

Nuclear relaxation effects in Davies ENDOR variants

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Abstract

A recent article by Yang and Hoffman (J. Magn. Reson. 181, 280) presents a ‘Davies/Hahn ENDOR multi-sequence’ in which the α and β peaks of an ENDOR spectrum can be distinguished. This represents one instance of a family of ENDOR sequences which have no initial microwave inversion pulse, and which can reveal information about nuclear relaxation rates and the signs of hyperfine coupling constants. Here we discuss the more general set of such sequences, which we term *Saturated Pulsed ENDOR*, and show how signal sensitivity can be optimised within the context of this new technique. Through simulations, we compare its performance relative to other techniques based on Davies ENDOR, and experimentally illustrate its properties using the non-heme Fe enzyme anthranilate dioxygenase AntDO. Finally, we suggest a protocol for extracting both the magnitude and sign of the hyperfine tensor using a combination of ENDOR techniques.

1. Introduction

Electron-nuclear double resonance (ENDOR) represents a family of techniques in which a combination of radiofrequency (rf) and microwave (mw) excitation is used to study nuclear spins which are coupled to a paramagnetic species (1; 2). A recent paper by Yang and Hoffman (3) discusses the effects of rapidly repeating an ENDOR sequence at a rate commensurate with the relevant spin relaxation times, building on the work of Epel *et al.* (4). It is shown how a steady-state ENDOR signal is obtained by repeating a sequence which is similar to the Davies ENDOR method but without the preparatory π mw pulse.

A typical ENDOR spectrum representing a nucleus with spin $I = 1/2$ coupled to an electron spin $S = 1/2$ consists of pairs of peaks with equal intensity at frequencies ν_α and ν_β , associated with the $m_S = +1/2$ (α) and $m_S = -1/2$ (β) electron spin projections. The main advantage of the approach of Yang *et al.* is the distinguishability of these α and β ENDOR peaks, as their method yields intensities of different magnitude or of different sign. A prerequisite for asymmetry is that the temperature, T , must be around or below the Zeeman temperature $h\nu_{mw}/k_B$ (e.g. 1.7 K for a spectrometer frequency of $\nu_{mw} = 35$ GHz), along with the condition of a suitable combination of relaxation rates of the electron and nuclear spin. The observation of asymmetry in peak intensity permits the determination of the sign of the hyperfine coupling constant and the simplification

of a potentially busy spectrum. Furthermore, the intensity difference of the two peaks diminishes as the repetition time is increased, providing a way to measure nuclear spin relaxation processes.

Under similar, but less general, circumstances, the standard Davies ENDOR experiment also yields peaks of unequal intensity, giving access to the sign of the hyperfine coupling constant and to nuclear spin relaxation times (5). An alternative method for measuring nuclear spin relaxation via another modified Davies ENDOR sequence is described in (6).

In this work, we compare the method proposed by Yang and Hoffman to other Davies ENDOR variants with respect to their ability to yield asymmetric spectra. The first section summarises the underlying theory. In the following sections, simulations are discussed and an experimental comparison is given. Finally, we draw conclusions about the benefits of the various techniques.

2. Theory

The standard Davies ENDOR sequence is shown in Fig. 1A. It consists of a selective mw and a selective rf π pulse followed by a non-selective two-pulse echo sequence. In the sequence in Fig. 1B, an additional selective rf π pulse is added *after* the echo detection (6). This essentially undoes the nuclear spin polarisation created by the first

