of the ternary complex (X) at a given time (t) is given by the following equation according to the Eqs. 1 and 2:

\[
\ln \frac{H_0}{H_0 - X} = \frac{k_1k_2}{k_1} (I_0L_0 - H_0L_0 - H_0I_0) t
\]

where \( I_0, L_0, \) and \( H_0 \) represent the initial concentrations of IL-2, L, and H chains, respectively. Under the condition that the concentrations of IL-2 and H are over that of L, the following equation is drawn:

\[
\ln \frac{L_0}{L_0 - X} = \frac{k_1k_2}{k_2} \left( \frac{k_1}{k_1} \right) \left( \frac{I_0 - L_0}{H_0I_0 - I_0L_0 - H_0L_0} \right)
\]
From the Eqs. 3 and 4 it is obvious that the velocity of the ternary complex formation, i.e., the high affinity binding, should be accelerated by increasing the L or H chain concentration.

On the other hand, the preformed binary complex model can be represented by the reaction as follows:

$$\text{IL-2} + \text{L-H} \xrightarrow{k_3} \text{L-H-IL-2}$$

Here, the initial concentration of L-H is equal to the concentration of a limiting component of the two chains. The following simpler equation can be drawn from Eq. 5 assuming that the concentration of IL-2 is over that of L-H:

$$\ln \frac{R_0}{R_0 - X} = k_3 t$$

where $R_0$ is the initial concentration of L-H. This equation indicates that the velocity of the high affinity binding would not be affected by increasing numbers of the more abundant component of the two chains according to the preformed binary complex model.

These kinetic predictions indicate that we can distinguish the above two models by testing whether the high affinity binding is accelerated by the increment of the L (or H) chain concentration. The $k_3$ values calculated by Eq. 6 should remain constant if the preformed binary complex model is correct. As the left sides of the Eqs. 3, 4, and 6 are identical, the apparent $k_3$ value would become larger by increasing the concentration of the abundant chain of the two if the affinity conversion model is correct.

**Kinetic Comparison of ATL-2 and YTC3 Cells.** We have compared binding kinetics with the high affinity IL-2-R of ATL-2 and YTC3 cells that express comparable numbers (3 x 10^4 and 6 x 10^4, respectively) of H chains per cell but different numbers (5 x 10^5 and 1 x 10^4, respectively) of L chains per cell. The binary complex model assumes that ATL-2 and YTC3 cells would have the same concentration of the L-H complex and so an equivalent association rate of IL-2 to the high affinity IL-2-R when the total numbers of the limiting chains, i.e., the H chain for ATL-2 and the L chain for YTC3, are matched by adjusting cell numbers in the assay system. On the other hand, the affinity conversion model predicts that ATL-2 cells would show more rapid association of IL-2 to high affinity sites than YTC3 cells because ATL-2 cells have a larger number of L chains under the same conditions.

An association profile of IL-2 binding to the high affinity IL-2-R on these cells are displayed in Fig. 1 A. The binding curves declined with prolonged incubation probably because IL-2 bound to the high affinity IL-2-R was rapidly internalized with a $t_{1/2}$ value of ~15 min and IL-2-R was downregulated (data not shown). The experiments were done practically under the pseudo-first order conditions because only 20% of added IL-2 was bound at 30 min when the maximal amount of IL-2 was bound to ATL-2. Under those conditions the $k_3$ value for ATL-2 (9.8 x 10^7/M/s) was about six times larger than that of YTC3 (1.7 x 10^7/M/s), which disagrees with
FIGURE 1. Kinetics of IL-2 association to the high affinity IL-2-R of ATL-2 (●) and YTC3 (□). (A) The time courses of IL-2 association were measured by incubating the cells with 50 pM $^{125}$I-IL-2 at 37°C. At time intervals indicated, aliquots were taken and assayed for amounts of bound radioactivity. (B) Natural log plots of the association profiles shown in A according to Eq. 6. $X$, bound $^{125}$I-IL-2 at time $t$. $R_0$, the total number of high affinity IL-2-R.

The binary complex model (Fig. 1 B). By contrast, the $k_2$ values of ATL-2 and YTC3 cells calculated by Eqs. 3 and 4, respectively, were essentially identical, i.e., $5.6 \times 10^9$ M/s for ATL-2 and $3.7 \times 10^9$ M/s for YTC3 (Table I). These results are consistent with the affinity conversion model and contradictory to the binary complex model.

