Surface Enhanced Raman Spectroscopy detection of p-coumaric acid from cell supernatant using gold-capped silicon nanopillar substrates - DTU Orbit (21/08/2019)

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A standard protocol for analysis of microbial factories requires the screening of several populations in order to find the best performing ones. This is done with standard analytical methods (e.g. HPLC) with an expensive and time-consuming process. Surface Enhanced Raman Spectroscopy (SERS) is a highly sensitive spectroscopic technique which only requires drying a small volume of solution on an active substrate, with an analysis time of few minutes. Here we demonstrate the use of SERS to discriminate between two different bacterial populations based on detection of p-coumaric acid (pHCA) in cell supernatant. pHCA is a valuable secondary metabolite of genetically modified E. coli[1]. It is produced through deamination of tyrosine, and it has strong Raman and SERS activity[2],[3]. Gold capped silicon nanopillars were used as sensing substrates[4]. At first, they were successfully used to detect pHCA spiked in culture medium, in the same concentration range ($10^{-4}$ – $10^{-5}$ M) commonly found in cell supernatant. For supernatant analysis, triplicate cultures of FjTAL modified (P strains) and control (C strains) E.coli strains were carried out according to the methods described by[5] and shown in Fig.1. Samples of cell supernatant were extracted from each culture at 0, 3, 24 and 48 h post seeding and their pHCA content was measured with HPLC[5]. For SERS analysis, aliquots of supernatant were diluted 10-fold with MilliQ water, and 1 μL droplets were dried on the SERS substrates. A MatLab analysis was performed to extract the height of the significant peak at 1169 cm$^{-1}$, with the results shown in Fig.2. The amplitude of the peak shows a different trend for P and C strains. A similar trend is obtained from HPLC. These promising results open up new possibilities for the use of SERS for high-throughput and automated evaluation of bacterial factories, allowing parallel analysis and discrimination of different strains.

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