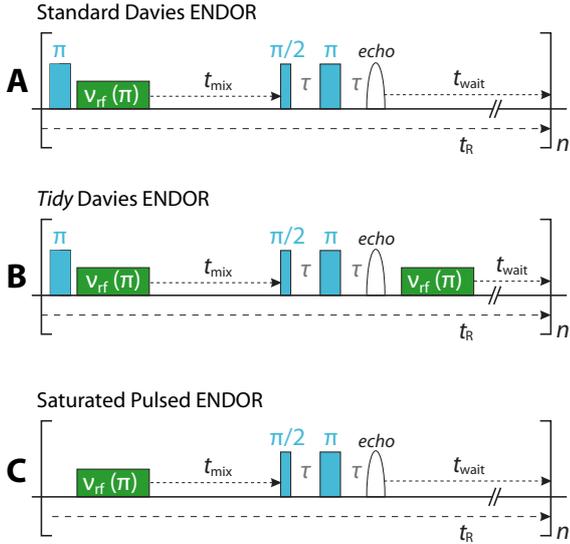


Fig. 1. Davies ENDOR sequence and modifications. (A) Standard Davies sequence, (B) *Tidy* Davies ENDOR: rf π pulse applied after the echo, (C) *Saturated Pulsed* ENDOR sequence: initial mw π pulse omitted. n is the number of repetitions of the sequence in brackets before the radiofrequency is changed.

rf pulse and increases the overall intensity of the ENDOR spectrum compared to the standard sequence, thus allowing higher repetition rates. We shall denote this the *Tidy* Davies sequence. In the sequence in Fig. 1C, the initial preparation π pulse is removed, and instead the sequence is repeated sufficiently rapidly so as to drive the electron spin into saturation. This sequence is a generalisation of the one used by Yang and Hoffman (where $t_{\text{mix}} \approx 0$) (3). As they first noted, the mw π pulse is not necessary to observe an ENDOR effect, since the subsequent two-pulse sequence can act both as a electron polarisation detector and generator. We shall denote this the *Saturated Pulsed* ENDOR sequence, or SP-ENDOR. In contrast to the standard and *Tidy* sequences, the mw $\pi/2$ pulse in SP-ENDOR must be a selective pulse, as it assumes in addition the function of the selective π pulse used in the other variants. This distinction is, of course, unimportant when a single microwave channel is employed, as the preparation π -pulse of a Davies ENDOR sequence must be selective.

For all sequences, the mixing time t_{mix} denotes the free-evolution time *before* the two-pulse echo sequence, and the wait time t_{wait} indicates the free-evolution time *after* the two-pulse sequence. The sequence in square brackets is repeated n times. All other inter-pulse delays and the durations of all pulses are assumed to be of negligible duration compared to t_{mix} and t_{wait} . The repetition time $t_{\text{R}} \approx t_{\text{mix}} + t_{\text{wait}}$ is the elapsed time between the first pulse in one sequence and the first pulse of the subsequent one.

An ENDOR spectrum of an $I = 1/2$ nucleus coupled to an $S = 1/2$ electron spin consists of two lines with frequencies ν_{α} and ν_{β} and intensities I_{α} and I_{β} . For an isotropic hyperfine coupling a_{iso} , the frequencies are

$$\nu_{\alpha} = |\nu_I - a_{\text{iso}}/2|, \quad \nu_{\beta} = |\nu_I + a_{\text{iso}}/2|, \quad (1)$$

where ν_I is the nuclear Larmor frequency. The intensities are determined by several factors. The nuclear transition matrix elements for the two lines are identical, and the factor mainly responsible for asymmetry is the difference in polarisations of the two nuclear transitions. Effects like the hyperfine enhancement and experimental imperfections of the rf excitation can also render the two intensities unequal. However, these effects are often negligible in high-field ENDOR.

To best describe the intensity features of an ENDOR experiment for our purpose, we introduce two parameters. The first describes the intensity of the strongest peak in the spectrum

$$I = \max(|I_{\alpha}|, |I_{\beta}|) \quad . \quad (2)$$

The second one quantifies the asymmetry of the ENDOR spectrum

$$A = \frac{I_{\alpha} - I_{\beta}}{2I} \quad . \quad (3)$$

For symmetric spectra, the asymmetry parameter gives $A = 0$. $A > 0$ means that the α peak is stronger, whereas $A < 0$ indicates a stronger β peak. The greatest asymmetry is represented by $A = \pm 1$.

