Cleft Lip with Cleft Palate, Ankyloglossia, and Hypodontia are Associated with TBX22 Mutations

INTRODUCTION

X-linked cleft palate and ankyloglossia (CPX: OMIM 303400) are caused by mutation in the T-box transcription factor TBX22 (Braybrook et al., 2001). Nonsense, frame-shift, splice site, and missense changes have all been described, with the latter usually occurring in the highly conserved 180-amino-acid T-box domain. These lead to a loss of function, mediated through impaired DNA binding, but may also affect the ability of the protein to undergo post-translational modification with SUMO1 (Andreou et al., 2007). An increased risk of cleft palate (CP) with ankyloglossia has also been associated with sequence variation resulting in reduced TBX22 promoter activity (Pauws et al., 2009b).

The palate phenotype can vary, involving either a complete cleft of the secondary palate or a submucous cleft, with or without a bifid or absent uvula. These different forms have been described within a single family (Moore et al., 1987; Bjornger et al., 1989; Stanier et al., 1993), suggesting that environmental factors or other genetic modifiers may influence the outcome. However, we recently observed overt clefts and submucous clefts in littermates of inbred mice lacking TBX22, with no obvious explanation for the difference (Pauws et al., 2009a). Ankyloglossia is also variable, being present in classic CPX but not always in relatives carrying the same mutation. These individuals might otherwise be described as non-syndromic. Consequently, TBX22 mutations are reported in well-defined CPX families and in 4-8% of non-syndromic CP patients (Marcano et al., 2004; Suphaseetiporn et al., 2007).

The expression of TBX22 is first seen at CS16, approximately 37 days post-ovulation (Braybrook et al., 2002). At early stages, it is expressed in the developing somites and the first pharyngeal arch (Haening et al., 2002; Bush et al., 2004). Expression is later observed in the medial portion of the posterior palatal shelves and in the base of the tongue around the site of attachment to the lower jaw. Craniofacial expression is also detected in the ventral portion of the nasal septum, the tooth buds, and extra-ocular tissue (Braybrook et al., 2002). TBX22 expression was reported to disappear just prior to palatal shelf fusion (Braybrook et al., 2002; Bush et al., 2004) and was thought instead to be required for mesenchymal proliferation and shelf elevation. However, in most Thdx22mutant mouse embryos, shelf elevation and fusion progress normally, while pattering of the post-fusion mesenchymal bridge and subsequent palatal ossification is abnormal (Pauws et al., 2009a).
The genetic basis of isolated ankyloglossia is rarely studied, but it is not unusual within CPX families, especially female carriers (45%) and occasionally males (4%) (Marañón et al., 2004). Mutations have yet to be reported where there is no family history of CPX, but this could be of great significance for future genetic counseling. There is also mounting evidence for a role for TBA22 in the occurrence of cleft lip and palate (CLP). Apart from a lone female with CLP and ankyloglossia in a large CPX family (Braybrook et al., 2001), a genome-wide CLP sib pair analysis reported a suggestive multipoint LOD score (2.89) for the locus surrounding TBA22 (Prescott et al., 2000). Meanwhile, recent evidence from the chick shows that ectopic expression of hTBA22 in the frontonasal mass results in cleft lip (Higashiori et al., 2010).

The objectives of the study were to investigate whether ankyloglossia alone or in the presence of other craniofacial features, including hypodontia or CLP, might be caused by TBA22 mutations. Therefore, we selected patients with isolated ankyloglossia or CLP in whom to sequence TBA22. We identified 2 novel missense mutations and 3 others that had previously been reported in classic CPX. Several patients were also noted to have dental anomalies. Computational and biochemical analysis was used to provide functional evidence for a causal role of these variants.

**MATERIALS & METHODS**

**Patients and Samples**

The study was granted ethical approval by the committees of the Faculty of Dentistry, Chiang Mai and Mahidol University, and by the Institute of Child Health/Great Ormond Street Hospital. Written consent was obtained from the participants. Blood samples from patients with isolated ankyloglossia (n = 45) or sporadic, isolated CLP (n = 90) were collected from the Thai population. Ankyloglossia and hypodontia were evaluated by one of the authors, who is a pediatric dentist (M.P.). Ankyloglossia was reported when the lingual frenum was very short with significant restriction of tongue movement, or the frenum was attached from the tip of the tongue to the anterior alveolar ridge. Hypodontia was indicated when the tooth or teeth were missing clinically and radiographically. A further 192 single or multiple affected UK families with non-syndromic CLP were enrolled in the study (Prescott et al., 2000). In addition, two unusual familial cases, one of cleft palate and ankyloglossia (CPA) from Thailand and one complex CPA/cleft lip and palate with ankyloglossia (CLPA) family from the UK, were included. Control samples without hypodontia or ankyloglossia consisted of 100 Thai and 192 UK individuals (Apostolidou et al., 2007). The coding regions and flanking intronic sequences of TBA22 were amplified from genomic DNA and sequenced as previously described (Braybrook et al., 2001).

