On the applicability of SiO$_2$/Al$_2$O$_3$/Nb$_2$O$_5$ and SiO$_2$/Al$_2$O$_3$/TiO$_2$ as a biocompatible platform for chloroperoxidase

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In the present work, two mixed oxides, namely, SiO$_2$/Al$_2$O$_3$/Nb$_2$O$_5$ and SiO$_2$/Al$_2$O$_3$/TiO$_2$ (designated as SiAlNb and SiAlTi, respectively), obtained using the sol–gel method were used to immobilize chloroperoxidase. Hydrogen peroxide was quantified using potassium hexacyanoferrate(II) as a redox mediator and amperometric measurements at 0.0 V vs. Ag/AgCl/Cl$^-$ (3 M). The SiAlTi biosensor presented higher sensitivity than the SiAlNb biosensor, however, the first one did not present a good response regarding time. The developed biosensor using the SiAlNb mixed oxide provided good signal levels, good linearity, good stability (retaining approximately 70% of its original response after 6 weeks of usage), a low detection limit (3 μM), good sensitivity, a suitable working range (from 4 to 19 μM), fast response and good repeatability. The recovery of the amperometric method for the detection of hydrogen peroxide in synthetic samples was approximately 100 ± 2%, and for Listerine® Whitening Pre-Brush Rinse samples fortified with 1, 2 and 3% (v/v) of hydrogen peroxide, it was 100 ± 3%.

Introduction

Recently, many support materials, such as Nafion, silica sol–gel, chitosan (CS) and poly(vinyl alcohol), have been used for immobilizing enzymes. Among these materials, the mixed oxides are promising for the development of biosensors. In this way, the long-term stability of biomolecules attached on inorganic matrices has been an interesting subject matter.

Inorganic matrixes have shown useful physical–chemical properties, such as morphology, biocompatibility and chemical composition. Many kinds of sol–gel based materials have been applied for both covalent and physical adsorption immobilization of biomolecules (e.g., Enzymes). As a great advantage, these materials (i.e., Titania, NiFe$_2$O$_4$/CuO/FeO–chitosan, SiO$_2$ and TiO$_2$–CeO$_2$) have shown biocompatible features, which they are able to keep their properties after the immobilization procedure.

The preparation of SiO$_2$/M$_x$O$_y$ or SiO$_2$/M$_x$O$_y$/M$_x$O$_y$ oxides obtained by the sol–gel process combines the mechanical properties of the silica matrix with the chemical properties of the bulk metal oxides (M$_x$O$_y$). The sol–gel process also enables a solid with controlled porosity to be obtained, and the metal oxide can be obtained as highly dispersed particles in the silica matrix. Basically, this procedure consists of the reaction between tetraethyl orthosilicate and the metal oxide precursor.

The SiO$_2$/M$_x$O$_y$ materials have found use in many applications, such as their use as a porous substrate to immobilize electroactive species to prepare chemically modified electrodes. The metal oxides (such as SnO$_2$, TiO$_2$, Sb$_2$O$_5$ and Nb$_2$O$_5$) are dispersed in the silica matrix, and they present acidic and basic properties, which enables them to be used for adsorbing enzymes.

Several authors have reported that adsorption and/or covalent entrapment can provide a simple way to immobilize a variety of proteins to sol–gel based materials.

Among other enzymes that can be used as a model to study interactions with sol–gel based materials, chloroperoxidase (CPO) offers useful features. Besides its wide applicability to the detection and quantification of peroxide, a common target, CPO is a versatile heme-containing enzyme that exhibits peroxidase, catalase and cytochrome P450-like activities in addition to catalyzing halogenation and H$_2$O$_2$ decomposition reactions. For that reason, this enzyme can be used as a model to investigate the interaction of CPO with a variety of inorganic and organic matrixes, commonly used in the development of biosensors.