I_{α} and I_{β} depend on the initial equilibrium polarization, which in turn is a function of the temperature T and the spectrometer frequency ν . In addition, I_{α} and I_{β} depend on t_{wait} and t_{mix} as well as on the electron and nuclear spin-lattice relaxation rates T_{1e}^{-1} and T_{1n}^{-1} and the electron-nuclear cross relaxation rate T_{1x}^{-1} . In paramagnetic systems, nuclei usually relax via coupling to the local electron spin, or else to neighbouring electron spins (7). The direct nuclear spin-lattice relaxation rate can thus be neglected, so that we can assume $T_{1n}^{-1} \approx 0$.

In an ENDOR experiment where the objective is to measure principal values and tilt angles of hyperfine and quadrupole tensors, I should be maximised and A minimised. In contrast, if α/β peak assignment is of interest, a significant asymmetry A must be achieved without excessive reduction in the overall intensity I . The dependence of the asymmetry on t_{mix} or t_{wait} can also be used to provide insight into relaxation processes. In all cases, the repetition time $t_{\text{R}} (\approx t_{\text{mix}} + t_{\text{wait}})$ should be as short as possible to maximise signal/time.

3. Simulations

The dependence of the overall intensity I and the asymmetry A for the various sequences on t_{mix} and t_{wait} depends on how fast the nuclei relax compared to the electrons and compared to the time scale of t_{mix} and t_{wait} . Two physical regimes can be distinguished: (i) $T_{1x} \gg T_{1e}$ and (ii) $T_{1x} \approx T_{1e}$. $T_{1x} \ll T_{1e}$ is ignored as in most measurements of the electron spin longitudinal relaxation time the shorter of T_{1x} and T_{1e} is measured. Sample simulations are shown in Fig. 2 and 3. For simplicity, we plot the cases where one of t_{mix} or t_{wait} is set to zero while the other is varied. Full