**Mutation Analysis**

Putative missense mutations were analyzed in *silico*, and compared by 3 Web-based programs: PANTHER (http://www.pantherdb.org/), PolyPhen (http://genetics.bwh.harvard.edu/pph/), and SIFT (Ng and Henikoff, 2003) (http://sift.jcvi.org/). Protein sequence alignments were constructed by CLUSTALW2 (http://www.ebi.ac.uk/Tools/clustalw2/).

Plasmid expression constructs containing full-length TBA22 cDNA (pCDNA3.1.TBA22.V5/His) or missense mutations (E187K, R120W, N264Y) were as previously described (Andreou et al., 2007). New mutations were introduced with the QuickChange site-directed mutagenesis kit (Stratagene, La Jolla, CA, USA). Transcriptional repression was investigated with a luciferase reporter construct (pGL3, Promega, Madison, WI, USA) containing -683 bp to +115 bp of the *MyoD* promoter (amplified with *MyoD* F, 5'-ATTCCTCGAGACCGGGAATTT GACCGAATT-3' and *MyoD* R, 5'-ATTCCTCGAGACAAAGG TCTGTTGGTTGG-3') DNA binding-independent effects were investigated by means of a GAL4-LexA inducible repression assay with wild-type and mutant constructs. Reporter assays were performed as previously described (Andreou et al., 2007) by co-transfection into 293T cells with FuGene6 (Roche, Mannheim, Germany). Results were statistically tested by ANOVA with significance set at p < 0.01.

Chromatin-immunoprecipitation was used to detect interaction between TBA22 and the *MyoD* promoter. 293T cells were transfected with full-length wild-type or mutant (N264Y, R120Q, R126W, R151H, P389Q, S400Y) pCDNA3.1.TBA22.V5/His constructs and incubated for 48 hrs. Cross-linking with 0.8% formaldehyde was stopped by the addition of glycerine to a final concentration of 0.125 M. The DNA was sonicated (Bioruptor, Diagenode, Liège, Belgium) and protein-DNA complexes immunoprecipitated with anti-V5 antibody (Invitrogen) and protein G agarose (Pierce, Rockford, IL, USA). Protein-DNA complexes were unlinked and the DNA recovered with the QIAquick PCR purification kit (QIAGEN, Valencia, CA, USA). PCR amplification then used the primers: *MyoD* ChIPF, 5'-ATTCTCGAGTCCGAGTTTGGAGAGATTGG-3'; and *MyoD* ChIPI, 5'-TGGAGACTGAGCCCGTGAA-3'.

**RESULTS**

TBA22 coding exons were sequenced in 45 patients with isolated ankyloglossia. Two potentially pathogenic changes were identified. A heterozygous missense variant in exon 8 (1166C>A; P389Q) was identified in a 9-year-old Thai girl (Fig. 1A). Inheritance could not be established, since the mutation was not present in her clinically unaffected mother, and DNA was not available from her unaffected father, who is deceased. The second missense variant in exon 3 (359G>A; R120Q) was present in a 13-year-old Thai boy (Fig. 1B). This variant was present in his mother, who has microdontia of the maxillary permanent left lateral incisor. Interestingly, both variants have previously been reported in Thai patients with non-syndromic cleft palate (Chaabouni et al., 2005). The arginine residue of the R120Q variant is highly conserved in all species and T-box family members, with the only exception being Drosophila OMB, where a glutamine residue is found (Muller and Herrmann, 1997). In contrast, the C-terminal P389Q variant, which is conserved among human, mouse, and chicken, shares little homology with other species or other T-box proteins (Fig. 2L).
A heterozygous missense mutation was detected in exon 8 (1199C>A; S400Y) in a Thai family (Figs. 2A-2I), initially recruited due to the presence of CPA in the 2.5-year-old daughter. The mutation was also present in the mother, who has a bifid tongue. Her father has CP, ankyloglossia, and microdontia of the maxillary permanent lateral incisor but does not carry the mutation, or any other TBX22 variant. This change was not found in controls or the SNP database and is conserved across species. The inheritance indicates that the S400Y variant may be related to the tongue defect but is unlikely to be the cause of the girl’s palate phenotype.