Our group recently demonstrated the use of the SiAlNb and SiAlTi for the pre-concentration of metal ions in solution and also, the use of the SiAlNb in development of electrochemical
biosensors for amitriptyline and promethazine determinations.\textsuperscript{45,46} Additionally, Yoshida and co-workers reported that the SiO\textsubscript{2}/Al\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3}/TiO\textsubscript{2} oxide exhibited high photocatalytic activity in the photoinduced direct methane coupling to produce H\textsubscript{2} and ethane.\textsuperscript{47} Crisan and co-workers demonstrated that Al\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3}/TiO\textsubscript{2}/SiO\textsubscript{2} had a high reactivity, and the formation of titalite was improved.\textsuperscript{48} The use of SiAlNb and SiAlTi as a biocompatible platform for chloroperoxidase to prepare modified electrodes has not been described in the literature, despite the great potential of these materials.

Aiming to understand and characterize the properties of SiAlNb and SiAlTi, before and after the attachment of CPO through adsorption technique, this paper describes results obtained by a combination of physical and electrochemical measurements. Experimental results are complemented with further analysis by statistical treatment of electrochemical data.

Experimental

Synthesis of SiO\textsubscript{2}/Al\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3}/Nb\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{5} and SiO\textsubscript{2}/Al\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3}/TiO\textsubscript{2}

SiO\textsubscript{2}/Al\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3}/Nb\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{5}, which was designated as SiAlNb, was prepared according to a previously described procedure with several modifications.\textsuperscript{49} Specifically, 13 mL of a 3.5 M solution of HCl was added to 230.0 mL of a 50% (v/v) solution of ethanol/TEOS. The mixture was stirred for 3 h at 70 °C. After the pre-hydrolysis step, 20.5 g of aluminium isopropoxide (dissolved in a small amount of trifluoroacetic acid) and 10.3 g of NbCl\textsubscript{5} (previously dissolved in ethanol under a nitrogen atmosphere) were added, and the resulting mixture was stirred for 20 h at 70 °C. The solvent was slowly evaporated at 80 °C until a gel has formed and was subsequently heated for 4 h in an oven at 80 °C. The obtained gel was ground and dried under vacuum (1.3 × 10\textsuperscript{-2} Pa) for 4 h. Subsequently, the resulting particles were washed with ethanol in a Soxhlet extractor for 6 h. Finally, the particles were dried under vacuum (1.3 × 10\textsuperscript{-2} Pa) for 2 h at 80 °C and were stored.

SiO\textsubscript{2}/Al\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3}/TiO\textsubscript{2}, which was designated as SiAlTi, was prepared according to a previously described procedure with several modifications.\textsuperscript{49} 13.0 mL of a 3.5 M solution of HCl was added to 230.0 mL of a 50% (v/v) solution of ethanol/TEOS. The mixture was stirred for 3 h at 70 °C. After the pre-hydrolysis step, 66.0 mL of titanium(IV) butoxide and 15.0 mL of 3.5 M HCl were added. The mixture was stirred for 2 h at 70 °C. Next, 11.0 g of aluminium isopropoxide (dissolved in 5 mL of trifluoroacetic acid) was added, and the resulting mixture was stirred for 20 h at 70 °C. The solvent was slowly evaporated at 70 °C until the gel formed and was later heated for 4 h in an oven at 70 °C. The final product was carefully crushed, and the remaining solvent was evaporated at 70 °C under vacuum (1.3 × 10\textsuperscript{-2} Pa) for approximately 4 h, which resulted in a completely dry gel. The resulting material was ground in a mortar, sieved and washed in a Soxhlet extractor for 6 h with ethanol followed by 100.0 mL of 0.1 M HNO\textsubscript{3}. Next, the material was washed repeatedly with ethanol, deionised water and with ethanol again. Finally, the solid was dried at 60 °C under vacuum (1.3 × 10\textsuperscript{-2} Pa) for approximately 2 h at room temperature and was stored.

