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Theoretical investigation of the infrared spectrum of small polyynes†

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The full cubic and semidiagonal quartic force fields of acetylene (C₂H₂), diacetylene (C₄H₂), triacetylene (C₆H₂), and tetraacetylene (C₈H₂) are determined using CCSD(T) (coupled cluster theory with single and double excitations and augmented by a perturbative treatment of triple excitations) in combination with the atomic natural orbital (ANO) basis sets. Application of second-order vibrational perturbation theory (VPT2) results in vibrational frequencies that agree well with the known fundamental and combination band experimental frequencies of acetylene, diacetylene, and triacetylene (average discrepancies are less than 10 cm⁻¹). Furthermore, the predicted ground state rotational constants (*B*₀) and vibration–rotation interaction constants (*α*_{*i*}) are shown to be consistent with known experimental values. New vibrational frequencies and rotational parameters from the presented theoretical predictions are given for triacetylene and tetraacetylene, which can be used to aid laboratory and astronomical spectroscopic searches for characteristic transitions of these molecules.

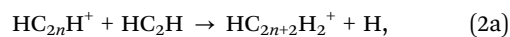
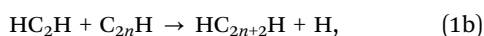
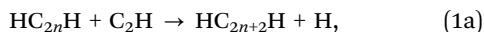
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1 Introduction

Due to their reactive nature, unsaturated linear hydrocarbons, such as acetylene and polyynes (general structure HC_{2*n*}H; X¹Σ_g⁺), are prevalent in combustion chemistry,^{1–4} plasma processes,^{5,6} chemical synthesis,^{7–10} chemistry of planetary atmospheres,^{11–19} and interstellar gas-phase chemistry.^{20–25} They are of particular interest for astronomers, because they are believed to act as the ultraviolet (UV) shield in hydrocarbon-rich atmospheres,^{26–29} and in the formation and destruction of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs),^{18,30–33} a major reservoir of carbon in the universe. In astronomical environments, the formation of long chain polyynes from acetylene is believed to occur through polymerization reactions,^{19,34,35}



Although long carbon chain molecules (*e.g.*, HC_{*n*} and HC_{*n*}N for *n* ≤ 9)^{36–39} and small polyynes (HC_{2*n*}H for *n* ≤ 3) have been detected in carbon-rich astronomical sources,^{20,21,39} tetraacetylene has yet to be observed. One limiting factor is that as centrosymmetric molecules, polyynes lack a permanent dipole moment, and cannot be detected by radioastronomy using pure rotational transitions, unlike, *e.g.*, HC_{*n*}N. Therefore, ro-vibrational spectra in the infrared (IR) region are the most important spectroscopic tools to detect polyynes both in the laboratory and in space. In particular, detection of acetylene, diacetylene, and triacetylene in planetary atmospheres and protoplanetary nebulae has been realized primarily through observation of the strongest perpendicular band (*ν*₅, *ν*₈, and *ν*₁₁, respectively, at ~13–17 μm) and the second strongest parallel band (*ν*₄ + *ν*₅, *ν*₆ + *ν*₈, and *ν*₈ + *ν*₁₁, respectively, at ~8 μm).^{11,12,20,21} However, accurate line positions for tetraacetylene are lacking, from either laboratory or theoretical studies.

Extensive theoretical and experimental studies have been carried out for acetylene and diacetylene in the past few decades, including high-resolution spectroscopic studies of all the fundamental bands and a significant number of the combination bands,^{29,40–50} and high level *ab initio* calculations that take into account anharmonic effects.^{51–54} The combination of these studies shows that current quantum chemical theory, particularly coupled cluster theory with single and double excitations and augmented by a perturbative treatment of triple excitations (CCSD(T)),⁵⁵ is able to accurately reproduce equilibrium geometries, experimental vibrational frequencies, vibration–rotation interaction constants (*α*_{*i*}), and ground state rotational constants (*B*₀).

