Comparative study of the stability of iso- α -acids, dihydroiso- α -acids and tetrahydroiso- α -acids during beer ageing[†]

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ABSTRACT

Reduced iso-α-acids are believed to exhibit a higher resistance to oxidation in the beer matrix, as compared with iso-α-acids. However, evidence for this assumption is not available. Our study on the stability of the different bitter acids by HPLC profiling of selected ageing beers, showed that trans-iso-a-acids are more prone to oxidation than their cis counterparts. Tetrahydroiso-α-acids are extremely resistant to oxidative deterioration, whilst the 'light-stable' dihydroiso-α-acids are not at all stable on storage. Tetrahydroiso-α-acids are the most stable bitter acids towards oxidation, followed by cis-iso-α-acids, dihydroiso-α-acids, and trans-iso-α-acids. For 'normal' beers, bitterness consistency can be improved by the use of isomerised hop extracts, or by the partial substitution of iso-α-acids for tetrahydroiso-α-acids. For beers packaged in colourless bottles, dihydroiso-α-acids are to be used, but oxidative deterioration of these compounds will occur anyhow. The potential of the hexahydroiso-α-acids should be re-evaluated.

Keywords: beer bitterness, beer ageing, iso- α -acids, dihydroiso- α -acids, tetrahydroiso- α -acids

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INTRODUCTION

Iso- α -acids, derived from the hop α -acids, are primary flavour constituents of beer (7). Beer contains six major iso-\alpha -acids, i.e. the trans- and cis-isomers of isocohumulone, isohumulone, and isoadhumulone (for the structures, see Fig. 1). Together with some minor iso- α acids, these compounds are largely responsible for the characteristic bitter beer taste (15, 18). One of the most striking sensory changes in ageing beer is a decrease in bitterness intensity and quality, often occurring from the onset of the ageing process (2). Such undesirable changes are associated with oxidative transformations on beer storage (1, 12, 19). In this respect, isohumulones are indeed prone to oxidative decomposition during the brewing process and on storage of finished beer (3, 18). Iso-α-acids deterioration in ageing beer has been reported in several studies and is believed to be caused by freeradical reactions (4, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 20). Moreover, isoα-acids degradation is often quoted as a possible pathway to the generation of ageing off-flavours, including staling carbonyls (2, 4, 5, 18, 19). Recent investigations demonstrated that trans-iso-α-acids are significantly less stable in the beer matrix than cis-iso-α-acids (4, 9, 14, 20). In a previous study, we emphasised the marked instability of trans-iso-α-acids in ageing beer and hence, their adverse impact on bitterness consistency (4). It was clearly shown that the ratio of the sum of the concentrations of trans-isocohumulone (1a) and trans-isohumulone (1b) to the sum of the concentrations of cis-isocohumulone (2a) and cis-isohumulone (2b), defined as the 'trans-cis ratio'. proves to be a reliable parameter to evaluate bitterness deterioration in ageing beers (4). In contrast to iso-aacids, tetrahydroiso-α-acids appeared to be remarkably stable on beer storage (4). These earlier observations prompted us to conduct a more comprehensive study on the stability of both conventional and reduced iso-α-acids, including dihydro- and tetrahydroiso-α-acids. Nowadays, dihydro- and tetrahydroiso-α-acids are used in the preparation of light-stable beers to circumvent the formation of 3-methyl-2-butene-1-thiol by photosensitised degradation of iso-\alpha-acids (3, 8) (for the structures of the reduced iso-α-acids, see Fig. 1). Tetrahydroiso-α-acids are also frequently applied in 'normal' beers to enhance foam stability and bitterness consistency (3). Besides their lightproofing properties, it is accepted that reduced iso-α-acids also exhibit a higher resistance to oxidative decomposition in the beer matrix in comparison with conventional iso-αacids (6, 14). However, conclusive evidence for this assumption is not available in literature. We therefore examined the stability of the different bitter acid types in pilot beers brewed at our institute, and in commercial beers with a known bitter acid profile.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Preparation of pilot beers

