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Rotamerization equilibrium in novel N,N-disubstituted chloroacetamides: An NMR spectroscopic study

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ABSTRACT

We studied the E/Z rotamers of new N-substituted 2-chloro-N-(2-nitrobenzyl)acetamides by applying ¹H-NMR and ¹³C-NMR techniques. The restricted rotation around the amide bond generates a mixture of E/Z diastereomers visualized as a set of appreciably separated signals in the NMR spectra. In order to assign each signal to its corresponding rotamer, the criterion of the anisotropic solvent-induced shift (ASIS) effect, observed in the ¹H-NMR spectra, was used. The effects of solvent and substituent on the relative E/Z ratios were also analyzed.

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1. Introduction

The synthesis of new small bioactive molecules is a continuous challenge for the synthetic organic chemistry community [1]. N-substituted 2-chloroacetamides are molecules with a high impact on biochemistry. Several examples of molecules acting as targeted covalent inhibitors (TCIs) with proven pharmacological effects have been reported in recent years [2]. Thus, the synthesis of novel chloroacetamides is still a field to be investigated in order to enlarge the molecular diversity of this kind of molecule. As biological receptors interact with bioactive molecules in a precise, unique way, the molecular structure and conformations of potentially bioactive synthetic organic compounds must be analyzed in all their complexity [3]. Structural features related to isomeric equilibriums play a key role in many biological processes. For example, E/Z isomerization in substituted amides was reported as crucial in protein folding and biocatalytic processes [4]. The (0)C-N moiety adopts a partial double bond electronic configuration with a hindered rotation [5], and this particular electronic feature causes a rotational barrier established in 15-25 kcal/mol [6] that can be studied by spectroscopic techniques [7]. When a substituent

* Corresponding author. E-mail address: sasiamba@quimica.unlp.edu.ar (L.D. Sasiambarrena). is present in the nitrogen atom, the asymmetrical substructure could be represented as a non-isolable pair of E/Z rotamers (Fig. 1).

This equilibrium could be seen in NMR spectra as different sets of signals when rotamers are appreciably present. Therefore, NMR spectrometric analysis, including dynamic techniques, complemented with theoretical calculations brings valuable information about structures and their conformations [8]. Recently, we have observed these spectral signals in some α -chloroacetamides synthesized in our laboratory. As part of our ongoing efforts in the synthesis and in-depth structure elucidation of new bioactive compounds [9], we report herein a complete NMR and molecular modeling study of nine new N-substituted 2-chloro-N-(2nitrobenzyl)acetamides.

2. Experimental

2.1. Chemistry

The preparation of novel chloroacetamides was performed as previously described [9g] N-substituted N-(2-nitrobenzyl)amines were prepared by reaction with o-nitrobenzaldehyde in ethanol at room temperature. After the aldehyde was consumed, NaBH₄ was added and 2-nitrobenzylamines were obtained after 2 h when R = alkyl or aralkyl and 24 h when R = aryl. The amine (3 mmol) and triethylamine (3 mmol) were dissolved in 5 mL of toluene

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Fig. 1. Rotamerization equilibrium in N,N-disubstituted chloroacetamides.



Fig. 2. ¹H NMR spectrum of compound 1a in CDCl₃.

and a solution of 3 mmol of chloroacetyl chloride in 5 mL of toluene was added. The mixture was heated to reflux for 2–24 h, cooled and washed with water (10 mL), HCl 10% (10 mL) and water (2 \times 10 mL). Solution was dried over sodium sulfate and concentrated to dryness at reduced pressure to obtain crude 2–chloro-*N*-(2-nitrobenzyl)acetamides (1) that were purified by column chromatography (hexane-EtOAc 8:2) or crystallization from methanol. The desired products were obtained in good yields (Scheme 1).

2.2. NMR spectra

¹H- and ¹³C-NMR spectra were measured at 600.13 MHz and 150.91 MHz, respectively, on a Bruker UltraShield 14.1 T with shim Boss II (Probe multinuclear Bruker Smart Probe BBFO (5 mm) and Bruker Avance III acquisition and control system unless noted otherwise. *J* values are given in Hz. All assignments were confirmed by a combination of 2D spectra (HSQC and NOESY) using CDCl₃ or C₆D₆ solution. Chemical shifts are indicated in parts per mil-

Table 1		
¹ H chemical shifts and	oupling constants (Hz) of compounds 1 in $CDCl_3$. (*: E/Z overlapped signals).