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Triacetylene and tetraacetylene are not as thoroughly studied, notably in terms of rotational information. While all of the fundamental vibrational modes of triacetylene have been measured, there is only rotational information for the IR active fundamental modes,⁵⁶ and the strongest IR combination band ($\nu_8 + \nu_{11}$).^{57–61} However, theoretical studies of triacetylene do give rotational information for the remaining modes from CCSD(T) calculations of the vibration–rotation interaction constants⁶² and the equilibrium geometry.⁶³ In addition, the harmonic frequencies of triacetylene were calculated using partial fourth-order many-body perturbation theory [SDQ-MBPT(4)].⁶³ Conversely though, to the authors' knowledge, there is almost no rotational information for tetraacetylene. There has been only one low-resolution spectroscopic study of tetraacetylene, which measured three of the fundamentals (ν_6 , ν_8 , and ν_{14} at 3329.4, 2023.3, and 621.5 cm^{-1} , respectively), and one combination band ($\nu_{10} + \nu_{14}$ at 1229.7 cm^{-1}), and gives an estimate for the electronic ground state rotational constant, B_0 .⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the theoretical knowledge of tetraacetylene is equally limited, with only two studies of the equilibrium geometry (at the Hartree-Fock⁶⁵ and B3LYP⁶⁶ level of theory), and a calculation of the harmonic vibrational frequencies at the SVWN level of theory.⁶⁴ While the two modes that are most useful for astronomical identification (ν_{14} and $\nu_{10} + \nu_{14}$) were measured, the uncertainty associated with the line positions is too large to allow for an unambiguous assignment. Moreover, some high-resolution IR searches have been attempted,^{50,61,62,67} but so far no transitions have been assigned to tetraacetylene.

In this paper, we report the *ab initio* calculations for acetylene, diacetylene, triacetylene, and tetraacetylene. Due to the centrosymmetric nature of these molecules, observations in the laboratory and in space are most easily accomplished through their infrared spectra. As such, the properties computed and presented here are those related to that technique: fundamental vibrational frequencies, ground state rotational constants, and intramolecular interactions. The computational approach is calibrated using the well studied acetylene and diacetylene, and then extended to make predictions for triacetylene and tetraacetylene.

2 Computational methods

All calculations were carried out at the CCSD(T) level of theory, which with a sufficiently large basis set has been shown to accurately reproduce experimental values of semi-rigid molecules.^{52–55,68–72} Equilibrium geometries were determined using the large core-valence correlation-consistent quadruple- ζ basis set (cc-pCVQZ), which features [8s7p5d3f1g] (non-hydrogen atoms) and [4s3p2d1f] (hydrogen) of (15s9p5d3f1g) and (6s3p2d1f) primitive basis sets, respectively.^{73–75} All electron (AE)-CCSD(T)/cc-pCVQZ has been shown to give very accurate equilibrium geometries for unsaturated hydrocarbons.^{54,76–78} Optimizations were done using analytic energy derivatives,⁷⁹ and were considered converged when the root-mean-square (RMS) gradient fell below 10^{-10} au.

However, it is well known that correlation-consistent basis sets, such as cc-pCVQZ, tend to underestimate the vibrational frequencies of symmetric bending modes (π_g) of conjugated molecules, *e.g.*, polyynes, due to their susceptibility to an intramolecular variant of basis set superposition error (BSSE).^{54,80} It has been shown that one way to avoid this problem is to use basis sets with a large number of Gaussian primitives (particularly f-type), such as the atomic natural orbital (ANO) basis set (with the primitive basis set (13s8p6d4f2g) for non-hydrogen atoms and (8s6p4d2f) for hydrogen).^{52,81,82} The basis set has two common truncations: [4s3p2d1f] for non-hydrogen atoms and [4s2p1d] for hydrogen (hereafter known as ANO1), and [5s4p3d2f1g] (non-hydrogen atoms) and [4s3p2d1f] (hydrogen) (hereafter known as ANO2).^{74,75,81} In addition, only the valence electrons of carbon are considered in the correlation treatment, *i.e.*, standard frozen-core (fc) calculations. (fc)-CCSD(T)/ANO1 has been shown to accurately reproduce experimental frequencies and intensities for small molecules.^{52,83,84} Using the (fc)-CCSD(T)/ANO1 optimized geometry, second-order vibrational perturbation (VPT2) theory calculations were determined from full cubic and the semidiagonal part of the quartic force fields obtained by numerical differentiation of analytic CCSD(T) second derivatives.^{70,85} All calculations were performed with the development version of the CFOUR program.⁸⁶