Abundant L Chains Expressed on PBMC Accelerate the Rate of High Affinity Binding to IL-2. To confirm acceleration of the IL-2 binding to high affinity sites by abundant L chains, we investigated the binding kinetics of IL-2 to the high affinity IL-2-R on lectin-stimulated PBMC. The number of L chains on PBMC rapidly increased after lectin stimulation and progressively declined. Equilibrium and kinetic IL-2 binding studies were performed on days 5, 7, 9, and 11 after PHA stimulation. The numbers of L and H chains of each PBMC preparation were estimated by Scatchard plot analysis. The average numbers of L chains per cell were maximal on day 5 ($3.3 \times$...

| Cells   | L chain | H chain | IL-2 | $k_2$  | $k_3$  | $k_{22}$ | $k_{33}$ | $k_{22}/k_{33}$ | $k_{45}/k_{45}$ |
|---------|---------|---------|------|--------|--------|----------|----------|-----------------|-----------------|
| YTC3    | 13      | 80      | 50   | $3.7 \times 10^9$ | $1.7 \times 10^7$ | $1.2 \times 10^{-4}$ | $7.0 \times 10^{-12}$ | 3.2 $\times 10^{17}$ |
| ATL-2   | 290     | 17      | 50   | $5.6 \times 10^9$ | $9.6 \times 10^7$ | $1.4 \times 10^{-4}$ | $1.5 \times 10^{-12}$ | 5.6 $\times 10^{17}$ |
| PBMC    |         |         |      |        |        |          |          |                 |
| Day 5   | 280     | 14      | 50   | $4.5 \times 10^9$ | $8.3 \times 10^7$ | $1.9 \times 10^{-4}$ | $2.3 \times 10^{-12}$ | 4.5 $\times 10^{17}$ |
| Day 7   | 81      | 12      | 50   | $2.7 \times 10^9$ | $1.3 \times 10^7$ | $1.5 \times 10^{-4}$ | $1.2 \times 10^{-11}$ | 2.7 $\times 10^{17}$ |
| Day 9   | 25      | 8       | 50   | $8.4 \times 10^9$ | $1.1 \times 10^7$ | $2.0 \times 10^{-4}$ | $1.8 \times 10^{-11}$ | 8.4 $\times 10^{17}$ |
| Day 11  | 34      | 10      | 50   | $7.8 \times 10^9$ | $1.3 \times 10^7$ | $1.9 \times 10^{-4}$ | $1.5 \times 10^{-11}$ | 7.8 $\times 10^{17}$ |

The numbers of L and H chains were estimated by the numbers of low and high affinity IL-2-R by means of Scatchard plot analysis performed at 37°C. The concentrations of L and H chains were calculated from the products of the estimated numbers of L and H chains, and cell concentrations, which are described in the text and in Materials and Methods. The association and dissociation rate constants were calculated from log-linearized plots of the respective time course, according to equations described in the text. Data were from Figs. 1 and 2.
10^4) and gradually declined to 9.5 x 10^3 (day 7), 3.0 x 10^3 (day 9), and 4.0 x 10^3 (day 11). The average numbers of H chains per cell remained almost constant within the range between 900 and 1,600.

The association rate increased in parallel with the number of L chains per cell, as shown in Fig. 2 A. The association rate constants (k3) on day 5, day 7, day 9, and day 11 were 8.3 x 10^7/M/s, 1.3 x 10^7/M/s, 1.1 x 10^7/M/s and 1.3 x 10^7/M/s, respectively (Fig. 2 B). This result also indicates that abundant L chains expressed on PBMC after lectin stimulation facilitate IL-2 binding to the high affinity IL-2-R. By contrast, the association rate constants (k2) calculated by Eq. 3 were again almost constant among these PBMC, YTC3, and ATL-2 (Table I), except that the k2 values for day 9 and day 11 PBMC deviated slightly from the others. This deviation may be due to the following two reasons: (a) the ratio of L/H is <3.5 and does not fulfill the pseudo-first order condition completely; and (b) the effect of internalization may not be negligible when the total number of receptors is less. These results taken together, our kinetic data are not compatible with the preformed binary complex model but are consistent with the affinity conversion model.