Compound	H ₁	H ₂	H ₃	H ₄	H ₇	H_9	H _{Aromatics}	R
1a (Z)	7.35-7.30 (m)*	7.61 (td, <i>J</i> = 7.6, 1.3)	7.46-7.41 (m)	8.05 (dd, <i>J</i> = 8.2, 1.3)	4.96 (s)	4.19 (s)		H ₁₀ : 3.14
1a (E)	7.35–7.30 (m)*	7.70 (td, <i>J</i> = 7.6, 1.4)	7.55–7.50 (m)	8.17 (dd, J = 8.2, 1.4)	5.01 (s)	4.07 (s)		(s) H ₁₀ : 3.00
1b (Z)	7.36–7.33 (m)*	7.60 (td, $J = 7.6, 1.4$)	7.45-7.40 (m)	8.05 (dd, <i>J</i> = 8.2, 1.4)	4.94 (s)	4.18 (s)		(s) H_{10} : 3.46 (q, J = 7.1) H_{11} : 1.26
1b (E)	7.36-7.33 (m)*	7.69 (td, <i>J</i> = 7.6, 1.4)	7.54–7.50 (m)	8.17 (dd, J = 8.2, 1.4)	4.99 (s)	4.01 (s)		(t, J = 7.1) H_{10} : 3.42 (q, J = 7.1) H_{11} : 1.17(t,
1c (Z)	7.37–7.32 (m)*	7.60 (td, J = 7.6, 1.3)	7.45-7.41 (m)	8.05 (td, <i>J</i> = 8.1, 1.3)	4.94 (s)	4.18 (s)		J = 7.1) H_{10} : 3.33 (m)* H_{11} : 1.67 (m)
1c (<i>E</i>)	7.37–7.32 (m)*	7.69 (td, <i>J</i> = 7.6, 1.3)	7.54-7.50 (m)	8.18 (td, J = 8.1, 1.3)	5.00 (s)	4.00 (s)		H_{12} : 0.94 (t, $J = 7.4$) H_{10} : 3.33 (m)* H_{11} : 1.62 (m)
1d (Z)	7.32 (dd, <i>J</i> = 7.8, 1.1)	7.57 (td, <i>J</i> = 7.8, 1.2)	7.41-7.37 (m)	8.06 (td, J = 8.2, 1.2)	4.85 (s)	4.21 (s)		H_{12} . 0.90 (t, $J = 7.4$) H_{10} : 4.32 (hept, J = 6.6)
1d (E)	7.46 (dd, <i>J</i> = 7.7, 1.1)	7.68 (td, J = 7.7, 1.2)	7.53–7.49 (m)	8.17 (td, <i>J</i> = 8.2, 1.2)	4.91 (s)	3.87 (s)		H ₁₁ , H ₁₂ . 1.22 (d, J = 6.6) H ₁₀ : 4.79 (hept, J = 6.6) H ₁₁ , H ₁₂ :
1e (Z)	7.36-7.32 (m)*	7.60 (td, $J = 7.6, 1.4$)	7.46-7.40 (m)	8.05 (dd, <i>J</i> = 8.2, 1.4)	4.95 (s)	4.18 (s)		1.12 (d, J = 6.6) H ₁₀ : 3.36 (t)* H ₁₁ : 1.66 - 1.52 (m)*
1e (<i>E</i>)	7.36–7.32(m)*	7.68 (td, J = 7.7, 1.4)	7.54-7.50 (m)	8.18 (d, <i>J</i> = 8.2, 1.4)	4.99 (s)	4.00 (s)		
1f	7.67- 7.62 (m)	7.43 (ddd, <i>J</i> = 8.5, 7.2, 1.3).	7.62 - 7.67 (m)	7.93 (dd, <i>J</i> = 8.1, 1.3)	5.33 (s)	3.92 (s)	H ₁₂ , H ₁₄ : 7.15 - 7.14 (m) H11, H12,	(t, <i>J</i> = 7.4)
1 g	7.54–7.49 (m)	7.60 - 7.65 (m)	7.60 - 7.65 (m)	7.95 (dd, J = 8.2, 1.4)	5.29 (s)	3.90 (s)	H_{15} : 7.40 – 7.36 (m) H_{12} , H_{14} : 7.54–7.49 (m) H_{11} , H_{15} : 7.04 (d,	
1 h (<i>Z</i>)	7.38–7.16 (m)*	7.60 (td, <i>J</i> = 7.6, 1.3)	7.46-7.41 (m)	8.06 (dd, <i>J</i> = 8.2, 1.3)	5.00 (s)	4.02 (s)	J = 8.6) H₁₃₋₁₇: 7.38 - 7.16 (m)*	H ₁₀ : 3.62 (t, <i>J</i> = 7.1) H ₁₁ : 2.94 –
1 h (<i>E</i>)	7.38–7.16 (m)*	7.65 (td, <i>J</i> = 7.7, 1.3)	7.54-7.48 (m)	8.15 (dd, <i>J</i> = 8.2, 1.3)	4.82 (s)	3.77 (s)	H₁₃₋₁₇: 7.38 - 7.16 (m)*	2.91 (m) H_{10} : 3.59 - 3.56 (m) H_{11} : 2.85 (t, $J = 7.1$)

