RESEARCH PAPER

Genotypic and phenotypic study of *Lactobacillus* species isolated from traditional yogurt and cheese in southwest Iran

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**Key words:** *Lactobacillus*, Genotypic, Phenotypic, Traditional yogurt and cheese, PCR-RFLP.

http://dx.doi.org/10.12692/ijb/5.10.155-162 Article published on November 26, 2014

**Abstract**

Lactic acid bacteria (LAB) have the property of producing lactic acid from sugars by a process called fermentation. These bacteria are broadly used in the production of fermented food products, such as yogurt, cheeses, sauerkraut and sausage. Among them *Lactobacillus* species are used industrially for the production of yogurt and cheese. The purpose of present study was to identify the genotypic and phenotypic of *Lactobacillus* species in the traditional cheeses and yogurt produced in the Chaharmahal Va Bakhtiari province located in southwest Iran using molecular technique. 18 Dalameh cheeses and 15 traditional yogurt specimens were collected from various groceries and markets in the Chaharmahal Va Bakhtiari province. Genomic DNA was extracted from yogurt and cheese samples, as well as reference strains and PCR reaction was down for amplification of 16S rDNA gene. PCR products were digested by *TaqI* and *HaeIII* restriction enzymes and fragments were analyzed in 2% agarose gel electrophoresis. The results of present study showed that *Lactobacillus delbrueckii* (*Lb. delbrueckii*), *Lb. acidophilus*, *Lb. brevis* and *Lb. lactis* strains from traditional cheese and yogurt is important and more frequent in dairy industry. These findings could be used as starter cultures in manufacturing of cheeses and yogurt to approach better and safety dairy products with high quality.

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Introduction
Cheesemaking began about 8000 years ago and now there are in excess of 1000 cheese varieties worldwide (Sandine and Elliker, 1970). Since the 1960s, the industrial production of fermented milks especially yogurt has increasingly developed worldwide. Dairy yogurt is produced using a culture of Lactobacillus delbrueckii subsp. bulgaricus and Streptococcus salivarius subsp. thermophilus bacteria. Several factors account for the success of yogurt: it’s natural image, its organoleptic characteristics (fresh and acidulated taste and characteristic favor), nutritional, prophylactic and therapeutic properties, and its moderate cost due to the high productivity of the production lines (Sandine and Elliker, 1970). The ripening of cheese is a very complex process involving a range of biochemical reactions and high densities of microorganisms are present in cheese ripening (Beresford et al., 2001; Morsi and Soda, 1993). There are several factors which influence the development of the quality and organoleptic characteristics of cheese and yogurt, including the type of milk, its microbiological quality, the conditions of ripening and others (Herreros et al., 2003). Some factors influencing growth of microorganisms in cheese, such as water content, salt concentration and pH. These factors are processed through a number of common steps such as gel formation, whey expulsion, acid production and salt addition, followed by a period of ripening (Beresford et al., 2001). The primary changes involve the formation of peptides and amino acids from caseins, fatty acids from milk fat and the conversion of lactose to lactic acid and primary changes may also involve the degradation of citrate. The secondary changes involve the conversion of the end-products that result from the primary changes. For example amino acids yield the formation of amines, organic acids and sulfur compounds (Morsi and Soda, 1993). The micro flora of cheese may be divided into two groups include starter lactic acid bacteria that the most important of these is Lactobacillus and secondary microorganisms (Beresford et al., 2001). However, the lactic acid bacteria (LAB) play an important role in cheesemaking. During cheesemaking, the composition of LAB microflora undergoes several changes, according to modifications of environmental conditions, which frequently provide cellular stresses, such as heat shock, adverse pH, as well as reduction of oxidation–reduction potential, water activity and nutrient content (Elisabetta et al., 2008). The LAB carries out the initial acidification of the milk which assists in gelation (Cogan et al., 1997). Production of lactic acid by the starter flora during cheese manufacture results in a decrease in the pH of the milk (Beresford et al., 2001). Some species of LAB are able to hydrolyze milk fat or at least some triglycerides (Morsi and Soda, 1993). Secondary flora include non-starter lactic acid bacteria (NSLAB), propionic acid bacteria (PAB) that grow in many cheese varieties during ripening, mould that are important in the ripening of a range of cheeses and yeast, however, the role of yeast in cheese ripening is unclear (Beresford et al., 2001; Fleet, 1990). Some reports confirm the presence during cheese ripening of adventitious bacteria, referred to as NSLAB which play a major role in the organoleptic profile of the cheeses (Sancheza et al., 2005). They are not part of the normal starter flora; they generally do not grow well in milk and do not contribute to acid production in the cheese vat (Cogan et al., 1997). During ripening, starter organism’s autolyze, releasing growth substrates and enzymes; at the same time, NSLAB numbers increase from low initial levels until they eventually becomes the predominant microflora in mature cheese (Sancheza et al., 2005).

