ABSTRACT: The amino acid discrimination by aminoacyl-tRNA synthetase is achieved through two sifting steps: amino acids larger than the cognate substrate are rejected by a \textquotedblleft coarse sieve\textquotedblright, while the reaction products of amino acids smaller than the cognate substrate will go through a \textquotedblleft fine sieve\textquotedblright and be hydrolyzed. This \textquotedblleft double-sieve\textquotedblright mechanism has been proposed for IleRS, a class I aminoacyl-tRNA synthetase. In this study, we created LeuRS-B, a mutant leucyl-tRNA synthetase from \textit{Escherichia coli} with a duplication of the peptide fragment from Met328 to Pro368 (within its CP1 domain). This mutant has 50\% of the leucylation activity of the wild-type enzyme and has the same ability to discriminate noncognate amino acids in the first step of the reaction. However, LeuRS-B can catalyze mischarging of tRNA\textsubscript{Leu} by methionine or isoleucine, suggesting that it is impaired in the ability to edit incorrect products. Wild-type leucyl-tRNA synthetase can edit the mischarged tRNA\textsubscript{Leu} made by LeuRS-B, while a separated CP1 domain cannot. These data suggest that the CP1 domain of leucyl-tRNA synthetase is crucial to the second editing sieve and that CP1 needs the structural context in leucyl-tRNA synthetase to fulfill its editing function.

Aminoacyl-tRNA synthetases (aaRSs)\textsuperscript{1} arose early in evolution and are believed to be a group of ancient enzymes that catalyze the precise charging of tRNAs with their cognate amino acids (1). The aminoacylation of tRNA is a two-step reaction: (a) activation of amino acids with ATP by forming aminoacyl adenylates and (b) transferring of the aminoacyl residue from the aminoacyl adenylate to the cognate tRNA substrate (2). The accuracy of aminoacylation depends on both the specific recognition of amino acids during their activations (coarse sieve) and the pre- or post-transferring editing (fine sieve) that correct errors at either the aminoacyl adenylate level or the tRNA level (3–5). These editing reactions during the aminoacylation of tRNAs by aaRSs are essential for the accurate incorporation of amino acids during protein biosynthesis (4, 6–8). Leucyl-tRNA synthetase (EC 6.1.1.4) from \textit{Escherichia coli} is a monomeric enzyme consisting of 860 amino acid residues with a putative molecular mass of 97.3 kDa (from the \textit{leuS} gene sequence; 9). While LeuRS does misactivate methionine and isoleucine (10), in the presence of tRNA\textsubscript{Leu}, either the misactivated amino acids or the mischarged tRNA\textsubscript{Leu} is hydrolyzed (11).

On the basis of their conserved amino acid sequences and crystal structures, aaRSs are divided into two major classes, class I and II, each with characteristic sequences and structural motifs that form the substrate binding sites and catalytic sites (12–15). The 10 class I enzymes share HIGH and KMSKS motifs and active sites based on the Rossmann fold (an overall \beta_6\alpha_6 structure) (16–18). The Rossmann fold is made up of two \beta_6\alpha_6 halves, linked by the connective polypeptide 1 (19, 20). Among the 10 class I aaRSs, LeuRS, ValRS, IleRS, MetRS, and CysRS belong to one subgroup (20). MetRS and CysRS have relatively small CP1 domains (100 and 50 amino acids, respectively), while the other three (LeuRS, ValRS, and IleRS) have larger CP1 domains ranging from about 250 to 275 amino acids (21). On the basis of sequence alignments of the aaRSs in the same subgroup, CP1 of LeuRS extends from residue 126 to 389 (22). There is some evidence showing that the CP1 domains cloned from \textit{Bacillus stearothermophilus} ValRS and \textit{E. coli} IleRS have the editing function of decaying tRNA\textsuperscript{Val} and Val-tRNA\textsuperscript{Lle}, respectively (23). Further information about editing has been given by the crystal structures of \textit{Thermus thermophilus} IleRS complexed with L-isoleucine and L-valine (24), but the mechanism for the editing function of LeuRSs remains elusive.