Next we investigated 90 Thai patients with non-syndromic CLP. A heterozygous missense variant in exon 3 (452G>T; R151L) was identified in an 11-year-old Thai girl (Fig. 1C). This residue is highly conserved across species and in the TBX1 subfamily of T-box proteins. This variant was previously reported in an unrelated Thai male with non-syndromic CP (Suphapeetiporn et al., 2007). Closer inspection of this patient revealed that the maxillary left second premolar was congenitally missing, and the maxillary right lateral incisor was peg-shaped. The mutation was inherited from her unaffected mother.

To further investigate the prevalence of TBX22 mutations in non-syndromic CLP patients, we sequenced a UK cohort of 192 affected individuals (Prescott et al., 2004). Although numerous previously described (Marçano et al., 2004) polymorphic intronic and exonic variants were detected, no novel or potentially pathogenic variants were identified.

Finally, we report the analysis of a multi-generation UK family with mixed clefting phenotypes. An affected male presented with typical CPX, while his daughter has CLP (Figs. 2H-2J). We identified a novel missense variant in exon 3 (376C>T; R126W), which was not found in the SNP database or controls. It is located within the T-box domain and is highly conserved in different species and other TBX1 sub-family members (TBX15, TBX18, and TBX20).

To discriminate between functional and non-functional mutations, we investigated each variant using a series of bioinformatics tools and biochemical assays. The 5 missense variants were analyzed with PANTHER, PolyPhen, and SIFT prediction algorithms as previously described (Won et al., 2008). For controls, we included several mutations that have previously been validated as non-functional (E187K) or functional (R120W, N264Y) (Andrea et al., 2007). Although there are some differences between the algorithms, predictions are consistent with previous data. The E187K polymorphism has low PANTHER and PolyPhen scores, while the mutations N264Y and R120W are among the highest scores (Table). The 3 mutations located in the T-box domain (R120Q, R151Q, R126W) show high scores and are predicted to have a functional effect. Interestingly, R120Q has a lower score than R120W, indicating a potentially qualitative difference. The 2 mutations in the C-terminal region (P389Q, S400Y) also have low scores and are comparable with the E187K polymorphism. However, since these mutations
The sequence variant 1199C>A (S400Y) was identified in a family with cleft palate, ankyloglossia, and microdontia. (A-D) show the father with repaired cleft palate, ankyloglossia, and dental anomalies. (F-H) show the daughter with ankyloglossia and repaired cleft palate. (J) Pedigree of a family containing both classic CPX and CLP patients. (K) The sequence traces show wildtype, heterozygous, and hemizygous examples of the 376C>T (R126W) variant. (L) Clustal multispecies sequence alignment showing the location and conservation of the various mutations in Tbx22 and other Tbx1 protein family members. The first block is within the highly conserved T-box domain; the second is the poorly conserved C-terminal region.

**Table.** In silico Prediction of the Effects of Tbx22 Missense Mutations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substitution</th>
<th>PANTHER Score</th>
<th>PolyPhen Score</th>
<th>Prediction</th>
<th>SIFT Score [P]</th>
<th>Prediction</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R120W*</td>
<td>-8.80</td>
<td>0.99699</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>Probably damaging</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R120Q</td>
<td>-5.94</td>
<td>0.94994</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Possibly damaging</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R126W</td>
<td>-7.09</td>
<td>0.98361</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>Probably damaging</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R151L</td>
<td>-7.14</td>
<td>0.98432</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>Probably damaging</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E187K*</td>
<td>-3.71</td>
<td>0.67057</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>Possibly damaging</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N264Y*</td>
<td>-8.07</td>
<td>0.99379</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>Probably damaging</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P389Q</td>
<td>-3.57</td>
<td>0.63788</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>Probably damaging</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S400Y*</td>
<td>-3.21</td>
<td>0.55156</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>Possibly damaging</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scores indicate the probability (P value) or prediction that a missense mutation is functionally damaging. Value ranges are as follows: PANTHER, [-10, 0], cut off = -3; PolyPhen, possibly damaging when > 1.5, probably damaging when > 2.0; SIFT, [0-1], deleterious when p < 0.05.

*Previously described polymorphism; E187K* and functional mutations (R120W, N264Y*) (Andreau et al., 2007). This mutation is most likely a non-synonymous polymorphism.

occur in a poorly conserved protein region, it is possible that the program underestimates the effect.