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Equilibrium structure

The AE-CCSD(T)/cc-pCVQZ equilibrium geometries are shown in Fig. 1, with comparison to experimentally derived values (in italics) when known.^{53,87,88} The theoretical equilibrium bond lengths for acetylene, diacetylene, and triacetylene all agree within 0.5% of the structures determined from experimentally measured rotational constants. As the length of the carbon chain increases, the C–H bond lengths stay essentially the same, ~ 1.062 Å, consistent with a sp-H type C–H bond. However, the C \equiv C bond lengths increase (particularly the internal C \equiv C bonds), while the C–C bond lengths decrease, becoming closer to that typical of CC double bonds. This suggests that the π electrons become more delocalized over the internuclear axis, and the polyne's configuration moves from a strict triple-single bond alternation to more of a consecutive



Fig. 1 AE-CCSD(T)/cc-pCVQZ equilibrium geometries (Å) for HC_{2n}H . Experimentally determined equilibrium bond lengths for acetylene,⁸⁷ diacetylene,⁵³ and triacetylene⁸⁸ are given in italics below.



Table 1 CCSD(T)/ANO1 rotational constants (in cm^{-1}) of acetylene, diacetylene, triacetylene, and tetraacetylene

	HC ₂ H	HC ₄ H	HC ₆ H	HC ₈ H
Calc.				
B_e	1.181053	0.146248	0.044064	0.018823
B_0	1.175319	0.146167	0.044092	0.018844
$D_e(\times 10^8)$	160	1.5	0.086	0.012
Expt.				
B_0	1.17664632(18) ⁹⁰	0.1464123(17) ⁵⁰	0.0441735(12) ⁶¹	0.020(3) ⁶⁴
$D_0(\times 10^8)$	159.8(9) ⁹⁰	1.56825(20) ²⁹	0.107(7) ⁶¹	

double bond character of the CC bonds, making the overall structure more rigid as C₂ units are added, an effect that also qualitatively acts to increase the biradical character of the molecule as the size grows.

The equilibrium rotational constants, B_e , obtained from the AE-CCSD(T)/cc-pCVQZ equilibrium geometries are summarized in Table 1, and agree well with experimental ground state rotational constants (B_0). As such, the equilibrium rotational constants suggest that the calculations predict the correct ground state geometry, because for linear molecules with more than three atoms the summation of vibration-rotation interaction constants (α_i) is expected to be close to zero, and from

$$B_0 = B_e - \frac{1}{2} \sum_i \alpha_i, \quad (3)$$

$B_0 \sim B_e$.

In addition, as seen for other carbon chains (*e.g.*, HC_{*n*}, HC_{2*n*+1}N, and H₂C_{*n*})⁸⁹ the centrifugal distortion constant (D_e) decreases with increasing molecular size, with a theoretical $D_e = 1.6 \times 10^{-6} \text{ cm}^{-1}$ for acetylene, $D_e = 1.5 \times 10^{-8} \text{ cm}^{-1}$ for diacetylene, $D_e = 8.6 \times 10^{-10} \text{ cm}^{-1}$ for triacetylene, and $D_e = 1.2 \times 10^{-10} \text{ cm}^{-1}$ for tetraacetylene. These values are consistent with those found experimentally for the respective vibrational ground states (Table 1). As noted by Thaddeus *et al.*⁸⁹ this behavior of increasing stiffness with chain length is a distinguishing characteristic associated with *bona fide* chains.

