Protein folding, aggregation & hydrophobicity with simple physical models



Where physics and biology meet

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My Background

- First Degree: Computer Science / Mathematics (University of Manchester)
- PhD: Structural Bioinformatics / Biochemistry (University of Oxford)
- PostDoc: Computational (Bio)-Physics in the Frenkel group (Amolf, Amsterdam)
- Currently, Assistant Professor Bioinformatics (VU University), use all of the above

The biological approach or the physical approach?



TASK:

Given a protein sequence predict in which 3D structure the protein will fold.

Two approaches:

Biological Approach



(A)



- Find a known structure with a similar sequence
- Align the sequences
- Model the unkown structure on the known structure using the alignment

Physical Approach



- Take a full atomistic force field
- Simulate as long as possible

The biological approach or the physical approach?



TASK:

Given a protein sequence predict in which 3D structure the protein will fold.

Who wins, the physical or biological approach?

CASP

Critical Assessment of protein Structure Prediction AIM: assess progress in structure prediction

- Blind test
- Ongoing for three months
- Experimentalist submit targets
- Bioinformatics groups predict structures
 - groups
 - servers

Who wins BIOLOGY or PHYSICS?



Typical CASP results



"difficult" target







 GREEN
 Correctly aligned residues (0 shift) according to AL0_P

 YELLOW
 Residues aligned within " -4 , +4 " window (4 shift) according to AL4_P

 RED
 Residues aligned outside " -4 , +4 " window (4+ shift) according to AL1_P

 WHITE
 Residues not aligned or not predicted

 RMSD calculated on all N residues superimposed under 5.0 Angstrom distance cutoff



for 'easy' targets structures with similar sequences are available

Biology versus physical



Only when a structural template is available, recognised by evolutionary sequence conservation can we model the structure correctly.

Biology wins...

Review available https://arxiv.org/abs/1712.00407

The most successful approaches do not adhere to statistical mechanics principles



Biomolecular simulation (this afternoon)



Structure





hydrophobic polar (hydrophilic) negative charge positive charge



Let's have a look at the physical forces first

- What are the most important forces that act on a protein?
- We stay away from quantum mechanics for now.



What type of forces and effects would be relevant?

- Van der Waals
- Electrostatics
- Hydrogen bonding
- Entropic effects
- Hydrophobic effect

Primary Protein Structure



Hydrophobic effect



Hydrophobic Collapse



Backbone

Backbone has a hydrogen bond donor and acceptor per residue



Hydrogen bonds & secondary structure of backbone



We will ignore this in the practical exercises!

What are the effects that contribute to a stably folded protein?



 Hydrophobicity (oil in water)
 note this is an effective force that contains enthalpic and entropic components

2) Hydrogen bonds form secondary structure

What forces / effects destabilize a folded protein?





1) Chain entropy!

Questions for you:

Would secondary structures form / be stable in vacuum?

What is the influence of water molecules on secondary structure formation (does it help, does it hinder formation)?

How can you explain secondary structure formation in an aqueous environment?

The biological approach or the physical approach?



TASK:

Given a protein sequence predict in which 3D structure the protein will fold.

So WHY does biology win?

Entropic and enthalpic contributions compensate (experimental)



Look at the scale of the axes!

Physics & Biology: folding specificity



What can evolutionary history tell us?



Biology: structure is more conserved than sequence

1L9H:A(size=349) vs 1GUE:A(size=239) Structure Alignment

Rmsd = 4.0Å Z-Score = 5.5 Sequence identity = 7.4% Aligned/gap positions = 202/92

Sequence alignment based on structure alignment.

Sequence alignment based on structure alignment. Position numbers according to sequence (starting from 1) and according to PDB are given as SSSS/PPPP, SSSS - sequence, PPPP - PDB.