Lactobacillus is a genus of Gram-positive facultative anaerobic or microaerophilic bacteria. They are a major part of the lactic acid bacteria group, named as such because most of its members convert lactose and other sugars to lactic acid. Lactobacilli have many important roles in industry. Some Lactobacillus species are used for the production of yogurt, cheese, sauerkraut, pickles, beer, wine, cider, kimchi, chocolate, and other fermented foods, as well as animal feeds, such as silage (Makarova et al., 2006; Man et al., 1960). The lactic acid produced by Lactobacilli inhibits the growth of other organisms and lowers the pH of the product in these products.
According to importance of Lactobacilli for flavour, colour, quality and texture of dairy products, the present study performed to molecular identification of the genotypic and phenotypic of Lactobacillus species in the traditional cheeses and yogurt produced in the Chaharmahal Va Bakhtiari province located in southwest Iran.

Materials and methods

Sampling

In present study, a total of 18 Dalameh cheeses and 15 traditional yogurt samples were collected from various sites and markets in the Chaharmahal Va Bakhtiari province located in southwest Iran and were analyzed.

Reference Strains

The reference strains viz. Lactobacillus reuteri NCDC AS17, AS83 and NRRL 14170, Lb. delbrueckii ssp. delbrueckii CCM 7191, Lb. fermentum NRRL 4524, Lb. acidophilus CCM 4833, Lb. delbrueckii ssp. Lactis CCM 2772, Lb. delbrueckii ssp. bulgaricus CCM 7190, Lb. casei CH1, Lb. johnsonii NRRL 2178, Lb. plantarum NRRL 1954, Lb. helveticus NRRL 4526, Lb. brevis NRRL 4527 and Lb. rhamnosus NRRL 442 were obtained from the Razi Institute, Tehran, Iran.

Genotypic Characterization of Lactobacillus

Samples (10 g) of each products and reference strains were mixed with 90 ml of 0.85% (w/v) sterile physiological saline and vortexed for 1 minute. Serial dilutions were made in the same solution and plated on to MRS agar. Plates were incubated for 72 h at 37°C, under aerobic conditions. Genomic DNA was extracted from 2 ml samples of overnight cultures grown in MRS broth at 30°C using DNP™ Kit (CinnaGen, Iran), according to the manufacturer’s recommendation. The extracted DNA was quantified by spectrophotometric measurement at a wavelength of 260 nm. The extracted DNA of each sample was kept frozen at -20°C until used.

Gene Amplification

The oligonucleotide primers EGE1: 5'-AGAGTTTGATCCTGGCTCAG-3' and EGE2: 5'-CTACGGCTACCTTGTTACGA-3' for 16S rDNA gene described by Jensen et al. and conserved among various bacteria, including lactobacilli, were used as forward and reverse primers, respectively (Jensen et al., 1993). Lactobacillus acidophilus 5 (Lb-5) was used as positive control. A negative-DNA control was performed by adding 1 μL of sterile ultrapure deionized water. For detection of 16S rDNA gene the samples were amplified in a Gradient Palm Cycler (Corbett Research, Australia) and PCR reaction was performed in a total volume of 25 μL in 0.5 ml tubes containing 1 μg of genomic DNA, 1 μM of each primers, 2 mM Mgc2, 200 μM dNTP, 2.5 μL of 10X PCR buffer and 1 unit of Taq DNA polymerase (Roche applied science, Germany). This solution was initially denatured at 95°C for 5 min, followed by 32 cycles of denaturation (94°C for 1 min), annealing (56°C for 1 min), elongation (72°C for 1 min) and a final extension at 72°C for 5 min. The amplified products were detected in 1% agarose gel electrophoresis. Aliquots of 10 μL of PCR products were applied to the gel. Constant voltage of 80 V for 30 min was used for products separation. After electrophoresis, the gel was stained with Ethidium Bromide and images were obtained in UVIdoc gel documentation systems (UK).