Table 2

¹³C chemical shifts assigned with the aid of HSQC for selected compounds 1 in CDCl₃.

	Compound								
	1c		1d		1f				
Position	¹ H δ (ppm)	¹³ C δ (ppm)	¹ H δ (ppm)	¹³ C δ (ppm)	¹ H δ (ppm)	¹³ C δ (ppm)			
1	(Z) 7.34	128.93	(Z) 7.32	133.95	7.43	128.45			
	(E) 7.34	128.27	(E) 7.46	134.07					
2	(Z) 7.60	133.94	(Z) 7.57	133.76	7.62 - 7.67	133.57			
	(E) 7.69	134.48	(E) 7.68	134.28					
3	(Z) 7.43	127.64	(Z) 7.39	127.94	7.62 - 7.67	130.05			
	(E) 7.52	128.22	(E) 7.51	128.81					
4	(Z) 8.05	125.30	(Z) 8.06	125.24	7.93	124.94			
	(E) 8.18	126.03	(E) 8.17	125.99					
7	(Z) 4.94	46.34	(Z) 4.85	41.72	5.33	50.63			
	(E) 5.00	50.63	(E) 4.91	44.44					
9	(Z) 4.18	40.97	(Z) 4.21	41.41	3.92	41.64			
	(E) 4.00	41.38	(E) 3.87	42.00					
10	(Z) 3.33	49.39	(Z) 4.32	50.07		131.91			
	(E) 3.33	48.91	(E) 4.79	47.34					
11	(Z) 1.67	20.56	(Z) 1.22	21.27	7.36 - 7.40	130.19			
	(E) 1.62	22.34	(E) 1.12	19.88					
12	(Z) 0.94	11.27	(Z) 1.22	21.27	7.14 - 7.15	130.19			
	(E) 0.90	11.30	(E) 1.12	19.88					
13	14 O		2.0		7.36 - 7.40	127.66			
14					7.36 - 7.40	127.66			
15					7.36 - 7.40	129.10			
8		167.34 167.37		167.33 167.46		167.00			
5 & 6		132.68 132.78 147.90 148.49		134.07 134.06 147.62 147.47		140.93 148.65			

lion relative to TMS. The multiplicities are expressed as: singlet (s), doublet (d), triplet (t), quartet (q), hexuplet (h), multiplet (m), double doublet (dd) and triple doublet (td).

2.3. Computational details

Compounds **1c** and **1f** have been taken as a model for theoretical calculations using Gaussian Software [10a]. After a preoptimization process, the C–N-C(O) torsion angle was scanned using AM1 calculations. In both cases, two minima were found, which correspond to *E* and *Z* conformers. These structures were optimized using DFT method [10b], B3LYP functional and 6-311++G(d,p) as basis set [10c-d].