Three pilsener beers were prepared at our pilot scale brewery (2 hl) from one and the same brew. By post-fermentation addition of iso-α-acids, dihydroiso-α-acids, and tetrahydroiso-α-acids, respectively, to green beer derived from the same fermentation vessel, a similar matrix for these pilot beers is obtained. Beer preparation was carried out as follows. Grist: pilsener malt (34 kg) and maize flakes (6 kg); brewing water: reverse osmosis (1.7 hl) with addition of Ca²⁺ (40 ppm); brewing scheme: 36°C (15 min), 49°C (30 min), 63°C (20 min), 72°C (30 min),

78°C (120 min, including wort filtration with lauter tun); wort boiling: 75 min; wort clarification: whirlpool; original gravity: 12.2°P; pitching rate: 10^7 cells/ml; fermentation temp. and duration: 12°C, 8 days; hopping: at transfer to cask with either iso- α -acids (3.13 g/hl; presumed utilisation: 80%), dihydroiso- α -acids (4.20 g/hl; utilisation: 85%), or tetrahydroiso- α -acids (2.26 g/hl; utilisation: 65%); lagering: in cask (10 days at 2°C); beer filtration: kieselguhr/cellulose sheets (1 μ m); packaging: manual filling (Servinox) in brown glass bottles (25 cl).

Beer samples

Two commercial beers, indicated as 'A' (pellet hopping) and 'E' (hopped with reduced isomerised extracts), and three pilot beers, indicated as 'B', 'C', and 'D', were

studied. Next to fresh beers, the following samples were analysed:

- Beers 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D', 'E': samples aged at 60°C for 1, 3, 5, 7, and 10 days.

- Beer 'A': samples kept in the dark at room temperature for 1 to 6, 10 and 12 months.

- Beer 'É: samples kept in the dark at room temperature for 1 to 6, 9 and 12 months.

Extraction of bitter acids from beer and HPLC analysis of (reduced) iso- α -acids

The bitter acids were extracted from the beers and subsequently analysed by high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) as described earlier (4).

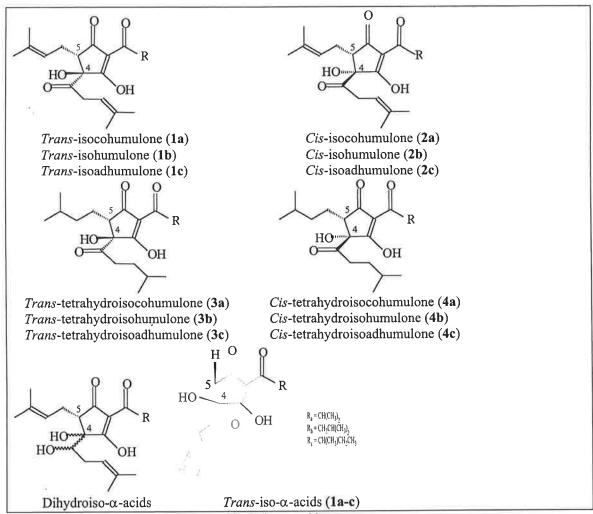


Figure 1: Structures of iso- α -acids, tetra- and dihydroiso- α -acids.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Evaluation of the stability of iso- α -acids in a commercial pilsener beer

A kettle hopped commercial pilsener, indicated as beer 'A', was studied as a function of both spontaneous and forced ageing. Figure 2A shows the iso- α -acids profile of the fresh beer. The applied HPLC method allows for the full separation of the 6 major iso- α -acids, i.e. transisochumulone (1a), cis-isochumulone (2a), transisohumulone (1b), cis-isohumulone (2b), trans-isoadhumulone (1c), and cis-isoadhumulone (2c). The HPLC

analysis of a beer sample that had been stored for one year in the dark at room temperature, is represented in figure 2B. Comparison between the analyses in figure 2 points to the differential behaviour of trans- and cis-iso-α-acids on beer storage. Trans-isomers are obviously deteriorated at a much faster rate than cis-isomers. In fact, the small peaks of trans-iso-α-acids in figure 2B (1a, 1b, 1c) suggest a high sensitivity of these compounds towards oxidative degradation in the beer matrix. The contents of iso-α-acids in samples of beer 'A' that were aged spontaneously for 1 to 12 months are summarised in table 1.