Reagents and solutions

HEPES buffer, chloroperoxidase from Caldariomyces fumago (CPO) 38 200 units mL\textsuperscript{-1}, glutaraldehyde solution (25%), tetraethyloxysilicate (TEOS) (98% v/v), NbCl\textsubscript{5} (99% w/w), titanium butoxide (97% v/v), aluminium isopropoxide (98% w/w) and trifluoroacetic acid (99% v/v) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (Saint Louis, MO, USA), ethanol solution from Vetec (Duque de Caxias, RJ, Brazil), H\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{2} (30% w/v) and potassium hexacyanoferrate(II) from Merck (Darmstadt, Germany), graphite 99.9% grade from Fluka (Buchs, Switzerland) and hydrocarbon oil from a commercial source. All solutions were prepared using ultra-pure water (>18.2 Ω cm\textsuperscript{-1}, Milli-Q Millipore, Billerica, MA, USA).

Biosensor preparation

The immobilization of the enzyme on the surface of the mixed oxide was performed by adding of 800 μL of a chloroperoxidase solution (1.5 mg mL\textsuperscript{-1}) to 60 mg of the mixed oxide (SiAlNb or SiAlTi) with 180 μL of a 0.1 M HEPES buffer (pH 7) and 20 μL of a 5% glutaraldehyde aqueous solution. The mixture was allowed to react at 14 °C for 30 min for simple adsorption and dried with nitrogen. The mixed oxide modified carbon paste electrode was prepared by mixing 60 mg of graphite, 40 mg of the material containing the immobilized enzyme and a drop of hydrocarbon oil as the binder. The newly prepared materials were named as CPO/SiAlNb/C and CPO/SiAlTi/C.

Electrochemical measurements

All of the electrochemical measurements were performed at 25 °C in a three-electrode cell with a 30 mL capacity. The cell was placed in a Faraday cage to avoid electrical noise. The electrochemical cell has a Teflon\textsuperscript{®} cover that hosts the mixed oxide modified carbon paste electrode with immobilized CPO as the working electrode (geometric area ca. 0.20 cm\textsuperscript{2}), Ag/AgCl/KCl (3 M) as the reference electrode and platinum wire with a high surface area as the counter electrode, and degassing procedures were performed under a pure nitrogen atmosphere. All of the measurements were performed using a potentiostat/galvanostat (Micro Autolab from Eco-chemie) controlled by the GPES 4.8 software package.

The electrochemical characterization of the biosensors using CPO/SiAlNb/C and CPO/SiAlTi/C was performed by cyclic voltammetry with a scan rate of 10 mV s\textsuperscript{-1} in 0.1 M of a phosphate buffer (pH 7.2) in the absence and presence of potassium hexacyanoferrate(II) solely and with addition of hydrogen peroxide. The amperometric response of the biosensor for the detection of H\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{2} was performed at 0.0 V for 30 s. The supporting electrolyte solution used was a mixture that contained 0.1 M phosphate buffer (pH 7.2) and 0.1 M of potassium hexacyanoferrate(II) as a redox-mediator.

The analytical curves were constructed by adding aliquots of a standard solution of hydrogen peroxide to the electrochemical cell, which ranged in concentration from 4 to 19 μM of...
hydrogen peroxide in 15 mL of the supporting electrolyte solution. The analysis was performed in triplicate for each concentration. For each measurement, the solution contained in the electrochemical cell was mixed by magnetic agitation for 20 s to obtain a homogeneous solution and to allow the catalysis of peroxide by CPO.

The analytical performance of the chronomperometric method for the quantitative determination of hydrogen peroxide using the biosensor was performed using several basic determinations, such as the linearity, detection and quantification limits, recovery and precision.