1L9H:A - MOL_ID: 1; MOLECULE: RHODOPSIN; CHAIN: A, B

1GUE:A - MOL_ID: 1; MOLECULE: SENSORY RHODOPSIN II; SYNONYM: SR-II; CHAIN: A; ENGINEERED: YES; OTHER_DETAILS: K-STATE, REFINED WITH EXTRAPOLATED DATA

1L9H: A	33/33	AEPWQFSMLAAYMFLLIMLGFPINFLTLYVTVQHKKLRTPLNYILLNLAVADLFMVFGGF
1GUE: A	3/4	GLTTLFWLGAIGMLVGTLAFAWAGRDAGSGERRYYVTLVGISGIAA
1L9H: A	93/93	TTTLYTSLHGYFVFGPTGCNLEGFFATLGGEIALWSLVVLAIERYVVVCKPM
1GUE: A	49/50	VAYVVMALGVGWVPVAERTVFAPRYIDWILTTPLIVYFLGLLAG
1L9H: A	145/145	SNFRFGENHAIMGVAFTWVMALACAAPPLVGWSRYIPEGMQCSCGIDYYTPHEETNNESF
1GUE: A	93/94	GAMVPGIERYALFGM
1L9H: A	205/205	VIYMEVVHEIIPLIVIFECYGQLVETVKEAAAQQQESATTQKAEKEVTRMVIIMVIAELI
1GUE: A	130/131	GAVAELGLVYYLVGPMTESASQRSSGIKSLYVRLRNL
1L9H: A	265/265	CWLPYAGVAFYIFTHQGSDFGPIFMTIPAFFAKTSAVYNPVIYIMMN



So if we have a protein with a known structure that has a similar sequence – we have solved our problem.

So is there any role for physics based approaches?



- Biological questions (qualitative):
 - What is the function of this protein in the cell?
 - What happens if we change the sequence of the protein?
 - Where does the substrate bind?
 - Do evolutionary related proteins bind the same substrate
- Physical questions (quantitative):
 - How stable is this protein
 - Under which conditions will this protein fold?
 - How strong is the binding to a substrate?

So is there any role for physics based approaches?





Why use simple models?

HP model - minute cubic lattice model - hour



backbone model - week



full atomistic model - year(s)





- Sampling lowest free energy state
- Different conditions
- Larger systems

Physics: folding specificity - perfect self assembly

Experimental curves – can we understand these?



A very simple model



- 3D for research
- 2D in practical

Lattice Model



Structure





hydrophobic polar (hydrophilic) negative charge positive charge



Cubic Lattice Model





- Cheap & simpleUse for right purpose
- Can model:
 - General trends
 - Folding specificity
 - Heat capacity
 - Binding and unbinding
- Not captured:
 - Secondary structure
 - Hydrophobic effect (cold denaturation)
 - Structure predictions for specific proteins

Shakhnovich & Gutin 1993 PNAS 90 Coluzza et al 2003 Phys Rev E 68

Lattice Model, Potential, Design & Simulation


Simulation: interaction potential



Simulation: Monte Carlo



Monte Carlo:

- Choose a residue (or region)
- Change its position
- Calculate new interaction energy
- Accept with Monte Carlo criterion

$$P_{\rm acc} = \min\left\{1, \exp\left(\frac{E_{\rm old} - E_{\rm new}}{kT}\right)\right\}$$

Shakhnovich & Gutin 1993 PNAS 90 Coluzza et al 2003 Phys Rev E 68 Betancourt & Thirumalai 1999 Protein Sci 8

Simulation: Lattice Moves



Sequence Design



Problem: how to create a folding sequence?



In nature evolution ensures folding...