To study the function of CP1 in LeuRS, seven deletion mutants and eight insertion mutants were obtained by PCR in our laboratory (25). Although all the deletion mutants have no aminoacylation activity, the aminoacylation activities of four insertion mutants can be determined in vitro (25). Among the four insertion mutants, only two mutants, LeuRS-A and LeuRS-B, were stable enough to be purified. Upon LeuRS-A, which has a duplication of the 40 amino
Editing Function of the CP1 Domain in *E. coli* LeuRS

The whole gene sequence encoding LeuRS-B was digested by *Nco I* and *Bfr I*, and then inserted into a His$_6$-tagging vector pMFT7H$_6$ (from Qiagen), as previously described (27). The His-tagged LeuRS was shown to have specificity and kinetic constants almost identical to those of untagged native LeuRS (27).

**Assay of Enzyme Activity.** Activities of LeuRS were measured according to the methods described by Li et al. (28). The ATP→P$_i$ exchange activity was assayed at 37 °C in the reaction mixture containing 100 mM HEPES (pH 7.8), 10 mM MgCl$_2$, 10 mM KF, 4 mM ATP (from Sigma), 2 mM [32P]pyrophosphate (from Amersham), an appropriate amount of amino acid (from Sigma), and enzymes (purified in our lab). The kinetics of ATP→P$_i$ exchange reaction was assayed with 4 nM LeuRS or 8 nM LeuRS-B, 5–50 mM methionine or isoleucine, or 0.02–0.2 mM leucine. The aminoacylation activity was determined at 37 °C in the reaction mixture consisted of 100 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.8), 0.2 mM leucine. The amount of enzyme that charges 1 nmol of tRNA$_{Leu}$ per minute under the given condition. The kinetic constants of enzymes were determined using various concentrations of the relevant substrates. To assay the mischarging of noncognate amino acids, L-[14C]methionine or L-[14C]isoleucine (from Amersham) was used in the aminoacylation activity assay in place of the cognate substrate L-[14C]leucine. The concentration of purified LeuRS and LeuRS-B was measured by optical absorbancy at 280 nm. At this wavelength, 1 unit of optical density correlates to about 1.60 mg/mL LeuRS, or 1.57 mg/mL His$_6$-tagged LeuRS-B (30).

**Circular Dichroism (CD) Spectroscopy.** Protein samples at the concentration of 0.20 mg/mL were analyzed on a Jasco J-715 spectropolarimeter with a nitrogen purge at room temperature. A 0.1 cm path length cuvette was used, and spectra were accumulated over five scans. Estimation of the secondary structure by the CD spectrum was calculated according to the method of Yang (31).

**RESULTS**

**Purification of His$_6$-Tagged Proteins.** Purification of His$_6$-tagged LeuRS (native), LeuRS-B, and CP1$_{Leu}$ was performed with Ni-NTA Superflow (from Qiagen), as previously described (27). The His-tagged LeuRS was shown to have specificity and kinetic constants almost identical to those of untagged native LeuRS (27).

**Assay of Enzyme Activity.** Activities of LeuRS were measured according to the methods described by Li et al. (28). The ATP→P$_i$ exchange activity was assayed at 37 °C in the reaction mixture containing 100 mM HEPES (pH 7.8), 10 mM MgCl$_2$, 10 mM KF, 4 mM ATP (from Sigma), 2 mM [32P]pyrophosphate (from Amersham), an appropriate amount of amino acid (from Sigma), and enzymes (purified in our lab). The kinetics of ATP→P$_i$ exchange reaction was assayed with 4 nM LeuRS or 8 nM LeuRS-B, 5–50 mM methionine or isoleucine, or 0.02–0.2 mM leucine. The aminoacylation activity was determined at 37 °C in the reaction mixture consisted of 100 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.8), 0.2 mM leucine. The amount of enzyme that charges 1 nmol of tRNA$_{Leu}$ per minute under the given condition. The kinetic constants of enzymes were determined using various concentrations of the relevant substrates. To assay the mischarging of noncognate amino acids, L-[14C]methionine or L-[14C]isoleucine (from Amersham) was used in the aminoacylation activity assay in place of the cognate substrate L-[14C]leucine. The concentration of purified LeuRS and LeuRS-B was measured by optical absorbancy at 280 nm. At this wavelength, 1 unit of optical density correlates to about 1.60 mg/mL LeuRS, or 1.57 mg/mL His$_6$-tagged LeuRS-B (30).