The detection limits (DL) for the chronomperometric method were obtained from the experimental data based on three statistical criteria: the $3.3\sigma/b$, $3\sigma/b$ and $3\sigma_b + X_b$, where $b$ is the slope of the linear analytical curve, $\sigma$ is an estimate of the standard deviation of the analytical curve, $\sigma_b$ is an estimate of the standard deviation of the blank samples and $X_b$ is the average value for a blank sample. Ten blank samples were analyzed to determine the detection limits. Grubb’s test was used to check for possible outliers, and all measurements fell within a 95% confidence interval. $^{32,33}$

For the linearity study, the analytical curve was obtained using a linear regression model to fit the data of current difference versus the known concentration of the hydrogen peroxide standard, which ranged from 4 to 19 $\mu$M.

These curve data were submitted to the Cochran test to determine whether the bilateral deviation of the variances was significant (5% or less). Plots of the residuals were obtained from the differences between the concentration values calculated from the linear regression line and the values obtained experimentally for evaluating the homoscedasticity. The precision of the method was statistically evaluated by observing the standard deviation of several analyses (repeatability).

The recovery study for this method was performed using synthetic samples of hydrogen peroxide ranging in concentration from 4 to 19 $\mu$M in the supporting electrolyte solution, and the samples recovery study was performed after fortifying a commercial tooth cleaning solution with 1, 2 and 3% (v/v) of hydrogen peroxide, which are concentrations close to the commercial tooth cleaning solution with 1, 2 and 3% (v/v) of hydrogen peroxide, which are concentrations close to the theoretical values. It is also worth mentioning that the hydrolysis process is not effective in the reaction media for all of the precursors. In this way, it is difficult to obtain mixed oxides using the sol–gel method with three different components in the desired proportions. However, this method is extremely useful for the synthesis of the materials.

The BET analyses revealed that the specific surface area of SiAlNb was 306 $m^2 g^{-1}$ and of SiAlTi was 437 $m^2 g^{-1}$. The BJH method revealed an average pore size of 15.3 Å for SiAlNb and 15.0 Å for SiAlTi, which indicates that these materials are microporous, and the observed values for the average pore volume were 0.026 cm$^3$ g$^{-1}$ for SiAlNb and 0.036 cm$^3$ g$^{-1}$ for SiAlTi. These values are similar to those reported in literature for mixed oxides obtained using sol–gel processes. $^{43–44}$ Furthermore, these values reflect a good accessibility to active sites, which is a fundamental characteristic for the adsorption of enzymes.

Fig. 1 shows scanning electron images for a single particle of SiAlNb, the morphology was characterized by a flat surface with a rough structure and does not present uniform size and shape. These features can contribute to the enzyme physical

**Instrumentation**

The Al$_2$O$_3$, Nb$_2$O$_5$ and TiO$_2$ contents in the materials were determined using energy-dispersive X-ray fluorescence analysis (EDFRX) on a model 800 HS EDX from Shimadzu (Tokyo, Japan).

The analysis of the specific surface area ($S_{BET}$) of the materials were performed on a Quantachrome Model Nova 1200e (Boynton Beach, Florida, USA) instrument and determined using the BET (Brunauer, Emmett and Teller) multipoint method by submitting the samples to previous activation at 250 °C in vacuum for 4 h. The BJH method was used to obtain the average pore size and the average pore volume.

For the scanning electron micrographs (SEM) and electron dispersive spectroscopy (EDS) analyses, the sample was dispersed on double-sided conductive tape on a copper support and coated with gold before the experiment. SEM images were acquired using a JEOL model JSM 6360-LV scanning electron microscope at an acceleration voltage of 20.0 kV (Tokyo, Jeol, www.jeol.co.jp) and 330 × magnification.

