QSPR Using MOLGEN-QSPR: The Challenge of Fluoroalkane Boiling Points

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By means of the new software MOLGEN-QSPR, a multilinear regression model for the boiling points of fluoroalkanes was established. The model is based exclusively on simple descriptors derived directly from molecular structure, and nevertheless describes a broader set of data more precisely than previous attempts that used either more demanding (quantum chemical) descriptors or more demanding (nonlinear) statistical methods such as neural networks. The model's internal consistency was confirmed by leave-one-out crossvalidation. The model was used to predict all unknown boiling points of fluorobutanes, and the quality of predictions was estimated by means of comparison with boiling point predictions for fluoropentanes.

INTRODUCTION

 Recent innovative use of poly- or perfluorinated alkanes has fostered interest in the physical properties of fluoroalkanes.¹ A compound's normal boiling point (bp) is a fundamental thermodynamic property, interesting both in its own right and as a basis for the calculation of other properties.² In previous studies it was noticed that fluoroalkanes exhibit boiling points that are more difficult to describe or predict in terms of molecular structure than those of alkanes or other haloalkanes.³⁻⁷ This follows from the particular properties of the fluorine atom compared to the other halogens, F being both highly electronegative and a rather small and "hard" sphere of low atomic weight. A C-F bond is a strong dipole, and these local dipoles interact intra- and intermolecularly even if the resulting dipole moment of an isolated molecule is zero. A consequence is the decidedly nonlinear dependence of fluoroalkane boiling points on the number of fluorine atoms, resulting in a bp maximum about halfway between an alkane and the corresponding perfluoroalkane (CH₄ -161.5°C, CH₃F -78.5, CH₂F₂ -51.6, CHF₃ -82 , CF₄ -128).^{3a}

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 For this reason previous researchers used inherently nonlinear methods such as neural networks for the description of fluoroalkane boiling points. $3b,4$ A manual graphical fitting method was used to describe the bps of fluoroethanes or, separately, of fluoropropanes, and allowed some predictions.⁵ Portability, parsimony, and predictive power of these methods, however, are less than desirable. Alternatively, multilinear regression (MLR) models required six mostly electrostatic and quantum chemical descriptors for describing the bps of 42 fluoroalkanes (s = 6.3 °C).⁸ Accepting fluoroalkane boiling points as a challenge we were curious on the viability of a model of the simplest kind for the boiling points of this class of compounds, i.e. a multilinear regression model based on simple descriptors that are directly derived from molecular structure. This is by no means an easy task, as illustrated by the fact that for fluorobutanes alone boiling points between –2 and +110°C have been reported, and even among the restricted set of tetrafluorobutanes bps vary between 17 and 110°C.

METHODS

Data. Boiling points at normal pressure of $C_1 - C_4$ fluoroalkanes (herein given in $^{\circ}$ C) were taken from the literature^{3,5,9-11} and checked against the Beilstein database in order to avoid fitting wrong data. A few compounds/boiling points found in Beilstein only were also included. In cases of marginal divergence between boiling points reported in the sources the average was taken. In cases of major divergence boiling points were excluded. This resulted in a data set of 83 $C_1 - C_4$ fluoroalkanes with boiling points, i.e. all 42 possible fluoromethanes through fluoropropanes plus 41 (out of 116 possible, ignoring stereoisomerism) fluorobutanes. We did not normally examine the primary sources given in Beilstein, and thus cannot exclude the remote possibility that a few bp values accepted here may be calculated rather than experimental values. 12 This is the most comprehensive collection of lower fluoroalkane bps of which we are aware.

 Boiling points were attributed reliability classes as in our earlier studies: $7,13$ Boiling points appearing in the Beilstein database only once are in reliability class 0, those measured at least twice by independent researchers with a difference of at most 4°C are in class 1, those measured at least four times by independent authors and differing no more than 2°C are in reliability class 2. According to this measure, the data

used in the present study are on average of lower quality than those in our previous studies, with many fluoroalkane bps reported only once. Information on reliability, though not used in the calculations, proved useful for identification of dubious bp data and in the selection of reference data.