RFLP Analysis of 16S rDNA Gene

Restriction fragment length polymorphisms (RFLPs) were used for analysis of 16S rDNA gene amplified from Lactobacillus strains. PCR products were digested by TaqI and HaeIII restriction enzymes (Roche applied science, USA) in a total volume of 20 μL (10 μL reaction solutions, 2 μL enzyme buffers, 0.2 μL of each enzyme, and 7.8 μL distilled water) and placed in the incubator at 65°C for TaqI, and 37°C for HaeIII. All of the reactions were performed overnight and additionally, TaqI restriction reactions were overlaid with mineral oil to avoid evaporation. Restriction fragments were analyzed electrophoretically in 2% agarose gel in TBE buffer.

Physiological and Phenotypic Characterization of Isolates
All isolates were tested for Gram stain and catalase activity. Also, they are examined for acid-producing ability and proteolytic activity. Gram-positive, catalase-negative isolates were checked for gas (CO₂) and NH₃ producing in modified MRS broth. API 50 CHL test strips were used for determination of sugar fermentation patterns of LAB isolates (BioMerieux, France). In addition, the presence of diaminopimelic acid (DAP) in the cell walls of Lactobacillus was determined on cellulose plates using a thinlayer-chromatography. Determination of the lactic acid produced system from glucose was performed enzymatically by using D-lactate and L-lactate dehydrogenase test kits (Roche Diagnostic, France).

**Statistical Analysis**

Analysis of data and polymorphic patterns of 16S rDNA gene in Lactobacillus strains were performed using the SPSS version 17.0 computer software (SPSS, Chicago, IL).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lactobacillus species</th>
<th>No. in Dalameh cheeses</th>
<th>No. in traditional yogurt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lactobacillus delbrueckii</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactobacillus acidophilus</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactobacillus brevis</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactobacillus lactis</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactobacillus helveticus</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactobacillus casei</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactobacillus plantarum</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactobacillus fermentum</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactobacillus reuteri</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactobacillus johnsonii</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>69</strong></td>
<td><strong>43</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The LAB are a group of related bacteria that produce lactic acid as a result of carbohydrate fermentation. These microbes are broadly used by us in the production of fermented food products, such as yogurt (Streptococcus spp. and Lactobacillus spp.), cheeses (Lactococcus spp. and Lactobacillus spp.), sauerkraut (Leuconostoc spp.), and sausage (Jensen et al., 1993; Tamang et al., 2000). These organisms are heterotrophic and generally have complex nutritional requirements because they lack many biosynthetic capabilities. Most species have multiple requirements for amino acids and vitamins. Because of this, lactic acid bacteria are generally abundant.
only in communities where these requirements can be provided (Tango and Ghaly, 1999). Lactic acid is a natural organic acid which has many applications in pharmaceutical, food and chemical industries (Tango and Ghaly, 1999). LAB microflora plays a fundamental role in the acidification of curd, as well as in other physical and chemical transformations that affect the development of curd and flavour (Elisabetta et al., 2008).

![Fig. 1. PCR amplification products from Lactobacillus isolated and reference strains (Line M: 1 kb DNA marker (Fermentas, Germany), Lines 1-3: AS17, AS83, and NRRL 14170 Lb. reuteri, respectively, line 4: NRRL 4524 Lb. fermentum, line 5: CCM 4833 Lb. acidophilus, line 6: CCM 7191 Lb. delbrueckii ssp. delbrueckii, line 7: CCM 2772 Lb. delbrueckii ssp. lactis, line 8: CCM 7190 Lb. delbrueckii ssp. bulgaricus, line 9: CH1 Lb. casei, line 10: NRRL 2178 Lb. johnsonii, line 11: NRRL 1954 Lb. plantarum, line 12: NRRL 4526 Lb. helveticus, line 13: NRRL 4527 Lb. brevis, and line 14: NRRL 442 Lb. rhamnosus).](image1)

The main genera of LAB include Lactobacillus, Aerococcus, Carnobacterium, Enterococcus, Lactococcus, Leuconostoc, Oenococcus, Pediococcus, Streptococcus, Tetragenococcus, Weissella and Vagococcus (Guarnieri et al., 2001). Between this LAB microflora, Lactobacillus species play an important role in ripening of cheese, therefore, determination of Lactobacillus species isolated from traditional yogurt and cheese in Chaharmahal Va Bakhtiari province (southwest Iran) is useful in dairy industry. In present study the Lactobacillus species of 33 traditional cheese and yogurt samples were analyzed by cultivation on MRS media and then, genomic DNA extracted and PCR reaction performed for amplification of 16S rDNA gene. Then, PCR products were digested by HaeIII and TaqI restriction enzymes.