We have measured the dissociation rate (koff) of the L-H-IL-2 complex by the release of IL-2 from IL-2-bound cells. The koff values of 1.4 x 10^{-4}/s (ATL-2) and 1.2 x 10^{-4}/s (YTC3) are close to that (2.3 x 10^{-4}/s) reported previously (6). Dissociation profiles from the high affinity IL-2-R of PBMC also remained virtually constant, with koff values of ~1.5-2.0 x 10^{-4}/s (Table I). According to the binary complex model the above koff value must be equal to the k3 value. As the independently determined k1' value is much faster than the koff value, it is reasonable to assume that the koff value represents the k2' value when we postulate that the Eqs. 1 and 2 are the major pathway. To confirm that IL-2 binding sites examined were mainly high affinity sites, the equilibrium dissociation constants calculated from the ratio of the two rate constants (k5/k3) (Table I) were compared with the equilibrium dis-

![Figure 2. Kinetics of IL-2 association to the high affinity IL-2-R of lectin-stimulated PBMC.](image)
The association constant of the high affinity IL-2-R \( (K_{dh}) \), which was determined by Scatchard plot (8, 13, 18). The \( k_2'/k_3 \) values varied considerably, although they were closest to the \( K_{dh} \) value (10 pM) among the three \( K_d \) values of IL-2-R. The \( K_{dh} \) estimation by the previous Scatchard plot (8, 13, 18) has assumed the fixed number of high affinity sites. In this case, \( K_{dh} \) values would be calculated by \( k_2'/k_3 \), which should be constant. Therefore, the fact that the \( K_{dh} \) values per se are variable, with the range between 5 and 50 pM (8, 13, 18), is contradictory to the binary complex model.

According to the affinity conversion model, however, such \( K_{dh} \) values should vary depending on the number of L chains because the equilibrium of the overall reaction is determined by the combination of the Eqs. 1 and 2. The \( K_{dh} \) values determined by the previous Scatchard plot do not represent the real \( K_{dh} \) value, which should be approximately equal to the product of the \( K_d \) values of the Eqs. 1 and 2, i.e., \( k_1/k_2/k_3 \). When the \( k_1 \) value of \( 1.5 \times 10^7/M/s \) is used (reference 6 and our data), the \( k_1/k_2'/k_3 \) value is \( \sim 6 \times 10^{-22}M^2 \). The results confirm that IL-2 bound to the high affinity IL-2-R and give further support to the affinity conversion model.

**Kinetic Evaluation of an Intermediate Model.** We have also considered a variation of the preformed binary complex model, which postulates the following two partial reactions:

\[
L + H \xrightarrow{k_4} L \cdot H
\]  
\[
L \cdot H + IL-2 \xrightarrow{k_5} L \cdot H \cdot IL-2
\]

The equilibrium of the reaction (Eq. 7) is not entirely favorable to the binary complex formation and only a fraction of H chains are associated with L chains although the reaction (Eq. 8) is identical to the reaction (Eq. 5). To solve Eqs. 7 and 8 we have introduced two assumptions as follows: (a) the \( k_5 \) value is negligible and (b) the concentration of L-H is determined by the equilibrium of the reaction in Eq. 7. The assumption in a is reasonable because of the same observation as described above for the \( k_2' \) value. The reaction in Eq. 7, which takes place on the cell surface, is likely to proceed more rapidly than the reaction in Eq. 8 and unlikely to be the rate-limiting step of the overall reaction, which makes the assumption in b reasonable. Under the condition that the concentrations of IL-2 and L are excess over H, the reactions in Eqs. 7 and 8 will draw the following equation:

\[
\ln \frac{H_0}{H_0 - X} = \frac{k_4 k_5}{k_4} (I_0 L_0 - H_0 I_0 - H_0 L_0) t
\]

Under the condition that the concentrations of IL-2 and H are excess over L, the reactions in Eqs. 7 and 8 will draw the following equation:
In Eq. 10, we calculated $k_{4k5}/k_{4'}$ values, which were relatively constant and averaged at $5.4 \times 10^{14}/M^2/s$ (Table I). According to the intermediate model, the $k_{4k5}$ value should represent the $k_5'$ value and the $K_{d5}$ value is equal to the $k_5'/k_{55}$ value. When the $k_5'$ value of $2 \times 10^{-1}/s$ and the $K_{d5}$ value of $1 \times 10^{-11}M$ were used, the $k_5$ value of $2 \times 10^{7}/M/s$ was obtained. Since $k_{4k5}/k_{4k5}/k_{4'} = 5.4 \times 10^{17}/M^2/s$, the association constant of the reaction in Eq. 7, i.e., $k_4/k_4'$, is equal to $2.7 \times 10^{10}/M$. With this association constant the majority of the H chains should be associated with the L chain under the experimental conditions used, which is contradictory to the original definition of the intermediate model.