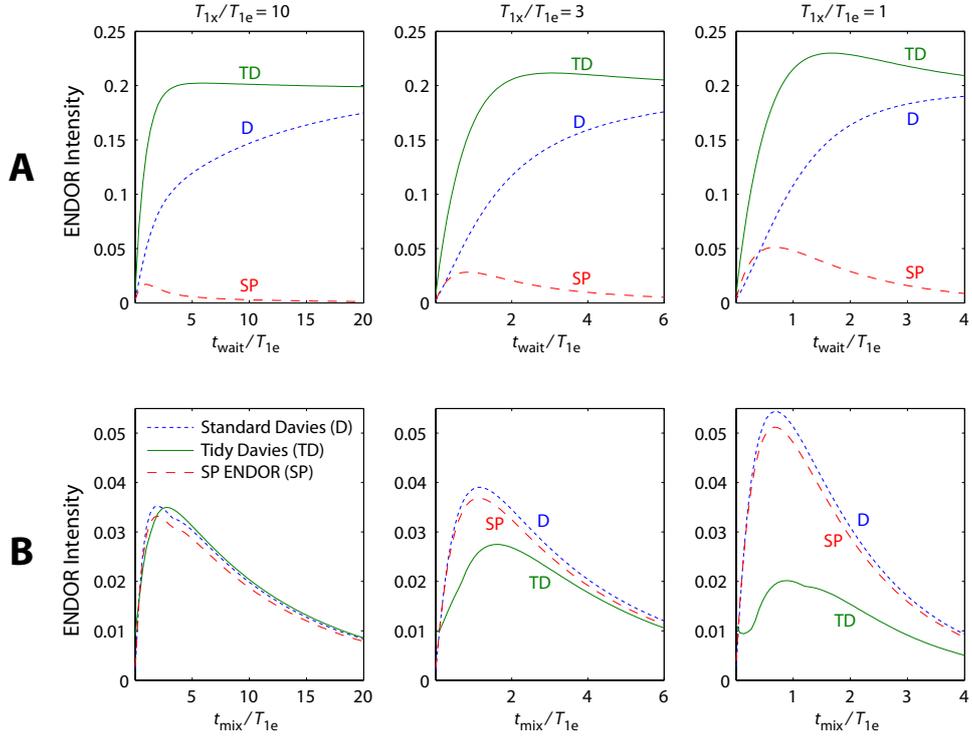


Fig. 2. Dependence of ENDOR intensity (see Eq. 2) on t_{mix} and t_{wait} for the Davies ENDOR sequence and its modifications, given different ratios of T_{1x} and T_{1e} . (A) $t_{\text{mix}} = 0$ and t_{wait} is varied; (B) $t_{\text{wait}} = 0$ and t_{mix} is varied. Simulation parameters: $\nu_{\text{mw}} = 35$ GHz, $T = 2$ K, $T_{1n} = \infty$, $A > 0$.

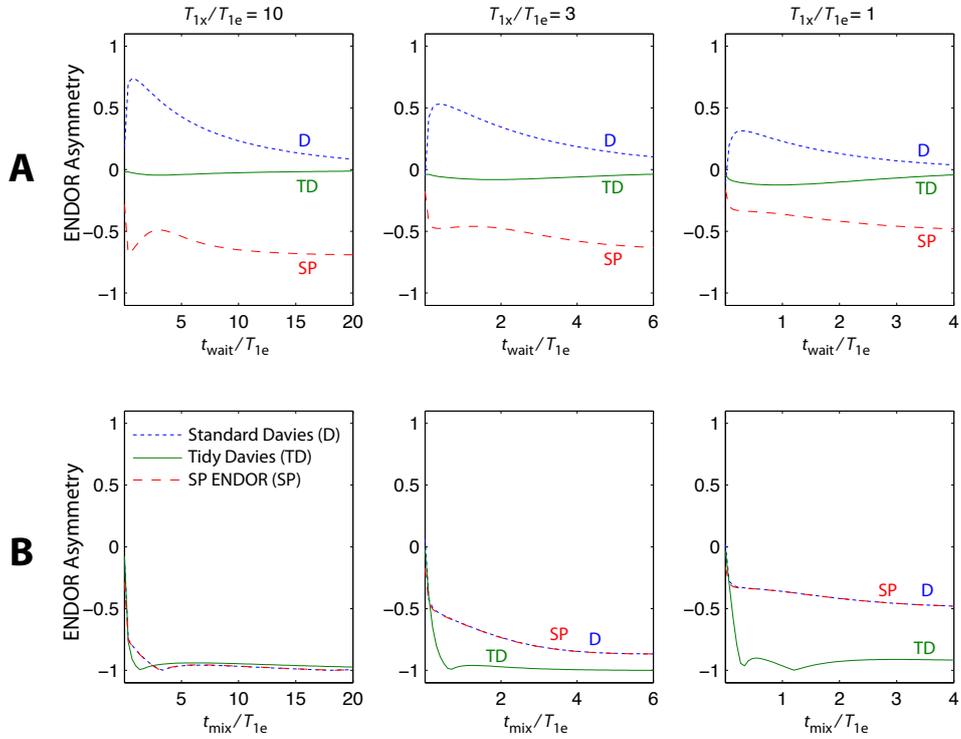


Fig. 3. Dependence of ENDOR asymmetry (see Eq. 3) on t_{mix} and t_{wait} for the Davies ENDOR sequence and its modifications, given different ratios of T_{1x} and T_{1e} . (A) $t_{\text{mix}} = 0$ and t_{wait} is varied; (B) $t_{\text{wait}} = 0$ and t_{mix} is varied. Simulation parameters: $\nu_{\text{mw}} = 35$ GHz, $T = 2$ K, $T_{1n} = \infty$, $A > 0$.

