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**High gravity extractive fermentation for enhanced
productivity of bioethanol**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

Bioethanol is a renewable alcohol fuel produced from sugary substrates via fermentation processes. Accumulation of ethanol in the fermentation broth inhibits cell growth and further production of ethanol. Recovering ethanol from a dilute broth is expensive. Ethanol inhibition of fermentation may be reduced by continuously removing it as it is formed.

This work focussed on production of bioethanol from glucose using the anaerobic bacterium *Zymomonas anaerobia*. This bacterium produces ethanol more rapidly than does the conventional yeast fermentation. The aim was to assess the impact of continuous in-situ removal of ethanol on the productivity of batch and continuous high-gravity fermentations. High-gravity fermentations use a medium with a high concentration of sugar to reduce production volume (bioreactor size) and potentially achieve a high productivity of ethanol, if the ethanol concentration in the broth can be kept to below inhibitory levels.

First, the batch fermentation was characterized for glucose tolerance, ethanol tolerance, optimal production temperature and biocompatibility with solvents and adsorbents that could be used for in-situ removal of ethanol. High gravity media containing 50–300 g L⁻¹ glucose were used to characterize batch and continuous fermentations with a view to identifying the best fermentation conditions for a detailed study. The optimal fermentation temperature was found to be 35 °C and the maximum tolerable initial glucose (i.e. without causing substrate inhibition) was 150 g L⁻¹.

In continuous high-gravity fermentations, six different dilution rates ($D = 0.05\text{--}0.30\text{ h}^{-1}$) were tested, but steady-state operation proved to be impossible at the lowest dilution rate: the fermentation showed a highly consistent oscillatory behaviour that was ascribed to ethanol toxicity. Use of higher dilution rates could overcome oscillations by washing out the ethanol from the bioreactor, but this reduced ethanol productivity as glucose and biomass also washed out. Strategies for removing ethanol in-situ while operating at such a dilution rate as to achieve a high ethanol productivity, were assessed by using liquid-liquid extraction and adsorption on polymer resins as methods for removing ethanol as it was being produced.

In the absence of in-situ removal of ethanol, the lowest operable steady-state dilution rate (i.e. without oscillations) was 0.15 h^{-1} . With in-situ removal of ethanol, the dilution rate for stable steady state operation could be reduced to 0.05 h^{-1} . At a dilution rate of 0.15 h^{-1} , the steady-state ethanol concentration was 42.5 g L^{-1} and the biomass concentration was 1.49 g L^{-1} . In the absence of in-situ ethanol removal, the ethanol concentration, but not ethanol productivity, was highest at a dilution rate of 0.3 h^{-1} although much residual glucose remained.

In in-situ batch extractive fermentations, all extraction solvents tested improved biomass concentration, glucose consumption and ethanol concentration relative to control, but iso-octadecanol was clearly the most effective solvent. For batch in-situ extractive fermentation with iso-octadecanol, the ethanol yield on glucose was $0.485 \pm 0.005 \text{ g g}^{-1}$, or comparable to a yield of $0.468 \pm 0.005 \text{ g g}^{-1}$ for the control culture, but the ethanol productivity was distinctly higher than for the control culture. Of the various polymer resins tested in batch fermentations for in-situ removal of ethanol by adsorption, Dowex Optipore L-493 appeared to be somewhat better than the control (i.e. no resin).

The best extraction solvent (i.e. iso-octadecanol) and the best adsorption resin (i.e. Dowex Optipore L-493) were separately assessed for ethanol removal in continuous fermentations. Continuous removal of ethanol both by adsorption and solvent extraction allowed a steady-state operation of the continuous fermentations at a dilution rate of 0.05 h^{-1} — the dilution rate at which steady-state operation had proved impossible in control fermentation (i.e. without in-situ removal of ethanol). This confirmed the mechanism used to explain the oscillatory behaviour of the fermentation and showed that in-situ ethanol removal permitted steady-state operation at dilution rates that would not allow such operation in the absence of ethanol removal. At a dilution rate of 0.05 h^{-1} , an extraction solvent flow rate of 300 mL h^{-1} provided the highest total ethanol productivity and ethanol yield on glucose while keeping the solvent use to a minimum.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	ix
List of Tables	xiii
Abbreviations	xiv
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Rationale and importance of the study	1
1.2 Research approach	3
1.3 Research objectives	4
1.4 Thesis outline	4
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	5
2.1 Bioethanol	5
2.2 Properties and uses of ethanol	5
2.3 Microorganisms used in making bioethanol	6
2.4 The genus <i>Zymomonas</i>	8
2.5 Carbohydrate metabolism	9
2.5.1 Glucose and fructose	9
2.5.2 Sucrose	11
2.5.3 Other carbohydrates	12
2.6 Growth and conservation conditions	12
2.6.1 Temperature	12
2.6.2 pH	12
2.7 Inhibitory factors	14
2.8 Continuous steady-state fermentations	14
2.9 In situ product recovery	15
2.9.1 Vacuum and flash fermentations	16
2.9.2 Gas stripping	17
2.9.3 Pervaporation	18
2.9.4 Liquid-liquid extraction	21
2.10 Adsorption	25