On the other hand, the determined rate constants of the Eqs. 1 and 2, i.e., $k_1 (1.5 \times 10^7/M/s)$, $k_2 (4.1 \times 10^9/M/s)$, $k_1' (3 \times 10^{-1}/s)$ and $k_2' (1.7 \times 10^{-4}/s)$ satisfy the original assumptions introduced to calculate them. As expected, the reaction shown by Eq. 1 is far slower than the reaction of Eq. 2. Although the $k_2$ value seems to exceed the maximal $k$ value that is limited between $10^8$ and $10^9/M/s$ by diffusion in solution (19), this $k_2$ value is exaggerated by the increase of effective concentrations of L-IL-2 and H whose movement is limited within the two-dimensional cell surface.

Experimental conditions used for previous determination of the $k_3$ values were not clear (6) or not satisfactory for the pseudo-first order reaction (7). However, the $k_1$ and $k_1'$ values were confirmed by our experiments. The association and dissociation rate constants for the H chain were also confirmed to be $1.5 \times 10^5/M/s$ and $3 \times 10^{-4}/s$, respectively.

**Physiological Significance of the Affinity Conversion Model.** If the reaction of Eq. 2 takes place, it may be also likely to assume that the reaction of Eq. 7 occurs to some extent because the L and H chains are expected to have some affinities even without the ligand. Consequently, even the reaction of Eq. 8 may occur to some extent. Inversely, if we assume the reaction of Eq. 7, it is reasonable to assume that the reaction of Eq. 2 will also take place. In fact, the reactions of Eqs. 1, 2, 7, and 8 all may take place more or less. The most important question is what is the major pathway to form the L-H-IL-2 complex. The presence of the L-H complex alone does not prove the intermediate model. Our kinetic evaluation indicates that the reactions of Eqs. 1 and 2 are the major pathway to form the ternary complex of IL-2, the H and L chains.

According to the intermediate model, the kinetics of the L and H chains are identical except for their difference in the $K_d$ value to IL-2. According to the affinity conversion model, however, the increase of the L chain has the stronger effect to the acceleration of the overall reaction than that of the H chain because the reaction of Eq. 1 is the rate-limiting step. Although the reaction of Eq. 1 is already proven to take place, the intermediate and binary complex models assume that the reaction of Eq. 1 per se would not contribute to the high affinity binding at all, whereas the affinity conversion model assumes that the reaction of Eq. 1 would be the initiation of the high affinity binding.

The two different ways of the regulatory expression of the L and H chains of IL-2-R (11) and the excess number of L chains on stimulated T cells suggest that the L and H chains may have different functional roles. Both kinetic and physiological
evaluations indicate that the affinity conversion model are more favorable than the other two.

Summary

The IL-2-R is composed of at least two proteins, that is, a 55-kD protein (p55, the L chain, or Tac) and a 75-kD protein (p75, the H chain, or converter). The high affinity binding of IL-2 results in the formation of the ternary complex consisting of IL-2, and the L and H chains. To distinguish the affinity conversion model and the binary complex model we have carried out kinetic studies on the IL-2 binding to the high affinity IL-2-R on T lymphocytes expressing various numbers of L chains and a relatively constant number of H chains. We found that expression of a larger number of L chains accelerated the association of IL-2 to the high affinity receptor. The results are not compatible with the binary complex model that assumes a fixed number of high affinity sites determined by the numbers of a limiting chain. Instead, the results are consistent with the prediction of the affinity conversion model that assumes association of IL-2 to the L chain as the first step of the ternary complex formation and they indicate that the possible role of excess L chains is to accelerate the formation of the ternary complex. The reaction rate constants calculated from the affinity conversion model were reasonably constant.

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