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the secondary structure of LeuRS and whether CP1<sub>Leu</sub> has a
definite secondary structure, the CD spectra of LeuRS,
LeuRS-B, and CP1<sub>Leu</sub> were measured. The CD spectra of
LeuRS and LeuRS-B appeared to be almost identical,
indicating that the insertion did not significantly affect the
secondary structure of LeuRS. The CP1<sub>Leu</sub> was also shown
to have a definite secondary structure (Figure 3). The
parameters of their secondary structures were estimated by
the method of Yang and summarized in Table 1.

**Aminoacylation Kinetics of E. coli LeuRS and LeuRS-B.**
To analyze the functional alteration of *E. coli* LeuRS caused
by the insertion mutation within CP1 domain, we measured
the kinetic constants for the aminoacylation reaction of *E.
coli* LeuRS and LeuRS-B (Table 2). The insertion mutation
induced a 50% decline in the values of *k*<sub>cat</sub> for leucine, ATP,
and tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> compared to those of the native enzyme. The
*K*<sub>m</sub> values for leucine and ATP were similar between
*E. coli* LeuRS and LeuRS-B, but the *K*<sub>m</sub> value for tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> was
more significantly affected by the insertion (1.5 μM for
LeuRS and 2.4 μM for LeuRS-B), indicating that the
insertion mutation has little effect on the binding of leucine
and ATP, but causes looser binding of tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> on the
enzyme. These results also suggested that the CP1 domain
in *E. coli* LeuRS might be involved in tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> binding.

**Discrimination between Cognate and Noncognate Amino
Acids by LeuRS and LeuRS-B.** To evaluate the contribution
of the CP1 domain to the discrimination between leucine
and methionine or isoleucine (Table 3). The discrimination
factor *D* was calculated from the equation

\[
D = \frac{k_{cat} \cdot K_{m, Met}}{k_{cat} \cdot K_{m, Ile}}
\]

where *k*<sub>cat</sub> and *K*<sub>m</sub> are the kinetic constants for the
aminoacylation reaction of enzymes with methionine or
isoleucine. All the data in this table were the average values with a
variation of <5% from three independent determinations.

### Table 1: CD Estimates of LeuRS, LeuRS-B, and CP1<sub>Leu</sub>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>protein secondary structure</th>
<th>LeuRS</th>
<th>LeuRS-B</th>
<th>CP1&lt;sub&gt;Leu&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>α-helix</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β-sheet</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β-turn</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>random</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> All spectra are averages of 5 scans at room temperature. A 0.1 cm optical path length cuvette and enzymes at concentrations of 0.20 mg/mL were used. Estimation of the secondary structure with CD spectra was calculated according to the method of Yang (3J).

| Table 2: Aminoacylation Kinetic Constants of LeuRS and LeuRS-B<sup>a</sup>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>substrate</th>
<th>constant</th>
<th>LeuRS</th>
<th>LeuRS-B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>leucine</td>
<td><em>K</em>&lt;sub&gt;m&lt;/sub&gt; (μM)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>k</em>&lt;sub&gt;cat&lt;/sub&gt; (s&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>k</em>&lt;sub&gt;cat&lt;/sub&gt;/<em>K</em>&lt;sub&gt;m&lt;/sub&gt; (s&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt; M&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATP</td>
<td><em>K</em>&lt;sub&gt;m&lt;/sub&gt; (μM)</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>k</em>&lt;sub&gt;cat&lt;/sub&gt; (s&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>k</em>&lt;sub&gt;cat&lt;/sub&gt;/<em>K</em>&lt;sub&gt;m&lt;/sub&gt; (s&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt; M&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tRNA&lt;sup&gt;Leu&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td><em>k</em>&lt;sub&gt;cat&lt;/sub&gt; (s&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>k</em>&lt;sub&gt;cat&lt;/sub&gt;/<em>K</em>&lt;sub&gt;m&lt;/sub&gt; (s&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt; M&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Aminoacylation kinetics of enzymes were determined as described in Experimental Procedures. All the data in this table were the average values with a variation of <5% from three independent determinations.

| Table 3: Kinetic Constants of Activation and Misactivation by
| LeuRS and LeuRS-B<sup>a</sup> |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| enzymes | substrate | *K*<sub>m</sub> (μM) | *k*<sub>cat</sub> (s<sup>-1</sup>) | *k*<sub>cat</sub>/*K*<sub>m</sub> (s<sup>-1</sup> M<sup>-1</sup>) | discrimination factor |
| LeuRS | Met | 7.5 | 19 | 2.5 | 1.3 × 10<sup>3</sup> |
|       | Ile | 3.5 | 18 | 5.1 | 6.5 × 10<sup>2</sup> |
| LeuRS-B | Met | 6.2 | 7.6 | 1.2 | 1.3 × 10<sup>3</sup> |
|        | Ile | 2.8 | 6.9 | 2.5 | 6.0 × 10<sup>2</sup> |