Chemical shifts (δ_{calc}) relative to tetramethylsilane were then calculated for ¹H and ¹³C nuclei for the two optimized conformers for both compounds. The isotropic magnetic shielding tensors were evaluated in chloroform and benzene by means of GIAO NMR calculations at the B3LYP/6-31+G(d,p) level of theory using the polarization continuum model, SCRF-PCM [10f]. Each scalar isotropic shielding value (σ_i) was turned into a chemical shift by subtracting it from the corresponding σ of ¹H or ¹³C of TMS (these σ were calculated using the same method and basis set).

3. Results and discussion

The NMR spectra of all new compounds were carefully analyzed. Due to the slow rotation around the N–C(O) bond, these compounds exist in solution as a mixture of two *E* and *Z* isomers (rotamers) that were detected by ¹H and ¹³C-NMR. As we expected, duplicated signals could be attributed to the two *E/Z* isomers, as shown in Fig. 2.

¹H and ¹³C chemical shifts and multiplicities for both isomers in CDCl₃ are given in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. At this point, to establish the correspondence of the signals with *E* or *Z* rotamers, we assume the reported tendency for model compounds, which indicates that, concerning to the carbonyl moiety, *cis* methylene protons are more deshielded than those in the *trans* isomer [11]. The relative proportions of rotamers in CDCl₃ were calculated by integrating the C7 and C9 methylene signals, as listed in Table 3. In all

Table 3									
E/Z ratios	at 25	°C for	compounds	1	in	CDCl ₃	and	C_6D_6 .	

	CDCl ₃		C_6D_6	
Compound	%Е	%Z	%Е	%Z
1a	31	69	32	68
1b	36	64	37	63
1c	35	65	36	64
1d ^a	70	30	67	33
1e	34	66	35	65
1h	32	68	40	60

^a Note that the rotamers visualized for compound 1d have inverted names because of priority rules.

cases, the signal assignments were made with the aid of gHSQC, and NOESY experiments.

Although some reports demonstrate good correlations between chemical shifts and *cis/trans* relative location of *N*-substituents in amides, this information could not be assumed to be undoubtedly certain [12]. Recording the NMR spectra in C_6D_6 solution could provide more structural information. The results obtained are summarized in **Tables 1SI** and **2SI**.

As shown in Tables 1 and **1SI**, the signal of R substituent *trans* to the carbonyl moiety (*Z*) suffers a diamagnetic shift $(\Delta\delta)$ when chloroform was replaced with benzene as the deuterated solvent (Fig. 3). This $\Delta\delta$ was smaller in the rotamer where R substituent is *cis* to the carbonyl moiety (*E*). This phenomenon was extended (Table 4), and it agrees with the anisotropic solvent-induced shifts (ASIS) effect [13].

Assuming that the ASIS effect is a piece of reliable information, we could describe and undoubtedly assign all signals expressed in the NMR spectra to both diastereomers in equilibrium. In the ¹H NMR spectrum of **1a**, the protons of the methyl group appear as two singlet signals at 3.00 (*E*) and 3.14 (*Z*) ppm. These characteristic two sets of signals were also observed in both C7 and C9 methylenes. The benzyl protons appear at 4.96 (*Z*) and 5.01 (*E*) ppm and the chloromethylene at 4.07 (*E*) and 4.19 (*Z*) ppm. Also, aromatic protons were distinguished in both rotamers. Near the nitro group, the H4 signals at 8.17 (*Z*) and 8.05 (*E*) appear as



Fig. 3. Detail of the ¹H NMR spectra of 1a (R=CH₃) in CDCl₃ (A) and C₆D₆ (B). The blue lines indicates the signal experiencing the strongest ASIS for each rotamer.



Fig. 4. Conformational minima for compounds 1c and 1f at the $\mbox{B3LYP/6-311}++G(d,p)$ level.

Table 4

 $\Delta\delta$ values, calculated from CDCl₃ and C₆D₆ ¹H NMR spectra, indicating the ASIS effect for compounds 1.