CHAPTER 3 MATERIALS AND METHODS	30
3.1 Microorganism, maintenance and preparation.....	30
3.2 Culture medium	31
3.3 Solvents and resins.....	31
3.4 Cleaning of glassware	36
3.5 Equipment sterilization	36
3.6 Glucose tolerance studies.....	36
3.7 Ethanol tolerance studies	37
3.8 Effect of an anaerobic atmosphere.....	37
3.9 Effect of temperature	38
3.10 Batch bioreactor fermentations	39
3.11 Continuous bioreactor fermentations.....	40
3.12 Pump calibration	41
3.13 Distribution coefficients of ethanol	42
3.14 Biocompatibility experiments.....	42
3.15 Extractive fermentations	43
3.15.1 In-situ batch extractive fermentations.....	43
3.15.2 Continuous extractive fermentations	45
3.16 Adsorption resins	48
3.16.1 Adsorption equilibria (specific loadings and partition coefficients).....	48
3.16.2 Glucose adsorption isotherm.....	49
3.17 Batch solid-sorbent extractive fermentations (shake flasks)	49
3.18 Continuous solid-sorbent extractive fermentations	49
3.19 Analytical methods	53
3.19.1 pH measurements.....	53
3.19.2 Preparation of samples.....	53
3.19.3 Glucose concentration.....	53
3.19.4 Biomass concentration	55
3.19.5 Ethanol concentration	57
3.19.6 Cell viability.....	58
3.19.7 Fermentation kinetics.....	58
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	63
4.1 Fermentation characterization.....	63
4.1.1 Effect of high glucose concentrations on fermentation	63

4.1.2 Inhibition by ethanol	68
4.1.3 Effect of temperature on <i>Z. anaerobia</i>	74
4.1.4 Impact of dilution rate on oscillations in continuous ethanol fermentations	78
4.1.5 Effect of feed glucose concentration on oscillations	87
4.2 In situ extractive fermentation using solvents	92
4.2.1 Biocompatibility of solvents (toxicity of solvents).....	92
4.2.2 In-situ batch extractive fermentation	94
4.2.3 Continuous extractive fermentation	99
4.3 In situ removal of ethanol from fermentation broth by solid-sorbents method	106
4.3.1 Equilibrium adsorption of ethanol and glucose on polymer resins.....	106
4.3.2 Adsorption isotherms	109
4.3.3 Batch solid-sorbent extractive fermentation	114
4.3.4 Continuous solid-sorbent extractive fermentation	119
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	123
5.1 Conclusions.....	123
5.2 Recommendations.....	125
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	126
REFERENCES	127
APPENDIX 1	149
APPENDIX 2	150