<sup>a</sup> ATP–PP, exchange kinetics of enzymes were determined in the presence of 0.02–0.2 mM leucine and 5–50 mM methionine or isoleucine. All the data in this table were the average values with a variation of <10% from three independent determinations. The discrimination factors were calculated from the equation

\[
D = \frac{(k_{cat}/K_{m, Met})_{cat} \cdot (k_{cat}/K_{m, Ile})_{Met}}{(k_{cat}/K_{m, Met})_{cat} \cdot (k_{cat}/K_{m, Ile})_{Met or Ile}}
\]
between cognate and noncognate amino acids in the first reaction (coarse sieve).

**Misaminoacylation of tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> Edited by LeuRS and LeuRS-B.** To reveal the function of the CP1 domain in *E. coli* LeuRS during editing (the fine sieve), the aminoacylation of tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> was assayed in the presence of 0.1 mM [14C]-leucine, 1 mM [14C]-methionine, or [14C]-isoleucine instead of 0.1 mM [14C]-leucine (Figure 4). It appeared that tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> could be methionylated or isoleucylated by *E. coli* LeuRS-B but not LeuRS, indicating that LeuRS-B had an impaired editing function as a fine sieve for correcting the errors in aminoacylation reaction, which was brought about by the insertion of 41 amino acid residues in the CP1 domain and disturbed the interaction between CP1 and tRNA<sup>Leu</sup>. The misacylation of tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> by methionine and isoleucine could be partially corrected by addition of 35 nM native LeuRS to the reaction mixture, but not 10-50 mM (286 times more concentrated than LeuRS) isolated wild-type CP1<sub>Leu</sub> (Figure 4). These data indicate that the CP1 domain is crucial for fine sieve editing function of *E. coli* LeuRS and may not function independently but is only able to perform its editing function in the context of the enzyme.

A competition experiment of methionine or isoleucine for leucine was also performed to confirm the observation described above. Aminoacylation activity of LeuRS and LeuRS-B was measured in the standard buffer containing 0.1 mM [14C]-leucine with the addition of methionine or isoleucine at concentrations ranging from 10 to 50 mM, which will compete with leucine for activation and transfer to tRNA<sup>Leu</sup>. These misactivation and mischarge, if not corrected during the editing step, will decrease the [14C]-leucine-tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> yield and hence the apparent leucylation activity, as compared to that in the absence of Met and Ile. Indeed, the leucylation activity of the mutant was decreased when methionine or isoleucine was added to the aminoacylation reaction system (Figure 5). In the presence of 50 mM methionine or isoleucine, the leucylation activity of LeuRS-B decreased to about 83 or 66%, respectively, as compared with the activity in the absence of the competitors. However, the leucylation activity of the native enzyme in the presence of 50 mM methionine or isoleucine decreased only 3.5 and 8% compared to that observed in the absence of competitor. In the case of the native enzyme, the decrease was probably caused by trace contamination of leucine in the methionine and isoleucine preparation (3). These results further confirm that LeuRS-B has an impaired fine sieve editing function for correcting the errors in the aminoacylation reaction, which suggests that the CP1 domain is crucial for fine sieve editing function of *E. coli* LeuRS.

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**FIGURE 4:** Methionylation and isoleucylation of tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> by *E. coli* LeuRS and LeuRS-B. (A) Methionylation of 20 μM tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> in the presence of 1 mM [14C]-methionine by 750 nM *E. coli* LeuRS (●), 750 nM LeuRS-B (▲), 750 nM LeuRS-B and 35 nM LeuRS (■), and 750 nM LeuRS-B and 10 μM CP1<sub>Leu</sub> (〇) at 37 °C and pH 7.8. (B) Isoleucylation at pH 7.8 and 37 °C of 20 μM tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> in the presence of 1 mM [14C]-isoleucine by 750 nM *E. coli* LeuRS (●), 750 nM LeuRS-B (▲), 750 nM LeuRS-B and 35 nM LeuRS (■), and 750 nM LeuRS-B and 10 μM isolated CP1<sub>Leu</sub> (〇).