Compound	δ (ppm) H ₇ C ₆ D ₆	δ (ppm) H ₇ CDCl ₃	$\Delta\delta$ (ppm) H ₇	δ (ppm) H ₉ C ₆ D ₆	δ (ppm) H ₉ CDCl ₃	$\Delta\delta$ (ppm) H ₉
1a (Z)	4.65	4.96	0.31	3.48	4.19	0.71
1a (E)	4.34	5.01	0.67	3.45	4.07	0.62
1b (Z)	4.73	4.94	0.21	3.53	4.18	0.65
1b (E)	4.45	4.99	0.54	3.40	4.01	0.61
1c (Z)	4.78	4.94	0.16	3.60	4.18	0.58
1c (E)	4.54	5.00	0.46	3.41	4.00	0.59
1d (Z)	4.50	4.91	0.41	3.35	3.87	0.52
1d (E)	4.79	4.85	0.06	3.59	4.21	0.62
1e (Z)	4.72	4.95	0.23	3.48	4.18	0.70
1e (E)	4.41	4.99	0.58	3.35	4.00	0.65
1 h (Z)	4.84	5.00	0.16	3.40	4.02	0.62
1 h (E)	4.42	4.82	0.40	3.27	3.77	0.50

Table 5

Calculated and experimental chemical shifts (ppm) for E/Z rotamers of compound 1c in CDCl₃.

Carbons	Ε		Ζ		Hydrogens	E Z			
	Calc.	Exp.	Calc.	Exp.		Calc.	Exp.	Calc.	Exp.
1	128.6	128.27	127.2	128.93	1	7.61	7.34	7.68	7.34
2	129.5	134.48	129.3	133.94	2	7.97	7.69	7.86	7.60
3	125.6	128.22	124.1	127.64	3	7.72	7.52	7.83	7.43
4	122.2	126.03	122.1	125.30	4	8.18	8.18	8.03	8.05
5	147.9	148.49	147.5	147.90	7	4.88	5.00	4.93	4.94
6	129.8	132.68	128.7	132.68	9	4.22	4.00	3.81	4.18
7	51.4	49.39	46.30	46.34	10	2.65	3.33	2.61	3.33
8	161.7	167.37	161.2	167.34	11	1.40	1.62	1.51	1.67
9	47.3	41.38	46.30	40.97	12	0.62	0.90	0.56	0.94
10	46.2	48.91	49.00	50.63					
11	19.7	22.34	23.10	20.56					
12	11.3	11.30	11.00	11.27					

Table 6

Calculated and experimental chemical shifts (ppm) for E/Z rotamers of compound 1f in CDCl₃.

Carbons	Е	Ζ		Hydrogens	E	Ζ	
	Calc.	Calc.	Exp.		Calc.	Calc.	Exp.
1	127.6	131.2	128.45	1	7.11	7.59	7.43
2	129.1	129.5	133.57	2	7.65	7.77	7.64
3	124.0	124.6	130.05	3	7.65	7.50	7.64
4	121.9	122.2	124.94	4	8.03	8.22	7.93
5	147.9	146.3	148.65	7	5.31	5.50	5.33
6	129.4	129.6	140.93	9	3.50	3.97	3.92
7	51.80	54.70	50.63	Ph	6.72 - 7.69	6.93 - 7.38	7.15-7.40
8	161.7	161.10	167.00				
9	45.10	46.60	41.64				
Ph	124.3 - 135.7	120.8 - 136.5	127.66-131.91				

two doublets ($J_{HH}^3 = 8.2$ Hz), then two pairs of triplets at 7.44 (Z) and 7.52 (E) (J_{HH}^3 =7.4) for protons H3 and 7.62 (Z) and 7.70 (Z) with $J_{HH}^3=7.3$ for protons H2 were present. The H1 peak was the only signal in the spectra that could not differentiate between the isomers, and a multiplet with the correct integration appears at 7.35-7.31 ppm. This assignment was also confirmed with data obtained from NOESY spectra. In all the examples examined, with Nalkyl substituents, appreciable signal correlations with the CH₂Cl methylene were detected only in the major isomer, assuming it as Z. The correlations extracted from gHSQC analysis provide the information to correctly assign all ¹³C signals. After integrating and comparing all signals for compound 1a, we assume that 69% of molecules in equilibrium are the Z isomer. The Z rotamers predominate in all cases, as shown in Table 3, except for R=isopropyl due to a change in substituent priority. This expected result is consistent with the steric influence of the groups that surrounded the amide bond. The bulky chloromethyl moiety preferred the trans position towards the o-nitrobenzyl group as this is more voluminous than the R-alkyl substituent. The populations of this major conformation are all around 65-70%. When aryl N-substituent (1f and 1g) is present, the electronic effects produce a delocalization