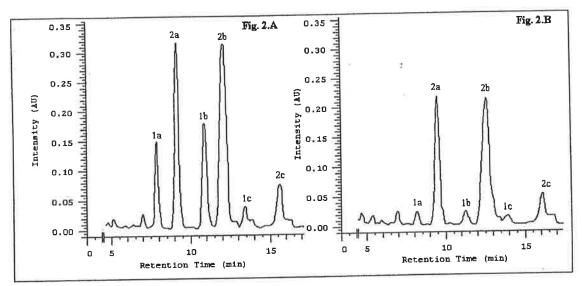


Figure 2: HPLC analysis of the iso-α-acids in a commercial pilsener beer 'A'; A: fresh sample, B: sample after spontaneous ageing for 12 months.

Table 1: Iso-α-acids (ppm) in beer 'A' as a function of spontaneous ageing.

		Ageing time (months)									
Compound	0 a	1 в	2 b	3 b	4 b	5 b	6 b	10 ^b	12 ^b		
Trans-ich	2.2	1.9	1.7	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.0	0.6	0.5		
Cis-ich	5.1	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.3		
Trans-inh	3.5	2.9	2.6	2.4	2.2	1.8	1.5	0.9	0.7		
Cis-inh	9.1	8.8	8.8	8.8	8.5	8.2	8.1	7.9	7.4		
Trans-iah	1.2	1.1	1.0	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.6		
Cis-iah	2.4	2.4	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.2	2.1	2.0	2.0		
Total (ppm)	23.5	22.0	21.2	20.9	20.0	18.9	18.1	16.6	15.4		
Total (%)	100	94	90	89	85	80	77	71	66		
T/C ratio (%)	40	35	31	29	27	23	20	16	10_		

"= fresh sample

After one year, total bitterness is reduced by 34%. The T/C ratio amounts to 40% for the fresh sample but only 10% for the one year-old beer, reflecting the differential behaviour of trans- and cis-iso-α-acids. After one year of spontaneous ageing, about 75% of trans-isomers are lost versus 18% of cis-components. A shelf half-life for transiso-α-acids of less than one year was also noticed previously in a commercial top-fermented beer subjected to spontaneous ageing (4). As a consequence, even after relatively short storage times of only one or two months, distinct decreases in the levels of trans-iso-α-acids can be measured (see also table 1). Similar findings as to the differential behaviour of trans- and cis-iso-α-acids, were obtained by forced ageing of beer 'A' at 60°C (see table 2). The marked instability of trans-iso-α-acids was explained earlier in terms of the stereochemical arrangement of the isohexenoyl and the prenyl side chains at C(4) and C(5), respectively (4). As shown in figure 1, only in trans-iso-α-acids, the proximity of the unsaturated sites provides a pool of high electron density, allowing ready initiation of radical-type oxidation reactions.

Evaluation of the stability of conventional and reduced iso-α-acids in pilot beers

Three pilot beers with a similar beer matrix were prepared as described in 'Materials and Methods'. After primary fermentation, either iso- α -acids (beer 'B'), dihydroiso- α -

acids (beer 'C'), or tetrahydroiso- α -acids (beer 'D'), were added. The contents of iso- α -acids on forced ageing of Beer 'B' are summarised in table 3. In the case of our pilot beer, a relatively low T/C ratio (28%) is measured in the fresh sample, which is typical when using pre-isomerised hop extract (9). Nevertheless, the results obtained on the pilot beer 'B' (table 3) largely parallel those collected for the commercial beer 'A' (table 2), i.e. clear reductions in total bitterness and especially in the T/C ratio are observed on forced ageing.