The bp reported for $1, 2$ -difluorobutane, $FH_2C-CHF-CH_2-CH_3$, $39^{\circ}C$, reliability class 0, is obviously unreasonable and was therefore excluded.¹⁴ For 1,2-difluoroethane, FH₂C-CH₂F, we used the bp value 10.5°C, as was done in most previous studies. 4-6,15

 Descriptor Calculation. We used our software MOLGEN-QSPR that combines structure generation with calculation of many molecular descriptor values and with data treatment by various statistical methods.^{7,12} For a set of compounds structurally rather homogenous such as the fluorinated alkanes, substructure and fragment counts could be anticipated to be valuable descriptors.¹⁶ In fact, in previous studies such descriptors had been extensively used.^{5,6} So, in addition to the descriptors offered routinely by MOLGEN-QSPR, 17 we included in this study substructure counts and fragment counts.¹⁸

 Substructure counts are automatically provided by MOLGEN-QSPR, a substructure is a part of the hydrogen-suppressed molecular graph. For example, counts of all substructures of one to four bonds were requested, and these substructures were generated and counted: C-C, C-F, C-C-C, $F-C-F$, $C-C-F$, $C-C-C-C$, $C-C(C)-C$, F_2C-C , $F-C-C-F$, F_3C , $C-C-C-F$, $C-C(C)-F$, F_3C-C , F_2C-C-F , $C-C(F) - C-C$, $C-C-C-F$, $C-C(C)(C) - F$, $C-C(C) - C-F$, $F-C-C-F$, $F-C-C(C)-F$, F_2C-C-C , $C-C(C)(F)-F$. MOLGEN rule for substructure counts: Two realizations of the same substructure are counted separately if they differ in at least one bond, i.e. if they differ in at least one (non-H) atom.

 In contrast, a fragment is a part of the full molecular graph, it may therefore include hydrogen atoms. A fragment is defined by the user and searched for by the system on request. For example, counts of the following fragments were used in this study: H-C-F, H-C-C-F (according to Woolf^{5b}); CHF₂, CH₂F (according to Carlton⁶); CH_3 , C-CH₂-C, C-CH(C)-C, C-CHF-C, FH₂C-CHF, FHC-CHF. MOLGEN rule for fragment counts: Two realizations of the same fragment are counted separately if they differ in at least one non-H atom.

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For example, by this rule $1,1,1,2,3$ -pentafluoropropane, F_3C -CHF-CH₂F, contains 2 H-C-F and 5 H-C-C-F fragments.

In Woolf's study^{5b} realizations of a fragment are counted separately if they differ in at least one atom (which may be an H atom). By this rule F₃C-CHF-CH₂F contains 3 H-C-F fragments and 6 H-C-C-F fragments. Counts of H-C-F and H-C-C-F fragments obtained by this rule (HCF_{man} and HCCFman) were manually added to our data.

 Further descriptors based on physical concepts were included in the descriptor pool:

bip = $n(CHF_2) + n(CH_2F)$ (bipolar groups, Carlton⁶);

tbip = bip + $n(C-CHF-C)$ (total bipolar groups);

 $xSF = N_F - n(CH_2F) - N_H + n(CH_F_2)$, unless this number is negative, in which case xsF is set to 0 (excess exterior fluorine atoms⁶);

 $\texttt{n}(\texttt{CF}_3)^{\texttt{2}}, \ \texttt{n}(\texttt{CH}_3)^{\texttt{2}}, \ \texttt{n}(\texttt{CF}_3) \cdot \texttt{n}(\texttt{CH}_3) \ \ (\texttt{Woolf}^{\texttt{5b}})$.

Finally, descriptors (relN_F)² = (N_F/number of all atoms)² and (Frate)² = $(N_F/(2N_c+2))^2$ were included to account for the bp maximum mentioned in the introduction.

In the step-up procedure⁷ the parameter N_{model} was always set to 1000.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

 Preliminary study. For comparison with the results of Ivanciuc et al., 8 we initially treated their data using our descriptors and statistical procedures. For this purpose compound structures and boiling points were taken from Balaban et al., $3a$ as described in ref. 8. Unfortunately, Ivanciuc et al. reported results for a set of 42 $C_1 - C_4$ fluoroalkanes, whereas Balaban's data^{3a} include 43 fluoroalkanes. So one compound is missing in Ivanciuc's study, but we do not know which one. For the 43 fluoroalkanes MOLGEN-QSPR found the best 6-descriptor MLR model as follows. (In the text we characterize a MLR model by the descriptors involved and by its r^2 , s, F, $r^2_{\rm\,cv}$ and $\rm s_{cv}$ values, the latter two refer to leave-one-out crossvalidation. For full models see Table 1.) Xu^m , ${}^0\chi^v$, ${}^4\chi_p$, S (ssssC), n(F-C-F), n(F-C-C-F) (model 0a) r^2 = 0.9883, s = 4.624, F = 508, $r^2_{\rm\,cv}$ = 0.9826, s $_{\rm cv}$ = 5.652, N = 43. 19,20 Xu^{m} is the modified Xu index,^{17,21} S(ssssC) is the sum of electrotopological state indices of carbon atoms bearing no hydrogen, 22 $n(F-C-F)$ and $n(F-C-C-F)$ are counts of the respective substructures.¹⁸

This result is to be compared to the previously best 6-descriptor MLR model, which comprises one topological, two electrostatic, and three quantum-chemical descriptors: $r = 0.989$ ($r^2 = 0.9781$), $s = 6.3$, $F = 267$, $N = 42.^8$

So even without any quantum-chemical descriptor better results than in reference 8 are achievable.