2D plots are shown in the supporting material. The details of the procedure used in simulating the signals is based on Ref. (4), and summarised in Appendix A.

As a general observation, the observed intensity and asymmetry dependencies are on the scale of T_{1x} both along t_{mix} and t_{wait} . The t_{mix} dependencies features an initial fast surge from zero, on the scale of T_{1e} .

When nuclear relaxation is slow, $T_{1x} \gg T_{1e}$, the Tidy sequence offers substantially greater intensity than the other sequences, especially at high repetition rate ($t_{\text{mix}} \approx 0$, t_{wait} small). With $t_{\text{mix}} \approx 0$, the asymmetry is essentially 0, irrespective of T_{1x} , T_{1e} and t_{wait} . If, on the other hand, $t_{\text{wait}} \approx 0$, the Tidy sequence can provide the greatest asymmetry of all three sequences, especially when $T_{1x} \approx T_{1e}$. However, in such cases the overall intensity is weak.

Yang et al. originally proposed to use the SP-ENDOR sequence with $t_{\text{mix}} = 0$ and a substantial t_{wait} in order to measure asymmetry (this so-called Davies/Hahn sequence comprised an rf pulse prior to the Hahn detection sequence). However, it is apparent by comparing Fig. 2A and B that when $T_{1x} > T_{1e}$, greater intensity is obtained if t_{wait} is set to zero and t_{mix} is substantial. The resulting sequence resembles the reverse of the Davies/Hahn multi-sequence proposed, i.e. the rf pulse immediately *follows* the electron spin echo detection instead of preceding it. Regardless of these delay times, the signal intensities in SP-ENDOR are generally weaker than for the standard and the Tidy sequence.

When $T_{1x} = T_{1e}$, the SP-ENDOR signal is symmetric with respect to t_{mix} and t_{wait} , i.e. neither the intensity nor the asymmetry change if the values of t_{mix} and t_{wait} are exchanged.

When run in the ‘‘conventional’’ case where $t_{\text{wait}} \gg t_{\text{mix}}$ (i.e. rf pulse appears to precede E.S.E. sequence), SP-ENDOR offers greater asymmetry than Davies ENDOR - hence the original proposal by Yang *et al.* However, our simulations show that by moving to the regime where $t_{\text{wait}} \ll t_{\text{mix}}$ (rf pulse appears to follow E.S.E. sequence), asymmetry is enhanced for both the SP-ENDOR and standard Davies and the two become largely indistinguishable. In terms of asymmetric signal/time, both SP-ENDOR and standard Davies, in their $t_{\text{wait}} \approx 0$ variant, are most generally appropriate.

4. Experiment

In this section, we use the non-heme Fe enzyme anthranilate dioxygenase, AntDO (8; 9) to illustrate the properties of the SP-ENDOR sequence described in the simulations above. Previous ENDOR studies on this enzyme indicate that $T_{1x} > T_{1e}$ at 2 K, making it an appropriate spin system for studies of asymmetry in ENDOR spectra (3). Experiments were performed using a lab-built Q-band ENDOR spectrometer described in Ref. (10). The experimental ENDOR intensity is defined in absolute terms (as opposed to a percentage of the echo intensity), and the asymmetry as