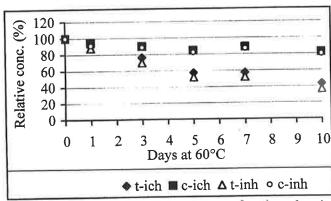


Figure 3: Iso-α-acids (%) in beer 'B' as a function of ageing at 60°C.

b = samples stored in the dark at room temperature

Table 2: Iso- α -acids (ppm) in beer 'A' as a function of

forced ageing.

	Ageing time (days)					
Compound	0 ª	1 ^b	3 6	5 6	7 ⁶	10 ⁶
Trans-ich	2.2	1.7	1.2	1.0	0.7	0.5
Cis-ich	5.1	4.7	4.5	4.5	4.1	4.0
Trans-inh	3.5	2.6	1.7	1.4	0.9	0.7
Cis-inh	9.1	8.3	8.1	8.1	7.2	6.9
Trans-iah	1.2	1.1	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.8
Cis-iah	2.4	2.1	2.1	2.1	1.9	1.7
Total (ppm)	23.5	20.5	18.5	18.0	15.6	14.6
Total (%)	100	87	79	77	66	62
T/C ratio (%)	40	33	23	19	14	11

[&]quot;= fresh sample

Table 4: Dihydroiso-α-acids (ppm) in beer 'C' as a function

of forced ageing.

	Ageing time (days)							
Compound	0 a	1 b	3 b	5 b	7 ^b	10 b		
Dihydro-ich(a)	6.6	6.1	5.9	5.3	5.1	4.5		
Dihydro-ich(b)	10.2	9.4	9.1	8.4	7.8	7.0		
Dihydro-inh(a)	5.1	4.6	4.4	4.0	3.8	3.3		
Dihydro-inh(b)/ dihydro-iah(a)	11.4	10.2	10.0	9.0	8.8	7.7		
Dihydro-iah(b)	3.1	2.8	2.8	2.6	2.5	2.3		
Total (ppm)	36.4	33.1	32.2	29.3	28.0	24.8		
Total (%)	100	91	88	81	77	68		

[&]quot;= fresh sample

Figure 3 shows the relative concentration (the content of each is $0-\alpha$ -acid in the fresh sample was equalised to 100%) of the major iso- α -acids, i.e. trans-isocohumulone (t-ich), cis-isocohumulone (c-ich), trans-isohumulone (tinh), and cis-isohumulone (c-inh), as a function of forced ageing time. As opposed to the differential behaviour of trans- and cis-iso-α-acids, co- and normal homologues degrade at a similar rate. When comparing the results in table 3 with those in table 2, it is further interesting to notice that bitterness was more stable in the pilot beer 'B' than in the commercial beer 'A'. Closer examination of the quantitative data reveals that this is mainly due to a greater stability of the trans-iso-α-acids in the pilot beer. Obviously, the rate of decline of the T/C ratio varies from one beer to another and such interesting differences are easily detected by high-resolution HPLC (4).

Totally new results were obtained on pilot beer 'C' containing only dihydroiso-α-acids. The quantitative data are represented in table 4. Because the identity of the dihydroiso-α-acids is not completely solved, the compounds are tentatively indicated dihydroisocohumulone (a), dihydroisocohumulone (b), dihydroisohumulone (a), dihydroisohumulone (b), dihydroisoadhumulone (a) (Dihydroisoadhumulone is not resolved from dihydroisohumulone. Hence, these peaks were quantified together.), and dihydroisoadhumulone (b), analogous to the identification of iso-α-acids and tetrahydroiso-α-acids. At first sight, the dihydroiso-αacids concentration in the fresh sample seems to be rather high (36.4 ppm), but according to Benitez et al. (3) such a level corresponds to a sensory bitterness, equivalent to about 25 ppm of iso- α -acids. Clear reductions in the **Table 3:** Iso- α -acids (ppm) in beer 'B' as a function of forced ageing.