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 World ethanol production (From the website of World Fuel Ethanol, www.distill.com).....	2
Figure 2.1 Entner-Doudoroff pathway in <i>Zymomonas mobilis</i> (Panesar <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	10
Figure 2.2 Fermentation coupled with gas stripping (after Cardona and Sánchez, 2007). 18	
Figure 2.3 Process configuration for an ethanol fermentation integrated with pervaporation: a. ethanol recovery directly from fermentation broth by pervaporation; b. ethanol recovery by pervaporation from a cell-free broth (after Groot <i>et al.</i> , 1992).	20
Figure 2.4 Possible methods of using solid sorbents in an extractive fermentation: a) adsorption inside the fermentor; b) adsorption from the whole broth but outside the fermentor; c) adsorption from cell-free broth outside the fermentor (after Holst and Mattiasson, 1991).....	28
Figure 3.1 An anaerobic fermentation (a) with an air atmosphere and (b) with purging with nitrogen	38
Figure 3.2 News Brunswick BioFlo 210 pump calibration graphs: (a) feed flow rate (mL h ⁻¹); (b) dilution rate of feed (h ⁻¹); (c) solvent flow rate (mL h ⁻¹); (d) dilution rate of solvent (h ⁻¹).....	41
Figure 3.3 Batch solvent extractive fermentation set up (adapted from Sulaiman <i>et al.</i> , 2011)	44
Figure 3.4 Flow scheme of the in situ solvent extractive continuous fermentation up (modified from Sulaiman <i>et al.</i> , 2011).....	47
Figure 3.5 Continuous adsorptive fermentation set up (modified from Sulaiman <i>et al.</i> , 2011).	50
Figure 3.6 The fluidized bed glass column. Dimensions in mm.	52
Figure 3.7 The standard curve of glucose.....	55
Figure 3.8 Calibration curve for A _{650nm} versus dry cell weight.	57
Figure 4.1 The effects of initial glucose concentrations on (a) ethanol production; (b) glucose utilization and (c) biomass growth. Each curve in the above graphs is based on three replicate fermentations. Each measurement in each fermentation was made in triplicate. Therefore, nine measurements were used to calculate the averages and standard deviations.	66

Figure 4.2 Effect of initial glucose concentration on ethanol productivity and specific growth rate in batch fermentations. Data from Table 4.1. 68

Figure 4.3 Effect of ethanol on its production. No ethanol was added to control cultures. Each curve is based on three replicate fermentations. 70

Figure 4.4 Effect of ethanol on glucose consumption and biomass production. No ethanol was added to control cultures. Each curve is based on three replicate fermentations..... 70

Figure 4.5 Correlation between specific growth rate and the added ethanol concentration. Data from Table 4.2. 71

Figure 4.6 Inhibition by ethanol added at 10 hour of fermentation: (a) glucose utilization; (b) biomass concentration; and (c) ethanol concentration. Three replicate fermentations were performed for each concentration of initial added ethanol..... 73

Figure 4.7 Biomass production profiles at various temperatures. Data are averaged values from three replicate fermentations at each temperature..... 74

Figure 4.8 Glucose consumption profiles at various temperatures. Data are averaged values from three replicate fermentations at each temperature. 75

Figure 4.9 Ethanol production profiles at various temperatures. Data are averaged values from three replicate fermentations at each temperature..... 75

Figure 4.10 Effect of temperature on ethanol productivity in batch fermentation. Data from Table 4.3..... 76

Figure 4.11 Impact of dilution rate (D) on the biomass concentration profile in continuous ethanol fermentation. Glucose concentration in the feed medium was 150 g L⁻¹. The working volume of the bioreactor was 1 L..... 82

Figure 4.12 Impact of dilution rate (D) on the glucose concentration profile in continuous ethanol fermentation. Glucose concentration in the feed medium was 150 g L⁻¹. The working volume of the bioreactor was 1 L..... 83

Figure 4.13 Impact of dilution rate (D) on the ethanol concentration profile in continuous ethanol fermentation. Glucose concentration in the feed medium was 150 g L⁻¹. The working volume of the bioreactor was 1 L..... 84

Figure 4.14 Steady state values of glucose concentration, ethanol concentration and biomass concentration in the bioreactor at various dilution rates. Glucose concentration in the feed medium was 150 g L⁻¹. 85