**Results and discussion**

**Characterization of SiAlNb and SiAlTi**

By means of EDFRX, the initial amounts of the precursors used in the synthetic routes should yield materials with 20.0 wt% of Al$_2$O$_3$ and 20.0 wt% of Nb$_2$O$_5$ in the SiAlNb and 10.0 wt% of Al$_2$O$_3$ and 30.0 wt% of TiO$_2$ in the SiAlTi. However, the results from EDFRX analyses revealed that approximately 19.9 wt% of Al$_2$O$_3$ and 20.9 wt% of Nb$_2$O$_5$ were incorporated in SiAlNb, and 9.8 wt% of Al$_2$O$_3$ and 30.3 wt% of TiO$_2$ in SiAlTi; these values are close to the theoretical values. It is also worth mentioning that the hydrolysis process is not effective in the reaction media for all of the precursors. In this way, it is difficult to obtain mixed oxides using the sol–gel method with three different components in the desired proportions. However, this method is extremely useful for the synthesis of the materials.

**Fig. 1.** Scanning electron micrograph of SiAlNb and the corresponding mapping of the Al (red), Si (green), and Nb (purple) elements by EDS. Magnification of 330×.
adsorption, since these defects figured out as good platform for the biological molecules. A typical energy dispersive scanning image (EDS) of the elements in the SiAlNb material is also shown in Fig. 1. The images suggest a good dispersion of the mixed oxides on the silica surface, and studied at this level, we can observe a homogeneous material without the formation of islands or phase segregation. This dispersion of the mixed oxides in the silica matrix is highly desirable because it increases the number of acidic sites on the surface of the material, which enhances its efficiency for the immobilization of enzymes. Furthermore, this high dispersion can be attributed to strong interactions with the siloxane groups of the silica surfaces by means of covalent bonds with other oxides in the material. The same characteristics are observed for SiAlTi (images not shown).

Electrochemical measurements

Fig. 2 depicts the cyclic voltammograms obtained from the biosensors using CPO/SiAlTi/C (Fig. 2A) and CPO/SiAlNb/C (Fig. 2B) in the presence and absence of $\text{[Fe(CN)}_6\text{]}^{3-}/4^-$ and hydrogen peroxide. We do not find any obvious electrochemical peaks in this potential range as the lack of electron mediator for CPO/SiAlNb/C. On the other hand the TiO$_2$ from CPO/SiAlTi/C presents redox behaviour with a small current response in this potential range. As can be seen from Fig. 2A and B, in the presence of $\text{[Fe(CN)}_6\text{]}^{3-}$ an increase of the electrochemical signal can be observed due to the reduction and oxidation of $\text{[Fe(CN)}_6\text{]}^{3-}/4^-$, when compared with the blank signal (only PBS buffer). Upon addition of 15 µM H$_2$O$_2$ to electrolyte solution an electrocatalytical response was observed wherein both reduction and oxidation peak currents increased indicating good catalytic activity toward H$_2$O$_2$ and an effective CPO immobilization.

The analytical curves obtained, with the biosensors using SiAlNb and SiAlTi modified carbon paste electrodes with immobilized chloroperoxidase are compared in Fig. 3. The parameters obtained from these analytical curves are the slope, linear coefficient, linear correlation coefficient and standard deviation curve, and they are presented in Table 1 for comparison.

The linear correlation coefficients revealed that the amperometric method using both biosensors has a linear correlation greater than 99%. Although the CPO/SiAlTi/C biosensor presented higher sensitivity than the CPO/SiAlNb/C biosensor, the standard deviation curve of the first one is also higher, which indicates a superior data dispersion of the linear fit. Furthermore, the CPO/SiAlTi/C biosensor did not present a good response with respect to time. The long-term stability of the biosensors was investigated by measuring the current response of 19 µM of H$_2$O$_2$ every other day over the course of 6 weeks. The
results indicated that the response of the CPO/SiAlNb/C biosensor decreased by 4% of its initial current after 1 week and retained approximately 70% of its original response after 6 weeks of usage, whereas the CPO/SiAlTi/C biosensor lasted only one day. Looking for applicability of one of these materials in real sample analysis, we chose to work with the CPO/SiAlNb/C biosensor, since it showed better stability.