Main study. For the larger set of 82 $C_1 - C_4$ fluoroalkane bps (83fluoroalkanes.md4) the step-up procedure found the best multilinear 6 descriptor model

 $Xu^{\mathfrak{m}}$, ${}^{2}TC^{\vee}$, ${}^{3}TM1$, $HCCF_{\mathfrak{man}}$, $(relN_{F})^2$, $n(FH_{2}C-CHF)=vidiF$ (model 1) r^2 = 0.9845, s = 5.140, F = 793, r^2_{cv} = 0.9812, s_{cv} = 5.679, N = 82. (83fluoroalkanesmodel1.qspr)

 $2TC^v$ and $3TM1$ are Bonchev overall indices, 23 HCCF_{man} is the number of HCCF fragments as counted by Woolf,^{5b} and n(FH₂C-CHF) is the count of fragment FH_2C-CHF .

 The best 7-descriptor model found is $\mathtt{Xu}^\mathfrak{m}$, $^2\mathtt{P}$, $\mathtt{S}(\texttt{ssssC})$, $\mathtt{n}(\mathtt{F}\texttt{-C}\texttt{-F})\texttt{=sub4}$, $\mathtt{n}(\mathtt{F}\texttt{-C}\texttt{-C}\texttt{-F})\texttt{=sub9}$, $(\mathtt{relu}_{\mathtt{F}})^2$, $\mathtt{n}(\mathtt{FH}_2\mathtt{C}\texttt{-CHF})$ =vicdiF (model 2) r^2 = 0.9872, s = 4.701, F = 815, r^2_{cv} = 0.9840, s_{cv} = 5.252, N = 82. (83fluoroalkanesmodel2.qspr)

 ^{2}P is the number of paths of length 2 in the H-suppressed molecular graph.

 Figure 1 is a plot of experimental vs calculated bps (by model 2) and of the corresponding bps obtained by leave-one-out crossvalidation.

(Figure 1)

 Table 2 (83fluoroalkanesTab.txt) lists experimental and calculated bps (by model 2) and residuals.

(Table 2)

 Figure 2 visualizes the results separately for fluorinated methanes, ethanes, propanes, and butanes. By inspection, the quality of data description is similar in all four subpopulations. In fact, the average absolute error for the 4 fluoromethanes, 9 fluoroethanes, 29

fluoropropanes, and 40 fluorobutanes is 3.72, 3.13, 4.02, and 3.40°C, respectively.

(Figure 2)

 Note that models 1 and 2 use both (electro)topological indices and substructure and fragment counts. In fact, (electro)topological indices alone or substructure and fragment counts alone led to best 6-descriptor models of $s = 5.83$ or 6.09, respectively. As in our earlier study,⁷ geometrical indices did not qualify to appear in the best models. Remarkably also most of the descriptors based on physical concepts^{5b,6} did not qualify for the best models.

 Prediction. By means of model 2 we predicted the normal boiling points of those 76 fluorobutanes whose bps are either not at all known or were excluded from our data set for contradicting reports in Beilstein. Table 3 (Predictions76Fbutanes.txt) shows the predictions.

(Table 3)

 Of course, the quality of these predictions cannot be assessed at present. We expect the average absolute error to be a bit larger than, but similar to that of the fit for fluorobutanes above, 3.40°C. An independent estimation was obtained as follows: The data for model 2 lead one to suspect that bp predictions for fluoropentanes by model 2 might not be senseless. Since these are extrapolations, their average error should be larger than that of the predictions for fluorobutanes, which are interpolations. So we predicted by model 2 the bps of all those fluoropentanes that have reliably known experimental bps (reliability classes 1 or 2, eighteen compounds). Results are shown in Table 4 (18Fpentanes.txt). The average absolute error of these predictions is 4.91°C. The predictions for the fluorobutanes therefore should on average be better than that.