Solution: energy minimization



we can simulate evolution by changing the sequence with random substitutions

Lattice Model: design



hydrophobic polar (hydrophilic) negative charge positive charge





Design loop:

-Initiation: choose a structure, keep it frozen

- Design loop:
 - Choose a residue
 - Change the amino acid
 - Calculate new interaction energy
 - Accept with Monte Carlo criterion based on <u>energy</u> and <u>variance</u>

Sequence design: energy minimization



$$P_{\rm acc} = \min\left\{1, \exp\left(\frac{E_{\rm old} - E_{\rm new}}{kT}\right)\right\}$$

Note that this is an "ad hoc" algorithm – no statistical mechanics, pure energy minimisation

Interactions: toy example 2D



matching puzzle pieces indicate favourable interaction energies

Tutorial code is based on this toy example

Sequence Design: what would be a good (specific) folder

Low energy

 \mathbf{DC}

÷

+

+

High variance



Good folder



Sequence Variance

$$\begin{split} N_p &= \frac{N!}{n_1! n_2! \dots n_{N_A}!} \\ P_{\rm acc} &= \min \left\{ 1, \left(\frac{N_p^{\rm new}}{N_p^{\rm old}} \right)^{1/q} \right\} \end{split}$$



Sequence Variance & Biology



Take variance estimates from amino acid type occurrence

How to derive a potential?

hydrophobic polar (hydrophilic) negative charge positive charge





$$E = rac{1}{2} \sum_{i}^{N} \sum_{j}^{N} \epsilon_{a(i),a(j)} C_{ij}$$

Can we use experimental biological data?

"Knowledge Based" Amino Acid Pair Potentials



- Sample the PDB
- Nearly 100.000 protein structures (X-ray, NMR, Cryo)
- Assumption: PDB is a representative ensemble of well mixed amino acids

"Knowledge Based" Amino Acid Pair Potentials



"Knowledge Based" Amino Acid Pair Potentials

 $\epsilon_{i,j} = kT \ln\left(\frac{c_{i,j}}{\omega_{i,j}}\right)$



 $\omega_{i,j} = \frac{n_i q_i n_j q_j}{\sum_k q_k n_k}$



Are experimental results captured by the model?



Let's start the Monte Carlo Simulation



Monte Carlo:

- Choose a residue (or region)
- Change its position
- Calculate new interaction energy
- Accept with Monte Carlo criterion

$$P_{\rm acc} = \min\left\{1, \exp\left(\frac{E_{\rm old} - E_{\rm new}}{kT}\right)\right\}$$

Shakhnovich & Gutin 1993 PNAS 90 Coluzza et al 2003 Phys Rev E 68 Betancourt & Thirumalai 1999 Protein Sci 8

Free energy curve of folding



- Proteins fold into a specific native structure, given their sequence
- What would happen if we raise the temperature?

Folding Specificity on the Lattice



Foldable, with high specificity



Full atom vs coarse grained folding



Shaw, D. E., et al. (2010) Science, 330

Full atom vs coarse grained folding



Protein folding Specificity

- Proteins fold into a specific native structure
- Folded structure => energetically favorable
- Unfolded structure => entropically favorable
- At higher temperatures, proteins become unstructured





Cubic Lattice Model





- Cheap & simple
 Use for right purpose
- Can model:
 - General trends
 - Folding specificity
 - Heat capacity
 - Binding and unbinding
- Not captured:
 - Secondary structure
 - Hydrophobic effect (cold denaturation)
 - Specific proteins

Shakhnovich & Gutin 1993 PNAS 90 Coluzza et al 2003 Phys Rev E 68 Consistent treatment of hydrophobicity in protein lattice models accounts for cold denaturation

Erik van Dijk & Sanne Abeln



PRL 116(7) 2016 & PLOS CB 11(5) 2015

Molecular picture of hydrophobicity?