	Ageing time (days)						
Compound	0 ª	1 ^b	3 b	5 b	7 °	10 b	
Trans-ich	2.1	1.9	1.6	1.2	1.2	0.9	
Cis-ich	7.9	7.5	7.1	6.7	7.0	6.5	
Trans-inh	3.3	2.9	2.3	1.7	1.7	1.2	
Cis-inh	11.4	10.4	10.1	9.4	9.9	9.1	
Trans-iah	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.5	
Cis-iah	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.4	2.4	2.3	
Total (ppm)	28.3	26.0	24.4	22.0	22.8	20.5	
Total (%)	100	92	86	78	81	72	
T/C ratio (%)	28	27	23	18	17	13	

u = fresh sample

content of all dihydroiso-α-acid components are detected on forced ageing, resulting in a relative total bitterness of only 68% after 10 days at 60°C. The changes in the levels of the individual components are visualised in figure 4. All dihydroiso-α-acids show a similar degradation rate, in contrast to iso-α-acids. A plausible explanation for this finding is that the dihydroiso-α-acids of the applied hop extract would possess the same configuration, i.e. the cisconfiguration as claimed by Ting & Goldstein (16). According to this view, when comparing the data obtained on the beers 'B' and 'C' (see tables 3 and 4), dihydroisoα-acids would be more sensitive to deterioration in beer than iso- α -acids. Anyhow, as apparent from the figures 3 and 4, the currently available dihydroiso-α-acids show a faster degradation than cis-iso- α -acids.

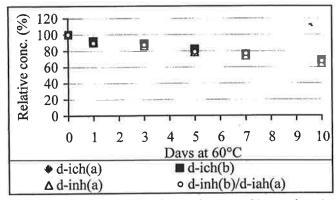


Figure 4: Dihydroiso-α-acids (%) in beer 'C' as a function of ageing at 60°C.

In tetrahydroiso- α -acids, the double bonds in the side chains at C(4) and C(5) are reduced (see Fig. 1). On account of this modification, it has been predicted that tetrahydroiso-α-acids should behave very stable towards oxidation in finished beer (3, 18). This view is confirmed by the results obtained on pilot beer 'D' (see table 5 and Fig. 5). Only a relatively small reduction in the level of tetra-components (approx. 10%) was detected on forced ageing. In our previous paper, a marked stability of tetrahydroiso-α-acids was also noticed in a commercial pilsener, subjected to prolonged spontaneous ageing (4). By comparing the data collected for the pilot beers, we can conclude that tetrahydroiso-α-acids are the most stable bitter acids towards oxidative deterioration, followed by cis-iso- α -acids, dihydroiso- α -acids, and trans-iso- α -acids.

^b = samples aged in a thermostated room at 60°C

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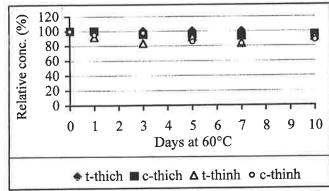


Figure 5: Tetrahydroiso- α -acids (%) in beer 'D' as a function of ageing at 60°C.

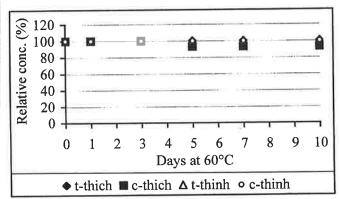
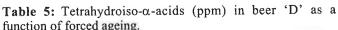


Figure 7: Tetrahydroiso- α -acids (%) in beer 'E' as a function of ageing at 60°C.