**FIGURE 5:** Leucylation of tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> by *E. coli* LeuRS and LeuRS-B with methionine or isoleucine as a competitor against [14C]-leucine. The Y-axis shows the percentage of leucylation activity decrease in the presence of methionine or isoleucine compared to that without the competitive amino acid. (A) Leucylation at pH 7.8 and 37 °C of 20 nM tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> by *E. coli* LeuRS (●) and LeuRS-B (〇) with 10–50 mM methionine and 0.1 mM [14C]leucine. (B) Leucylation at pH 7.8 and 37 °C of 20 μM tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> by *E. coli* LeuRS (●) and LeuRS-B (〇) with 10–50 mM isoleucine and 0.1 mM [14C]leucine.
DISCUSSION

This is the first report of the mechanism of the editing function of *E. coli* LeuRS. In this presentation, an insertion mutation in the CP1 domain of *E. coli* LeuRS was constructed. Although the insertion mutant retained 50% leucylation activity of the native enzyme, it lost part of the ability to discriminate other noncognate amino acids from leucine and caused mischarging of tRNA	extsuperscript{Leu}. LeuRS-B retained the “coarse sieve” discrimination of amino acids in the activation reaction, but was greatly impaired in fine sieve editing function. Therefore, the coarse and the fine sieves are located at different sites in *E. coli* LeuRS. Since this mutant could not deacylate the incorrectly charged tRNA	extsuperscript{Leu}, the level of errors in aminoaoylation was significantly increased. The errors could be corrected by the intact native *E. coli* LeuRS but not by the isolated CP1	extsubscript{Leu}, indicating that the CP1 domain in *E. coli* LeuRS serves as the fine sieve for editing but needs to be in the correct context of the synthetase to function properly. Currently, no crystal structure is available for LeuRS. Our data show that the exact primary structure of the CP1 domain of LeuRS is necessary for editing in *E. coli* LeuRS as a fine sieve and provide strong support for the role of the CP1 domain in the editing function. Also, it provides more details on the structural basis of the functional difference between the CP1 domains of the relative synthetase in the same subclass.

Among the 10 class I aaRSs, LeuRS, ValRS, IleRS, MetRS, and CysRS are more closely related to each other and are classified in one subgroup of class I aaRSs (20). MetRS and CysRS have relatively small CP1 domains (100 and 50 amino acids, respectively) with no known editing activity. The other three (LeuRS, ValRS, and IleRS) have large CP1 domains. The CP1 of ValRS from *B. stearothermophilus* consists of 221 amino acid residues, while those from IleRS and MetRS from *E. coli* are 275 and 106, respectively (21). Previous work of cloning and expression of DNA fragments that encode only the CP1 domain has shown that the isolated CP1	extsubscript{Val} domain from *B. stearothermophilus* ValRS and CP1	extsubscript{Ile} from *E. coli* IleRS harbor the editing function of deacylating Thr-tRNA	extsuperscript{Val} and Val-tRNA	extsuperscript{Ile}, respectively (22). The CP1	extsubscript{Leu} (260 residues) was stable during the purification procedure and had a definite secondary structure. Even though the CP1 domains from these three synthetases (IleRS, ValRS, and LeuRS) are so closely related, the isolated CP1	extsubscript{Leu} has no editing function while the isolated CP1	extsubscript{Val} and CP1	extsubscript{Ile} can. Therefore, the CP1	extsubscript{Leu} serves as the fine sieve for editing only in the intact LeuRS. The editing mechanism of CP1 in *E. coli* LeuRS may differ from that of ValRS from *B. stearothermophilus* and IleRS from *E. coli*.

From an evolutionary viewpoint, the ancestor of LeuRSs, IleRSs, and ValRSs, the coarse sieve discrimination is insufficient and the editing (by the CP1 domain) is necessary to maintain the accuracy of the aminoaoylation reaction. This hypothesis is supported not only by the results from our lab and others (24) but also by the comparison of the codons encoding the amino acids: CTX or TTA(G), leucine; ATA(C,T), isoleucine; ATG, methionine; and GTX, valine (where X is a wobble base). The codons for the four amino acids mentioned above are similar. It could be proposed that the XTX codon is shared by leucine, isoleucine, methionine, and valine in an ancient aminoaoylation enzyme system.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We thank Dr. Joanne Pelaschier and Dr. Doris M. Benbrook for careful reading of the manuscript.

REFERENCES