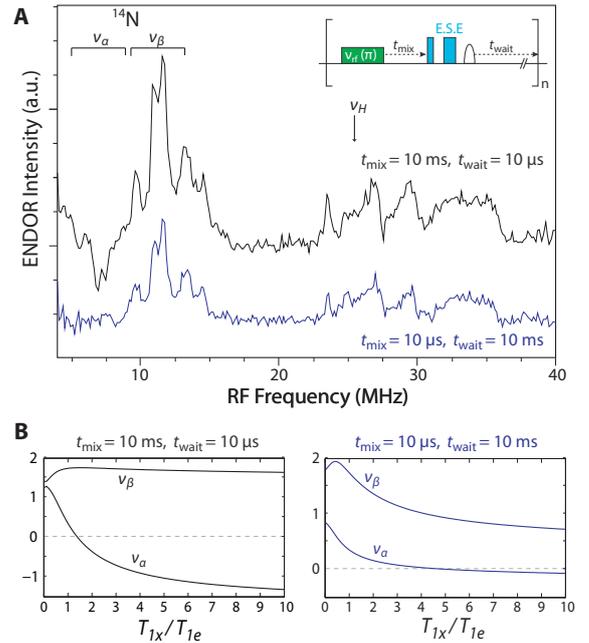


Fig. 4. (A) Q-band ENDOR spectra for natural abundance AntDO collected using the SP-ENDOR sequence with (bottom) $t_{\text{mix}} = 10 \mu\text{s}$, $t_{\text{wait}} = 10 \text{ms}$ and (top) $t_{\text{mix}} = 10 \text{ms}$, $t_{\text{wait}} = 10 \mu\text{s}$. Both the intensity and asymmetry of the spectrum are enhanced by shortening t_{wait} and lengthening t_{mix} . Experimental parameters: $\nu_{\text{mw}} = 34.771 \text{GHz}$, B_0 field = 6021 G, $T = 2 \text{K}$, mw $\pi/2$ pulse length 40 ns, $\tau = 700 \text{ns}$, rf π pulse length $10 \mu\text{s}$. (B) Simulated peak intensities for the two pulse sequences shown in (A). Simulation parameters: $\nu_{\text{mw}} = 34.8 \text{GHz}$, $T = 2 \text{K}$, $T_{1e} = 6 \text{ms}$.

in Eq. 3.

We begin by comparing ^{14}N signals from SP-ENDOR sequences with (long t_{mix} - short t_{wait}) versus (short t_{mix} - long t_{wait}), as shown in Fig. 4A. The fact that (long t_{mix} - short t_{wait}) yields both a greater intensity and a greater asymmetry is an immediate confirmation that $T_{1x} > T_{1e}$ in this system. Fig. 4B shows simulated α and β peak intensities for the two pulse sequences used. Comparison of these plots with the data shown above indicates that T_{1x} is approximately in the range $2T_{1e} < T_{1x} < 10T_{1e}$. Furthermore, the fact the α peak is of smaller intensity than the β peak (negative asymmetry) indicates that the hyperfine constant here is positive, by comparison with Fig. 3B. Fig. 4A also shows an enhancement in the ^1H ENDOR signals when long t_{mix} - short t_{wait} is used.

Having minimised t_{wait} , we now vary t_{mix} to trace out the behaviour predicted by the simulation in Fig. 2A. The resulting spectra are shown in Fig. 5, with the inset comparing the trend of ENDOR intensity with our model. T_{1e} was measured separately via an inversion recovery sequence, yielding a good mono-exponential fit with a time constant of $T_{1e} = 6.4 \text{ms}$. This value was incorporated into the model used to fit to the data, yielding $T_{1x} = 50 \text{ms}$. Both the positive and negative α and β peak intensities were fit to the same time parameter (T_{1x}).

While the above data provide a convenient illustration of the relaxation effects described in this work for the case