Figure 4.15 Continuous ethanol fermentation at feed glucose concentration of 80 g L ⁻¹ , D = 0.05 h ⁻¹ and D = 0.1 h ⁻¹ : a) biomass concentration profile; b) residual glucose concentration profile; and c) ethanol concentration profile. Dilution rate was changed at the instances marked by the dashed lines at 10 h and 170 h. The working volume of the bioreactor was 1 L.	88
Figure 4.16 Continuous ethanol fermentation at feed glucose concentration of 100 g L ⁻¹ , D = 0.05 h ⁻¹ and D = 0.1 h ⁻¹ : a) biomass concentration profile; b) residual glucose concentration profile; and c) ethanol concentration profile. Dilution rate was changed at the instances marked by the dashed lines at 10 h and 160 h. The working volume of the bioreactor was 1 L.	89
Figure 4.17 Effects of solvents on biomass and glucose concentration profiles in batch extractive fermentations. Each curve is based on three replicate fermentations.	95
Figure 4.18 Effects of solvents on total ethanol production in batch extractive fermentations. Each curve is based on three replicate fermentations.	96
Figure 4.19 Biomass concentration in the aqueous phase of continuous extractive fermentation (feed glucose concentration 150 g L ⁻¹ , dilution rate 0.05 h ⁻¹ , 35 °C, agitation rate of 140 rpm). F _s is the flow rate of solvent. The bioreactor had a constant working volume of 1 L of culture broth and 1 L of solvent.	101
Figure 4.20 Glucose concentration in the aqueous phase of continuous extractive fermentation (feed glucose concentration = 150 g L ⁻¹ , dilution rate 0.05 h ⁻¹ , 35 °C, agitation rate of 140 rpm). F _s is the flow rate of the solvent. The bioreactor had a constant working volume of 1 L of culture broth and 1 L of solvent.	102
Figure 4.21 Ethanol concentration in the aqueous phase and the solvent phase of continuous extractive fermentation (feed glucose concentration 150 g L ⁻¹ , dilution rate 0.05 h ⁻¹ , 35 °C, agitation rate of 140 rpm). F _s is the flow rate of the solvent. The bioreactor had a constant working volume of 1 L of culture broth and 1 L of solvent.	103
Figure 4.22 Adsorption isotherms of ethanol on solid-sorbents materials. Based on three replicates in each case.	107

Figure 4.23 Percent reduction of ethanol in the aqueous phase (10 mL) in equilibrium with 1 g of the resin. Based on three replicates in each case. 108

Figure 4.24 Adsorption isotherms of glucose on the solid adsorbents. Based on three replicates in each case. 108

Figure 4.25 Equilibrium adsorption data for ethanol on various resins at 35 °C. The lines are empirical best fit curves (Equation a-d) for the data. 109

Figure 4.26 Biomass concentration profiles in fermentations involving adsorption resins. The initial glucose concentration was 150 g L⁻¹. Data were measured in three replicate fermentations for each resin. 115

Figure 4.27 Residual glucose concentration profiles in the fermentations involving adsorption resins. The initial glucose concentration was 150 g L⁻¹. Data were measured in three replicate fermentations for each resin. 116

Figure 4.28 Ethanol concentration profiles in the fermentations involving adsorption resins. The initial glucose concentration was 150 g L⁻¹. Data were measured in three replicate fermentations for each resin. 117

Figure 4.29 Biomass and glucose concentration profiles in continuous fermentation with ethanol extraction in a fluidized bed. The working volume of the bioreactor was 1 L. 120

Figure 4.30 Ethanol concentration profile in continuous fermentation with ethanol extraction in a fluidized bed. The working volume of the bioreactor was 1 L. 121

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Comparison between <i>Z. mobilis</i> and yeast for ethanol production (Panesar <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	7
Table 2.2 Difference between the two species of the genus <i>Zymomonas</i> (Carr and Passmore, 1971).....	8
Table 2.3 Ranges of temperature and pH studied in <i>Zymomonas</i> fermentations.....	13
Table 2.4 Solvents used as extractants in fermentations.....	23
Table 2.5 Extraction solvents, sources and characteristics (Offeman <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	25
Table 3.1 Solvents and their characteristics.....	32
Table 3.2 Resins and their characteristics.....	35
Table 4.1 Kinetic parameters of <i>Z. anaerobia</i> in batch culture	67
Table 4.2 Effect of added ethanol on batch fermentation kinetics ^a	72
Table 4.3 Effect temperature on batch fermentation kinetics	77
Table 4.4 Summarized steady state parameters from continuous culture of <i>Z. anaerobia</i> at feed glucose concentration of 150 g L ⁻¹	86
Table 4.5 Steady state kinetic parameters for continuous culture of <i>Z. anaerobia</i> at feed glucose concentration of 80 g L ⁻¹	90
Table 4.6 Steady state kinetic parameters for continuous culture of <i>Z. anaerobia</i> at feed glucose concentration of 100 g L ⁻¹	91
Table 4.7 Comparison of solvents	93
Table 4.8 Comparison of fermentation kinetics of in-situ extractive batch fermentations	98
Table 4.9 Steady state kinetic parameters at different solvent flowrates and a constant medium flowrate (dilution rate = 0.05 h ⁻¹).....	104
Table 4.10 Regression equations of C_e/q_e vs C_e for Langmuir isotherms at 35 °C	112
Table 4.11 Regression equations of $\log q_e$ vs $\log C_e$ for Freundlich isotherms at 35 °C.....	113
Table 4.12 Adsorption Gibbs free energy parameters of ethanol on the resins at 35 °C.....	114
Table 4.13 Comparison of the kinetic parameters of batch fermentations with added adsorbents	118
Table 4.14 Steady state kinetic parameters of the adsorptive continuous fermentation at dilution rate of 0.05 h ⁻¹ and column recirculation flowrate of 0.22 L min ⁻¹ ..	122