Hydrophobicity is a an emergent force from collective interactions between water and oily-groups

Water likes itself 'better'

Exact molecular picture still unclear

- Entropic component
- Enthalpic component

Emergent behaviour (entropy & enthalpy)



Widom Phys. Chem. Chem. Phys., 2003; Gallagher 2003, JACS; Huang and Chandler PNAS 2000

Emergent behaviour (entropy & enthalpy)



Widom Phys. Chem. Chem. Phys., 2003; Gallagher 2003, JACS; Huang and Chandler PNAS 2000

Lattice model for protein folding



- At higher temperatures, proteins become unstructured
 - (chain) entropy becomes dominant in partition function

Heat capacity of myoglobin



Hallerbach & Hinz 1999 Biophys. Chemistry

Adding the temperature dependence to the model



Cold denaturation & compact state



Model predicts linearity of heat capacity baseline

In our model, we model the free energy of a water - hydrophobic contact as:

$$F_{\rm hydr} = -\alpha N_{\rm h} (T - T_0)^2 \tag{1}$$

Multiplying both sides by β , taking derivative with respect to β and using that $\frac{d\beta F}{d\beta} = \langle E \rangle$ we get:

$$\langle E_{\rm hydr} \rangle = -\alpha N_h (T_0^2 - T^2) \tag{2}$$

This yields a simple rule for theslope of heat capacity, under the assumption no phase transition, such as folding, take place.

$$C_V(T) = \frac{d\langle E \rangle}{dT} = 2\alpha N_h T \tag{3}$$



Heat capacity native-denatured



Cv slope for real proteins


Emergent behaviour (entropy & enthalpy)



Widom Phys. Chem. Chem. Phys., 2003; Gallagher 2003, JACS; Huang and Chandler PNAS 2000

"Knowledge Based" Amino Acid Pair Potentials

 $\epsilon_{i,j} = kT \ln\left(\frac{c_{i,j}}{\omega_{i,j}}\right)$ +++____ ++++ + $\omega_{i,j} = \frac{n_i q_i n_j q_j}{\sum_k q_k n_k}$

Calculating hydrophobicities for amino acids

- Mine set of protein structures resolved with NMR at different temperatures
- Consider buried versus surface residues
 - Simplest approach: propensity for being buried

$$P_{a,b}^* = \frac{p_{a,b}^*}{p_{a,nb}^*} = \frac{N_{a,b}/N_{a,nb}}{N_b/N_{nb}}$$

 We use three different approaches to calculate approximate free energy terms



Temperature dependence of amino acids

- We calculate the propensities for each type of amino acid at different temperatures
- We see a clear temperature dependence for the hydrophobic amino acids
- This nicely matches theoretical predictions





van Dijk et al. PLOS Compl Biol, 11(5) 2015

Is this temperature dependence significant?



temperature (Kelvin)

ble 3. Significance of hydrophobic temperature dependence pooled.	

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amino acid class	p-value contacts	p-value surface	ΔΔG contacts	ΔΔG surface	
hydrophobic	< 0.01	< 0.01	0.10	0.32	
polar	< 0.01	0.23	-0.05	0.13	
charged	< 0.01	0.80	-0.06	-0.04	
aromatic	0.04	< 0.01	0.06	0.32	
other	0.32	< 0.01	0.02	0.41	

Impact of understanding hydrophobicity



We can explain cold denaturation

We can understand heat capacity curves



Extract hydrophobic temperature dependence form structures



Predict total hydrophobic surface area



Model can reproduce formation of fibres

Abeln, S., Vendruscolo, M., Dobson, C. M., & Frenkel, D. (2014). A Simple Lattice Model That Captures Protein Folding, Aggregation and Amyloid Formation. PLoS ONE, 9(1), e85185



Fibres

- Formation depends on sequence properties
- Hydrophobic inner layers
- Fast simulation

hydrophobic polar (hydrophilic) beta-strand



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Vacancy for PhD student

- 4 years
- Protein folding & amyloid formation coarse-grained protein models
- Close connection to experimental work on force unfolding and amyloid formation in collaboration with Gijs Wuite en Alexander Buell
- Contact: s.abeln@vu.nl

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Consider NMR structures at different temperatures



Heat capacity: linear slope



Hydrophobicity of amino acids



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