(Table 4)

CONCLUSION

 The combination of global descriptors such as topological indices on the one hand and substructure and fragment counts on the other has proven itself to be very useful in QSPR work.^{12,16} Fragment counts offer the scientist some flexibility to react whenever in a QSPR equation several compounds containing a particular structural element have similar residuals. In fact, in this study fragment count $n(FH_2C-CHF)$ was included in the descriptor pool after preliminary QSPR models had resulted in large positive residuals for compounds $FH_2C-CHF-CH_3$, $FH_2C-CHF-CH_2F$, $F_2HC CHF-CH_2F$, $FH_2C-CHF-CHF-CH_2F$.

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(14) By obviously unreasonable we understand, e.g., a bp value that violates the fundamental rule of a considerable increase in bp on enlarging a molecule by a $CH₂$ group. Consider the following sequences (all bps in reliability classes 1 or 2):

 CH_3-CH_2F -37.5, $CH_3-CHF-CH_3$ -9.7, $CH_3-CHF-CH_2-CH_3$ 25;

 $CH_3-CHF_2 -25$, $CH_3-CF_2-CH_3 -0.5$, $CH_3-CF_2-CH_2-CH_3 31$;

 $FH_2C-CH_3 -37.5$, $FH_2C-CH_2-CH_3 -2.5$, $FH_2C-CH_2-CH_2-CH_3$ 32.5.

From these values the bp increment for a $CH₂$ group can be estimated to be 25-35°C (for additional examples see reference $14a$). Now consider FH_2C- CH₂F, bp 10.45 or 27 (reliability class unattributable¹⁵), FH₂C-CHF-CH₃ 32 (reliability class 0), $FH_2C-CHF-CH_2-CH_3$ 39 (reliability class 0). There is logic in this sequence only if for FH_2C-CH_2F 10.45, and for $FH_2C-CHF-CH_3$ 32 are essentially correct. For $FH_2C-CHF-CH_2-CH_3$ 39°C^{14b} then is far too low, this compound/bp therefore was excluded. (a) Balaban, A. T.; Basak, S. C.; Mills, D. Normal Boiling Points of 1,0-Alkanedinitriles: The highest Increment in a Homologous Series. J. Chem. Inf. Comput. Sci. **1999**, 39, 769. (b) Baklouti, A.; El Gharbi, R. J. Fluorine Chem. **1979**, 13, 297-314.

(15) The bp of FH_2C-CH_2F is somewhat problematic: An experimental bp of 10-11°C was reported only once,^{15a} while there are several reports of bp values between 25 and 31°C for this compound, though not all of these are independent.^{15b-h} However, the former number fits much better into various bp models. In the NIST Chemistry Webbook, 10.45°C is the only bp value given for $FH_2C-CH_2F.$ ¹⁰

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Figure and Table Captions

Figure 1. Plot of calculated (by model 2, white disks, and by leave-oneout crossvalidation, black disks) vs experimental boiling points of 82 fluoromethanes through fluorobutanes.

Figure 2. Plot of calculated (by model 2, white disks) and experimental (black disks) boiling points of lower fluoroalkanes vs number of F atoms in the molecule.

Table 1. Full MLR models for the boiling points of lower fluoroalkanes.

Table 2. Experimental and calculated boiling points (by model 2), residuals and structures of compounds in the learning set.

Table 3. Predicted boiling points (by model 2) for 76 fluorobutanes not included in the learning set.

Table 4. Experimental (with reliability) and predicted boiling points (extrapolations by model 2), residuals and structures of 18 fluoropentanes.

Table 1. Full MLR models for the boiling points of fluoroalkanes $C_1 - C_4$.

bp = 83.2226 \cdot Xu^m -25.1841 \cdot $^0\!\chi^{\rm v}$ -12.2045 \cdot $^4\!\chi_{\rm p}$ -5.21304 \cdot S(ssssC) $-34.247 \cdot n(F-C-F)$ $-9.2969 \cdot n(F-C-C-F)$ -41.3515 (model 0a)

bp = $67.3463 \cdot Xu^{m}$ -1.13857 $\cdot {}^{2}TC^{v}$ +0.092004 $\cdot {}^{3}TM1$ + 2.35049 \cdot HCCF_{man} $-81.9815 \cdot (\text{relu}_F)^2$ +8.5278 \cdot n(FH₂C-CHF) -75.3646 (model 1)

bp = $64.6756 \cdot Xu^{m}$ -5.51401 $\cdot^{2}P$ -2.05454 \cdot S(ssssC) -18.0512 \cdot n(F-C-F) $-3.88042 \cdot n(F-C-C-F)$ $-53.7732 \cdot (relN_F)^2$ +7.49879 $\cdot n(FH_2C-CHF)$ -72.4514 (model 2) **Table 2.** Experimental and calculated boiling points (by model 2), residuals and structures of compounds in the learning set.

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