of the nitrogen electrons so E/Z diastereomers were not detected in the NMR time scale [14].

The experimental information collected reveals a slow molecular equilibrium at room temperature, visible by NMR, and it may be attributed to the presence of relatively stable *E* and *Z* rotamers with respect to rotation about the (O)C–N bond. Although all NMR spectra were completely assigned, and the chemical shifts and ASIS effect are consistent with the proposed structures, we can obtain more information from theoretical calculations and analyze and compare it with the experimental observations [15]. Theoretical quantum calculations reveal crucial data to support experimental values, and hence elucidating the molecular structures is easier [16]. In this work, molecular modeling was performed to obtain the relative stability of the two rotamers and calculate the chemical shifts of carbon and hydrogen atoms. Model compounds 1c (R=propyl) and 1f (R=phenyl) were studied computationally using Gaussian Software as previously described (Fig. 4).

These structures were optimized using the DFT method, B3LYP functional, and 6-311++G(d,p) as basis set. ΔG at 25 °C was calculated in both cases by taking the differences between the *Z* and E rotamer energies, the results obtained being 1.55 kcal.mol⁻¹ and



Scheme 1. Synthetic route for preparation of N-substituted 2-chloro-N-(2-nitrobenzyl)acetamides.

-0.29 kcal.mol⁻¹ for compounds **1c** and **1f**, respectively. These calculations were in full accordance with the experimental results obtained by NMR spectroscopy, and the ΔG values obtained show the same tendency as experimental ones in solution. The ¹H and ¹³C NMR chemical shifts were calculated using chloroform and benzene as solvents, and a good correlation with experimental δ was found, as shown in Tables 5 and 6.

The experimental and theoretical data collected are consistent values in all cases. For the structures analyzed herein, the prediction fits well with the expected abundance of rotamers and their chemical shifts. We calculated their relative abundance in $CDCI_3$ and C_6D_6 solution, as well as the ASIS effect, and found that the chemical shifts provide the necessary information to distinguish both rotamers. Also, the theoretical calculations supported the spectroscopic experimental information: the most stable rotamer was the most abundant in solution, and all calculated chemical shifts clearly differentiated the *E* and *Z* diastereomers with the same experimental pattern.

4. Conclusions

We report here the complete ¹H and ¹³C-NMR characterization of a series of new *N*-substituted 2–chloro-*N*-(2nitrobenzyl)acetamides. Such compounds display *E*/*Z* stereoisomerism due to partial (O)C–N double bond character, showing two unequally populated sets of signals in their ¹H and ¹³C-NMR spectra. The ¹H-NMR resonances of both rotamers were assigned on the basis of the ASIS effects. For all the compounds, the *E*/*Z* equilibrium favors the *Z* diastereomer. This preference of chloromethylene and 2-nitrobenzyl moieties in *cis* position is sensitive to steric hindrance. Chloroacetamides carrying an aryl substituent to nitrogen atom did not show *E*/*Z* stereoisomerism. Results of the complete conformational study for compunds **1c** and **1f** performed at DFT-B3LYP/6-36–311++G(d,p) level of theory were in good agreement with the experimentally determined *E*/*Z* ratios.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Guido G. Fraga: Investigation, Formal analysis, **Diego D. Colasurdo:** Software, Formal analysis, **Cintia C. Santiago:** Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Agustín Ponzinibbio:** Resources, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Leandro D. Sasiambarrena:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Visualization, Supervision.

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Supplementary materials

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:10.1016/j.molstruc.2022.132892.

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