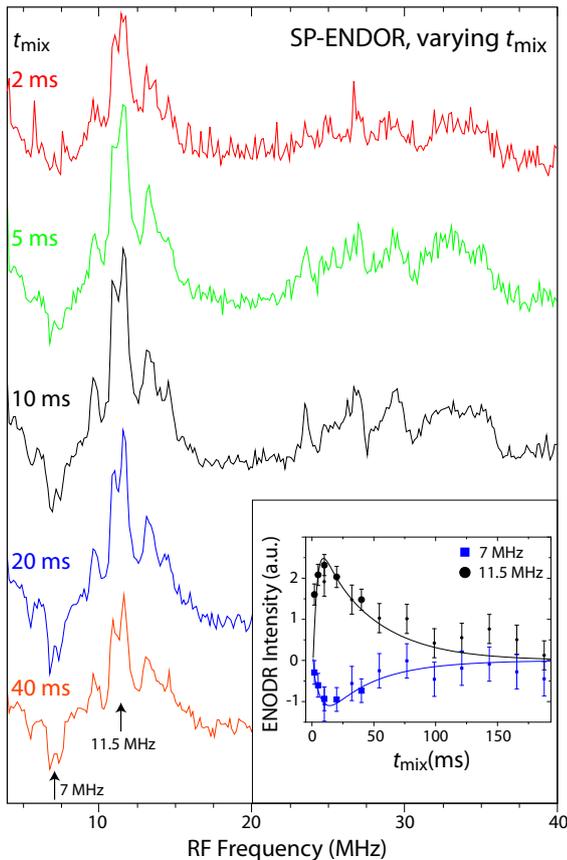


Fig. 5. Q-band ENDOR spectra for natural abundance AntDO collected using the SP-ENDOR sequence with $t_{\text{wait}} = 10 \mu\text{s}$, and at a range of different t_{mix} . The inset shows integrated peak intensities for the α and β peaks (at 11.5 MHz and 7.0 MHz, respectively). Large symbols are obtained by integrating the five traces shown above in the range 6.54 to 8.09 MHz and 10.64 to 12.61 MHz and subtracting a baseline. Smaller symbols are plotted on an independent y-axis, and were obtained by sitting at a particular rf frequency and varying shot repetition time and subtracting results obtained with an off-resonance rf pulse. Peak intensities were fit to the model described in the text, using $T_{1e} = 6.4 \text{ ms}$ and yielding $T_{1x} \approx 50 \text{ ms}$. Experimental parameters as in Fig. 4.

$T_{1x} \approx 8 T_{1e}$, a study of other species (with different ratios of T_{1x} and T_{1e}), and a thorough two-dimensional experiment where both t_{mix} and t_{wait} are swept are required to test the simulations in all conditions. This is the subject of a future work.

5. Conclusions

There is no single ENDOR sequence that is optimal under all experimental circumstances, and the choice of technique depends on precisely what information is being sought.

If the principal values of the hyperfine and quadrupole tensors are of interest, a maximal ENDOR intensity with minimal asymmetry is desired, and in this case the Tidy Davies sequence (6) is most effective, especially for slow and medium cross relaxation. For low-temperature work, one should be conscious of the possibility of sample heating

from a second rf pulse, and assess the advantage of Tidy Davies over the standard sequence accordingly.

To extract signs of the hyperfine interaction it is necessary to introduce an asymmetry between the α and β ENDOR peaks. In general, asymmetry can only be obtained at the cost of signal intensity. However, use of either SP-ENDOR or standard Davies ENDOR maximises the asymmetric signal which can be acquired in the shortest time, when the rf pulse immediately follows the two-pulse echo detection ($t_{\text{wait}} \ll t_{\text{mix}}$). A protocol for the complete measurement of the hyperfine tensor would therefore be:

- I. Tidy Davies ENDOR, for optimum ENDOR intensity to extract principal values. t_{mix} can be short, but t_{wait} should be 2-4 times T_{1e} , depending on nuclear relaxation times (shorter for shorter T_{1x}).
- II. Either SP- or Davies ENDOR, for maximum ENDOR asymmetry to extract signs. t_{wait} should be kept short (a few microseconds), while t_{mix} should be approximately T_{1e} .

6. Acknowledgments

J.J.L.M. is supported by St. John's College, Oxford. S.S. acknowledges the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation. B.M.H. acknowledges support of the US N.I.H., 4L13531.

