Chemometric Analysis of Raman Spectroscopy Data

The quantity of Raman spectroscopy data and the speed at which it can be collected when using fast imaging techniques have made the application of multivariate data analysis techniques – such as chemometrics – an invaluable and powerful tool.

The role of chemometrics in the analysis of Raman spectroscopy data is becoming increasingly important for many different application areas. The main reasons for this are:

- It allows the qualification and quantification of very complex systems such as biological materials (1).
- Chemometric algorithms are constantly being developed, and so there is a constant supply of new and improved methods.
- Chemometric methods are multivariate and can analyse the whole data set simultaneously. This allows spectral information to be accurately and directly related to chemical properties unlike univariate methods. Fast imaging techniques, such as StreamLine™ imaging, are ideal, as more data is available to improve the model quality (2).

This article looks at some of the different chemometric analysis methods currently available, why different algorithms are used to gain specific information and how data pre-processing can aid data interpretation. Finally, the application of chemometrics techniques to data from a pharmaceutical tablet is illustrated.

Introduction to Chemometrics

What is Chemometrics?

Chemometrics is defined by the International Chemometrics Society (ICS) as ‘the science of relating measurements made on a chemical system or process to the state of the system via application of mathematical or statistical methods’.

Raman spectroscopy is used to obtain, either directly or indirectly, information relating to the properties of the analyte. This information can take the form of component concentration, local stresses and sample crystallinity, for example.

Univariate statistical methods are the simplest way of extracting such information from Raman data. Direct Raman spectral information, such as relative band intensities and band positional changes, can be used in a univariate method to evaluate component concentration and local sample stresses. Multivariate techniques use more than one spectral variable to extract information about a spectrum. Perhaps the main advantage of using such a multivariate approach is the lower inherent error of the final information. The whole spectrum can be used to derive the information, rather than a single Raman band, and so all changes within the spectrum are considered, including those that are not immediately obvious.

Chemometrics is a group of multivariate data analysis methods. It allows a large number of Raman spectra to be analysed simultaneously and useful trends to be extracted from complex variables. To achieve this, the spectra are placed in the rows of a matrix (X), with the columns of this matrix representing the intensity change at a specific spectral wavenumber.

Different Chemometric Methods

A grouping of chemometric methods can be based on the information derived from the method. The initial grouping is broadly based on whether the derived information is qualitative or quantitative.

Typical qualitative methods used are cluster analysis and classification. In these methods, spectra are assigned to groups based on either prior knowledge (supervised pattern recognition) or their similarity (unsupervised pattern recognition). These methods therefore allow qualitative answers to questions such as ‘is the sample A or B’? ‘is the tissue cancerous or not’? ‘is my polymorph monohydrate or dihydrate’?

Quantitative methods are used to build calibration sets from the spectral data. Real quantitative information can be gained from this, such as the concentration of compound A and B in a sample. Typical quantitative methods used are multiple linear regression (MLR), principal component regression (PCR) and partial least squares (PLS). With such methods, a calibration model is constructed from a set of spectra of known concentrations. A second known set is used to validate this model.
neighbour comparison method (see Figure 1).

The nearest neighbour method compares the intensity at the same wave number with neighbouring spectra. The spectra from which the neighbours can originate are collected separately (at different times) and must represent similar component locations (that is, mapping data must be spatially oversampled). Using this method, the most similar CR feature-free nearest neighbour is chosen to identify CR signals in the original spectrum. Data normalisation allows the CR intensity values to be replaced by those of the most similar nearest neighbour. This ensures that band structure integrity is maintained.

Noise filtering uses PCA reconstruction to remove data variance not attributable to real or significant data – that is, noise (see Figure 2). Data filtered in this way has significantly lower noise and thus results in additional chemometric processing benefits. The improvement will depend on the original data quality and the data set size. Low signal-to-noise data within a very large dataset will benefit from significant improvements to the noise level. This is often the case for pharmaceutical tablet imaging.

Normalisation is a necessary step due to the local variations and perturbations that can result from the Raman experiment. The exact normalisation technique used will largely depend on the type of chemometric analysis to be performed. Perhaps of most significance is the variation in laser focus on the sample. In some cases, changes in focus of < 1 μm can significantly change the intensity but not the form of the spectrum. The aim of this step is to remove intensity variations not arising from compositional changes in the sample.

**Chemometric Analysis of a Pharmaceutical Tablet**

Tablet imaging is an established application area for Raman spectroscopy, where active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and excipients can be identified and differentiated. Fast Raman analysis, such as Renishaw’s StreamLine imaging technique, enable larger areas and more data to be collected from tablets at high spectral and spatial resolution. Quality Raman data representative of the tablet component contents and their distribution can now be collected in minutes.

The following example shows how a multivariate curve resolution technique can be used to extract valuable chemical information from a multi-component pharmaceutical tablet.

The distribution of an API within a formulation is thought to have a crucial effect on the bio-effectiveness of the drug, primarily by modifying the release rate. In addition to this, the ability to
API and excipient distribution can be determined using Empty Modelling™ multivariate curve resolution (EM-MCR). In one example, StreamLine imaging experiments were performed on a sectioned Piriton® allergy tablet. The tablet contained a mixture of standard excipients and an API (chlorphenamine maleate), and was sectioned using a mechanical cutting technique to ensure sample flatness.

Raman spectra from an area 7.1mm x 7.1mm (the entire tablet section) were collected using an inherent spatial resolution of 24μm (generating 82,656 Raman spectra). The collected spectra were pre-processed using the cosmic ray removal, noise filtering and normalisation techniques described above. The EM-MCR method was then applied to the data using Renishaw’s WiRE software (4).

For the Piriton® tablet, images representative of map spectra containing specific spectral components were created. This method does not require spectral or component information prior to performing the analysis. Each image represented the distribution of a single chemical component contained within the tablet. An individual image is shown in Figure 3. The identity of this component is confirmed through comparison with a reference spectrum of lactose monohydrate (see Figure 4). Good agreement between the derived component spectrum and the reference spectrum confirmed the effectiveness of the EM-MCR technique.

Figure 5 shows overlayed Raman images (red – API, green – lactose, blue – maize starch) derived from the Empty Modelling principal components. The look up table (LUT) for each image provides information on the approximate proportion of each spectral component to each sample location. However, as a result of the normalisation processes required, it is extremely difficult to gain accurate concentration information without using calibration sets. Nevertheless, EM-MCR allows detailed chemical images to be created where no reference information is available.

Conclusion

Chemometrics is a broad field comprising a huge array of different algorithmic methods. The most suitable approach for a given application depends upon the details of the constituent component spectra and the purity with which they occur. The quantity of Raman data and the speed at which it can be collected when using StreamLine imaging has made the application of multivariate data analysis techniques, such as chemometrics, an invaluable and powerful tool.

References

2. StreamLine™ imaging, Product note (PN123), Renishaw plc, UK
3. UK Patent Application No GB 0611981.2

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