Next, we evaluated the missense variants using *in vitro* methods. We recently identified the MyoD promoter as a direct target of Tbx22 (unpublished observations). Using a MyoD promoter construct expressing luciferase in 293T cells, we detected approximately 40% repression of promoter activity when co-transfected with full-length Tbx22 (Fig. 3A). The effect of each missense change on this repression can then be measured. The T-box domain mutations (R120Q, R126W, R151L) all show impaired repression of MyoD promoter activity (Fig. 3A). The R120Q mutation has less effect compared with the R120W
mutation. This correlates well with the in silico prediction (Table) and may explain the differences in phenotypic severity among the patients. The putative C-terminal mutations (P389Q, S400Y) did not significantly alter MyoD promoter activity.

To investigate whether the effect on repression was DNA-binding-dependent, we used a reporter containing only GAL4 and VP16 domains, where luciferase expression requires DNA binding via the GAL4 binding site. In the presence of TBX22 fused to GAL4, repression is maintained (i.e., independent of binding via the T-box domain) (Fig. 3B). We detected no loss of repression for any of the missense mutations (Fig. 3B), suggesting that they most likely exert their effect directly through specific DNA binding of the T-box domain. Mutations in the C-terminal region also did not alter repression. Alternative studies will be required to adequately assess the function of this part of the protein.

Finally, we investigated the missense changes for effects on direct interaction between TBX22 and the MyoD promoter. The MyoD promoter was reproducibly recovered from immunoprecipitated chromatin isolated from cells transfected with the TBX22:V5 expression construct (Fig. 3C). This interaction was completely abolished for the N264Y missense construct, previously shown to abrogate DNA binding (Andreu et al., 2007). Similarly, R126W and R151L failed to interact with the MyoD promoter in 4 independent assays. The R120Q was variable between assays (bound in 3/4), and although the method is not designed to be quantitative, we interpret this as suggesting a weak interaction. The C-terminal variants, P389Q and S400Y, consistently retained interaction (Fig. 3C).

**DISCUSSION**

Development of the secondary palate is a complex process influenced by a large number of genes. In mouse mutants, many of these are known to result in a partial or complete CP (Willie and Morrisey-Kay, 2001). Nevertheless, comparatively little is known about the molecular pathology underlying human

![Figure 3](image-url)
palatal defects. One of the most common known genetic causes of human CP involves TRB22 (Braybrook et al., 2001; Marzano et al., 2004; Suphakeopetorn et al., 2007). In this study, we have identified mutations in patients with isolated ankyloglossia, dental anomalies, and CLP to expand the phenotypic spectrum. With the exception of the F389Q, the likely pathogenic missense mutations detected are all located in the T-box domain. A high proportion of mutations after an arginine residue, 3 of which are described in this report. This correlates with the importance of hydrophobic residues in establishing contact with the DNA strand (Muller and Herrmann, 1997). Analysis of our data also supports the underlying mechanism of DNA-binding-dependent transcriptional repression. However, the role of the C-terminal mutation remains enigmatic. While several functional domains have been described for the N-terminal part of TRB22 (Andreou et al., 2007; Farinet et al., 2007), little is known about the C-terminal domain, although we can conclude that it is not involved in DNA binding or activation of the repression domain.

The hypodontia and cleft lip phenotype found in our study support the idea that TRB22 may also play a significant role in both tooth and upper lip development. However, its role is not yet sufficiently understood to explain why some patients (and some mice) develop an overt cleft, while the majority develop a closed but submucous cleft (Pauws et al., 2009a). Abnormalities of the upper lip and secondary palate are often considered to be etiologically distinct, since they are only rarely found within the same family and have distinct spatio-temporal developmental and epidemiological (Fogli-Andersen, 1942; Wyszynski et al., 1996; Stanier and Moore, 2004). In contrast, there are several examples indicating that a common molecular mechanism does exist, including MSX1, P63, and IRF6 (van den Boogaard et al., 2000; van Bokhoven et al., 2001; Kondo et al., 2002). A broader range of phenotypes can now also be associated with TRB22.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to all the volunteer patients and family members for their kind participation in this study. We thank Sayeda Abu-Amero and Emma Peskett for their excellent assistance with DNA sequencing. This work was supported by the Thailand Research Fund (TRF), the European Community’s Sixth Framework programme (LSHB-CT-2005-019067), SPARKS, and WellBeing of Women Baby Bio Bank.

REFERENCES