Appendix A. The model

The model (4) used for computing the ENDOR intensities neglects all coherences generated by the pulses and uses the populations n_i of the four states i of an $S = I = 1/2$ spin system, written as vector

$$\mathbf{n} = (n_1, n_2, n_3, n_4)^T \quad (\text{A.1})$$

The levels are numbered from the lowest to the highest in energy (1 and 2: electron β , 3 and 4: electron α). The initial normalised equilibrium populations are

$$\mathbf{n}_{\text{eq}} = \frac{(1, 1, \epsilon, \epsilon)^T}{2 + 2\epsilon}, \quad \text{with } \epsilon = \exp\left(-\frac{h\nu_{\text{mw}}}{\mu_B T}\right). \quad (\text{A.2})$$

For the experimental conditions used in this article ($\nu_{\text{mw}} = 34.8 \text{ GHz}$, $T = 2 \text{ K}$), $\epsilon = 0.43$.

The selective mw π pulse exchanges populations n_1 and n_3 . The two-pulse detection sequence, which is assumed to be selective for all three pulse sequences, equalises n_1 and n_3 , while n_2 and n_4 remain unaffected. We note that the ENDOR response is independent of the particular electron spin transition excited, and hence the results would be the same for pulses acting between levels 2 and 4. The selective α (β) rf π pulse exchanges the populations n_3 and n_4 (n_1 and n_2).

All time intervals except t_{mix} and t_{wait} are neglected, as they are usually very short compared to T_{1e} and T_{1x} ,

which determine the intensity and asymmetry of the ENDOR peaks. During the free evolution times t_{mix} and t_{wait} , \mathbf{n} changes according to

$$\frac{d}{dt}\mathbf{n}(t) = -\mathbf{\Gamma}\mathbf{n}(t) \quad (\text{A.3})$$

with the asymmetric relaxation matrix, $\mathbf{\Gamma} =$

$$\begin{pmatrix} \Gamma_n + \epsilon\Gamma_e + \epsilon\Gamma_x & -\Gamma_n & -\Gamma_e & -\Gamma_x \\ -\Gamma_n & \Gamma_n + \epsilon\Gamma_e + \epsilon\Gamma_x & -\Gamma_x & -\Gamma_e \\ -\epsilon\Gamma_e & -\epsilon\Gamma_x & \Gamma_n + \Gamma_e + \Gamma_x - \Gamma_n & \\ -\epsilon\Gamma_x & -\epsilon\Gamma_e - \Gamma_n & \Gamma_n + \Gamma_e + \Gamma_x & \end{pmatrix},$$

Here it is assumed that the relaxation times for the two forbidden EPR transitions (1-4 and 2-3) are identical. The electron spin-lattice relaxation time T_{1e} , the nuclear spin-lattice relaxation time T_{1n} , and the electron-nuclear cross relaxation time T_{1x} are related to the elements in the relaxation matrix by

$$T_{1e}^{-1} = (1+\epsilon)\Gamma_e, \quad T_{1n}^{-1} = 2\Gamma_n, \quad T_{1x}^{-1} = (1+\epsilon)\Gamma_x. \quad (\text{A.4})$$

In paramagnetic systems, T_{1n} is in general much larger than T_{1x} and T_{1e} . We thus can set $T_{1n}^{-1} = 0$.

The echo amplitude is obtained by computing $V = n_1 - n_3$ before the application of the two-pulse sequence (which equalises n_1 and n_3). The intensities of the α and β ENDOR peaks are then obtained by

$$I_\alpha = V_\alpha - V_{\text{off}} \quad I_\beta = V_\beta - V_{\text{off}}, \quad (\text{A.5})$$

where V_α and V_β are the echo amplitudes with the rf pulse resonant on the nuclear transition in the α (β) electron manifold, and V_{off} is the echo amplitude when the rf is off-resonant.

The sequence is computed n times, where in this paper we use $n = 50$. The n echo amplitudes are averaged. However, the difference between this average and the last echo amplitude is small. A steady-state is usually reached already after a couple of repetitions.

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