![Fig. 2. Gel electrophoresis of PCR products after digested with HaeIII restriction enzyme for detection of Lactobacillus strains in isolated and reference samples (Line M: 100 bp DNA ladder (Fermentas, Germany), line 1: NRRL 442 Lb. rhamnosus, lines 2-4: AS17, AS83, and NRRL 14170 Lb. reuteri, respectively, line 5: NRRL 4524 Lb. fermentum, line 6: CCM 4833 Lb. acidophilus, line 7: CCM 7191 Lb. delbrueckii ssp. delbrueckii, line 8: CCM 2772 Lb. delbrueckii ssp. lactis, line 9: CCM 7190 Lb. delbrueckii ssp. Bulgaricus, line 10: CH1 Lb. casei, line 11: NRRL 2178 Lb. johnsonii, line 12: NRRL 1954 Lb. plantarum, line 13: NRRL 4526 Lb. helveticus, and line 14: NRRL 4527 Lb. brevis).](image2)

In present study Lactobacillus species such as Lb. delbrueckii, Lb. lactis, Lb. acidophilus, Lb. brevis, Lb. helveticus, Lb. casei, Lb. fermentum, Lb. rhamnosus, Lb. plantarum and Lb. johnsonii were isolated from cheese and Lb. delbrueckii, Lb. lactis, Lb. acidophilus, Lb. brevis, Lactobacillus casei, Lb. fermentum, Lb. rhamnosus, Lb. plantarum and Lb. reuteri were detected in yogurt samples.

This work provides a first microbiological and molecular study of traditional cheese and yogurt in southwest Iran. The results of present study showed that witch strains of Lactobacillus species from traditional cheese and yogurt in southwest of Iran is important and more frequent in dairy industry and these findings can help us to have a better manufacturing of cheeses and yogurt.

Some studies were performed about lactic acid bacteria and its correlation with fermented food products. Guarneri et al. in 2001 optimized PCR method to identify Lactobacillus brevis. Their study showed protocol was highly efficient and sensitive (Guarneri et al., 2001). Tamang and Sarkar showed the predominance of Lb. plantarum and Lb. brevis in young bamboo shoots (Tamang et al., 1996). Dickson et al. in year 2005 showed that PCR assay provides a more rapid, specific and sensitive alternative to conventional culture methods for the identification of Lb. fermentum in clinical specimen (Dickson et al., 2005). The study of Ignacio Garabal and coworkers in 2008 on characterization of lactic acid bacteria isolated from raw cows’ milk cheeses currently produced in Galicia (NW Spain) showed that microflora and lactic acid bacteria in cheese-making environments have undergone changes, with the most evident difference being the practical absence of Enterococcal strains among the current isolates (Ignacio Garabal et al., 2008).

The research of Elisabetta et al. in 2008 on diversity of lactic acid bacteria population in ripened Parmigiano Reggiano cheese showed that combination of PCR-denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis (DGGE) and sequencing can effectively describe the lactic acid bacteria population of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese in advanced stages of ripening, giving useful information for elucidating the role of LAB in determining the final cheese quality (Elisabetta et al., 2008). In a study on fresh and fermented yak milk, Wu et al. reported the presence of Lactobacillus fermentum, Lactobacillus helveticus and Lactobacillus curvatus showing that lactobacilli could play an important role in the fermentation of yak milk (Wu et al., 2009).

Some of the strains identified in this study displayed promising properties suggesting that they might be candidate strains to use as starter cultures in manufacturing of cheeses, therefore, the technological characterization of these isolated Lactobacillus, can employ as the appropriate selection as adjunct cultures for the standardization and improvement of the cheese and yogurt quality and safety.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their deep sense of gratitude and sincere thanks to the staff of the Biotechnology Research Center of Islamic Azad University of Shahrekord Branch in southwest Iran.

References


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