The biocatalytic performance of the CPO-mediated modified sol–gel based material was determined by amperometry measurements. Fig. 4 shows typical amperometric responses of a sensing biosensor poised at 0.0 V (t = 30 s). The increase in cathodic current can be observed with each addition of the hydrogen peroxide standard solution, indicative of the enhancement of reduction current by the catalytic reaction on the electrode surface. In fact, [Fe(CN)6]4− plays as a mediator for CPO to recover its catalytic site. CPO is dependent of an electron donor to reduce H2O2. Therefore, the electrochemical signal observed is proportional to the amount of H2O2 reduced by the donor to reduce H2O2. Therefore, the electrochemical signal observed is proportional to the amount of H2O2 reduced by CPO. Such behaviour is similar to that presented by peroxidase enzymes, e.g., HPR.44

The curve presented in Fig. 4 has an excellent correlation coefficient (r = 0.9945). This graph indicates that the linear regression model was correct because the residues did not exceed 0.017 μA, which was close to the baseline noise (Fig. 5).

The Cochran test was applied to the amperometric method, and the calculated value (0.490) was also lower than the tabulated value (0.707) for the curve over the range from 4 to 19 μM. This result indicated homogeneous variances of the response with changing analyte concentration, which characterizes homoscedastic behaviour.

Statistical studies were used to determine the detection (DL) and quantification (QL) limits for the amperometric method using the SiAlNb biosensor. The calculated values for the detection and quantification limits of hydrogen peroxide were compared with the values obtained experimentally, as shown in Table 2. The statistically obtained detection and quantification limit values were similar to the experimental values of 3 and 9 μM, respectively.

The precision of the amperometric method was evaluated for its repeatability by observing the standard deviation obtained for each concentration of analyte in the range from 4 to 19 μM. A good repeatability was verified (i.e., there were only small variations in the results of the duplicate analyses performed within a short time using the same conditions). The relative standard deviation (RSD) values did not exceed 1.1% variability (see Table 3), which is considered acceptable for this type of technique and indicates a good precision for this type of analysis.

The recovery of the amperometric method for the detection of hydrogen peroxide in synthetic samples (in the range from 4 to 19 μM) was approximately 100 ± 2%, as observed in Table 3.

The commercial tooth cleaning solution sample was analyzed using the amperometric method with CPO/SiAlTi/C biosensor, and the hydrogen peroxide content was 1.98% (v/v), which is very close to the value provided by the manufacturer (2.0% (v/v)).51

The recovery for the detection of hydrogen peroxide in the commercial tooth cleaning solution sample fortified with 1, 2 and 3% (v/v) of hydrogen peroxide was 100 ± 3%, as shown in Table 4. These results indicate that there were no matrix effects in the hydrogen peroxide recovery in this type of sample.

Table 5 shows the performance of the CPO/SiAlNb/C modified electrode in comparison with other amperometric sensors based on carbon paste electrodes for the determination of hydrogen peroxide. As can be observed, the CPO/SiAlNb/C modified electrode presented good performance, showing the potentiality of the CPO/SiAlNb/C modified electrode as a sensor for hydrogen peroxide using mixed oxide synthesized by a simple low-cost novel route.

Conclusions

A sol–gel method was used to prepare two mixed oxides, SiAlTi and SiAlNb, which were used to immobilize chloroperoxidase and to prepare the modified carbon paste electrodes. Hydrogen peroxide was quantified using potassium hexacyanoferrate(II) as a redox-mediator and performing amperometric measurements at 0.0 V vs. Ag/AgCl/KCl (3 M).
The CPO/SiAlTi/C biosensor presented higher sensitivity for the detection of H$_2$O$_2$ than did the CPO/SiAlNb/C biosensor; however, the first sensor did not present a good response with respect to time. The developed biosensor using the CPO/SiAlNb/C mixed oxide provided good signal levels, good linearity, good stability, a low detection limit, good sensitivity, a suitable working range, fast response and good repeatability.

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