Abbreviations

A	-	Cross sectional area of the column (m^2)
C_{Aq}	-	Aqueous phase concentration of ethanol ($g L^{-1}$)
C_e	-	Equilibrium concentration of ethanol in glucose solution ($g L^{-1}$)
D	-	Dilution rate (h^{-1})
D_p	-	Particle size (m)
E	-	Maximum ethanol concentration ($g L^{-1}$)
E_A	-	Steady state ethanol concentration in aqueous phase ($g L^{-1}$)
E_S	-	Steady state ethanol concentration in solvent phase ($g L^{-1}$)
F_S	-	Flow rate of solvent ($mL h^{-1}$)
g	-	Acceleration due to gravity ($m s^{-2}$)
H	-	Height of expanded resin bed (m)
H_o	-	Bed height of original settled resin at superficial flow velocity of zero
K_a	-	Distribution coefficients of solute a in the solvent
K_b	-	Distribution coefficients of solute b in the solvent
K_d	-	Partition coefficient
K_F	-	Freundlich constant
K_L	-	Langmuir constant
K_r	-	Partitioning coefficient of ethanol on resin
K_s	-	Limiting substrate concentration ($g L^{-1}$)
L	-	Specific loading
n	-	Freundlich coefficient
P_E	-	Ethanol productivity ($g L^{-1} h^{-1}$)
P_{EA}	-	Steady state ethanol productivity in the aqueous phase ($g L^{-1} h^{-1}$)
P_{ES}	-	Steady state ethanol productivity in the solvent phase ($g L^{-1} h^{-1}$)
P_{ET}	-	Total ethanol productivity ($g L^{-1} h^{-1}$)
P_x	-	Biomass productivity ($g L^{-1} h^{-1}$)
q_e	-	Equilibrium adsorption capacity of ethanol on the adsorbent ($g kg^{-1}$)
Q_F	-	Medium flow rate ($mL h^{-1}$)
Q_L	-	Flow rate ($mL h^{-1}$)

Q_s	-	Solvent flow rate (mL h^{-1})
q_m	-	Maximum adsorption capacity of ethanol on the adsorbent (g kg^{-1})
q_p	-	Average specific ethanol production rate ($\text{g g}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$)
q_s	-	Average specific glucose uptake rate ($\text{g g}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$)
R	-	Ideal gas constant ($\text{J mol}^{-1} \text{K}^{-1}$)
R^2	-	Regression coefficient
S	-	Glucose concentration (g L^{-1})
S_o	-	Initial substrate concentration (g L^{-1})
T	-	Absolute temperature (K)
t	-	Time (h)
t_0	-	Initial time (h)
t_f	-	Time at equilibrium (h)
V_L	-	Liquid volume in the reactor (L)
V_s	-	Volume of solvent (L)
X_{max}	-	Biomass concentration (g L^{-1})
X_r	-	Mass of resin per unit volume of aqueous phase (g L^{-1})
W_o	-	Weight of aluminium pan and sample before drying (g)
W_f	-	Weight of aluminium pan and sample after drying (g)
$Y_{p/s}$	-	Ethanol yield on substrate (g g^{-1})
$Y_{x/s}$	-	Biomass yield on substrate (g g^{-1})
μ	-	Specific growth rate (h^{-1})
ε	-	Void volume of expanded bed
σ_L	-	Liquid density (kg m^{-3})
ε_m	-	Minimum bed void volume of a settled bed of spherical particles (m)
σ_p	-	Solid density (kg m^{-3})
$[E]_{aq}$	-	Ethanol concentration in the aqueous phase (g L^{-1})
$[E]_{org}$	-	Ethanol concentration in the organic phase (g L^{-1})
μ_{max}	-	Maximum specific growth rate (h^{-1})
ΔG	-	The adsorption Gibbs free energy (kJ/mol)

ρ - Density (kg/m³)

β - Selectivity