	Ageing time (days)							
Compound	0 ^a	1 b	3 b	5 ^b	7 ^b	10 ^b		
Trans-thich	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.3		
Cis-thich	4.4	4.4	4.2	4.2	4.1	4.2		
Trans-thinh	1.2	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.1		
Cis-thinh	4.2	4.0	4.1	3.6	3.5	3.7		
Trans-thiah	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3		
Cis-thiah	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.0		
Total (ppm)	12.6	12.2	12.0	11.6	11.1	11.6		
Total (%)	100	97	95	92	88	92		

a =fresh sample

Evaluation of the stability of reduced iso- α -acids in a commercial beer

The study of the pilot beer 'C' revealed instability of dihydroiso- α -acids on forced ageing. To determine whether these observations would also hold in other beers, a commercial light-stable beer 'E' was investigated. As required to light stability, beer 'E' is completely bittered with reduced iso- α -acids, the fresh beer containing both dihydroiso- α -acids (20 ppm) and tetrahydroiso- α -acids (3 ppm). In our study on beer 'E', samples of the same brew were subjected to forced or spontaneous ageing at various time intervals. The results are summarised in the figures 6 to 8. In conformity with our findings obtained on beer 'C', a relatively strong and similar reduction in all dihydrocomponents is observed on forced ageing of beer 'E' (Fig.

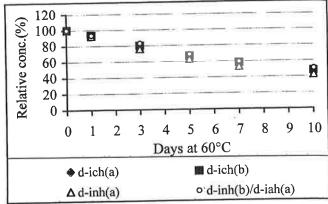


Figure 6: Dihydroiso-α-acids (%) in beer 'E' as a function of ageing at 60°C.

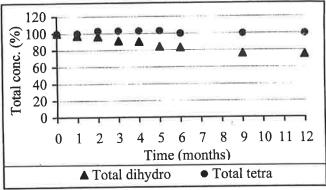


Figure 8: Total dihydro- and tetrahydro-iso-α-acids (%) in beer 'E' as a function of spontaneous ageing.

6). When comparing the results in the figures 6 and 4, it can be noticed that the dihydroiso- α -acids behaved more stable in the pilot beer 'C' than in the commercial beer 'E'.

Figure 7 again demonstrates the stability of the tetrahydroiso- α -acids. As further shown in figure 8, similar results on the dihydro- and tetrahydroiso- α -acids were obtained on prolonged spontaneous ageing of beer 'E'.

CONCLUSIONS

Trans-iso-α-acids are more prone to oxidation in ageing beer than cis-iso-\alpha-acids, and the corresponding trans/cis iso-α-acids ratio is useful to monitor and evaluate bitterness deterioration. In contrast with conventional isoα-acids, tetrahydroiso-α-acids are extremely resistant to oxidative decomposition. Surprisingly, the light-stable dihydroiso-α-acids are not at all stable on storage. Thus, the generalised view that reduced iso-α-acids exhibit enhanced resistance to oxidative deterioration in the beer matrix is only true for tetrahydroiso-α-acids. The decomposition kinetics of the three bitter acid types in the pilot beers, demonstrated that the most stable bitter principles towards oxidation in beer are the tetrahydroisoα-acids, followed by cis-iso-α-acids, dihydroiso-α-acids, and trans-iso-a-acids. For beers stored in dark-coloured glass bottles, bitterness consistency can be substantially improved by the use of pre-isomerised hop products with a high proportion of cis-iso-α-acids, and/or by the partial

^b = samples aged in a thermostated room at 60°C

substitution of iso- α -acids for tetrahydroiso- α -acids. Replacement of iso- α -acids by dihydroiso- α -acids in 'normal' beers is not recommended, considering the susceptibility of the dihydro-components to oxidation. For beers packaged in colourless glass bottles, dihydroiso- α -acids should be used as the main bittering principles because of their inherent light-stability. However, special attention must be paid to the issue of oxidative flavour deterioration in order to slow down, among other things, dihydroiso- α -acids decay. It also seems worthwhile to reconsider the potential benefits of the hexahydroiso- α -acids.

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