3.2 Spectroscopic properties of acetylene and diacetylene

The quality of the present calculations is checked by comparison to the experimentally well studied acetylene and diacetylene. The harmonic and VPT2 fundamental frequencies of the fundamental and combination bands are given in Table 2 and 3 for acetylene and diacetylene, respectively, and experimental values are included for comparison. The (fc)-CCSD(T)/ANO1 VPT2 fundamental frequencies show good agreement with experimental values, with most observed-calculated deviations (o-c) being less than 5 cm^{-1} and all being less than 15 cm^{-1} .

Based on previous studies of acetylene⁵² and diacetylene,⁵³ the use of the ANO2 basis set was evaluated compared to the ANO1 basis set. For some of the vibrational modes, such as the ν_4 mode of acetylene [612.88 cm^{-1} (observed)],⁴² Martin *et al.*⁵² showed that CCSD(T)/ANO2 can give a slightly better agreement (o-c value of $\sim 2 \text{ cm}^{-1}$) compared to the ANO1 basis set (o-c value of $\sim 12 \text{ cm}^{-1}$). However, the study by Thorwirth *et al.*⁵³

Table 2 Harmonic and anharmonic (VPT2) frequencies (in cm^{-1}) of acetylene fundamental and selected combination bands

	CCSD(T)/ANO1 ^a		Experimental
	ω	ν	ν
$\nu_1(\sigma_g^+)$	3514.2(0)	3375.2(0)	3372.851 ⁴¹
$\nu_2(\sigma_g^+)$	2001.5(0)	1964.8(0)	1974.317 ⁴¹
$\nu_3(\sigma_u^+)$	3414.6(84.7)	3285.9(74.8)	3288.58075 ⁴⁸
$\nu_4(\pi_g)$	600.5(0)	600.6(0)	612.871 ⁴²
$\nu_5(\pi_u)$	752.3(90.5)	734.7(91.7)	730.332 ⁴²
$\nu_4 + \nu_5(\sigma_u^+)$	1352.8	1329.2(10.8)	1328.074 ⁴²
$\nu_2 + \nu_5(\pi_u)$	2753.8	2698.3(0.1)	2701.907 ⁴³
$\nu_3 + \nu_4(\pi_u)$	4015.1	3878.5(0.5)	3882.4060 ⁴¹
$\nu_1 + \nu_5(\pi_u)$	4266.5	4098.9(0.5)	4091.17326 ⁹¹
$\nu_1 + \nu_3(\sigma_u^+)$	6928.7	6551.9(2.0)	6556.46 ⁴⁰
Anharmonic ZPE	= 5760.1		

^a Intensities in km mol^{-1} are given in parentheses.

Table 3 Harmonic and anharmonic (VPT2) frequencies (in cm^{-1}) of diacetylene fundamental and selected combination bands

	CCSD(T)/ANO1 ^a		Experimental
	ω	ν	ν
$\nu_1(\sigma_g^+)$	3465.8(0)	3332.5(0)	3332.15476 ⁴⁶
$\nu_2(\sigma_g^+)$	2240.2(0)	2193.1(0)	2188.9285 ⁴⁴
$\nu_3(\sigma_g^+)$	891.1(0)	859.2(0)	871.9582 ⁴⁴
$\nu_4(\sigma_u^+)$	3465.9(152.7)	3333.1(135.5)	3333.6634 ⁵⁰
$\nu_5(\sigma_u^+)$	2054.1(0.2)	2016.9(0.5)	2022.2415 ⁴⁴
$\nu_6(\pi_g)$	636.3(0)	624.2(0)	625.643507 ²⁹
$\nu_7(\pi_g)$	479.8(0)	476.9(0)	482.7078 ⁴⁴
$\nu_8(\pi_u)$	636.3(78.7)	624.1(78.8)	628.040776 ²⁹
$\nu_9(\pi_u)$	220.7(7.3)	219.6(7.3)	219.97713 ⁴⁷
$2\nu_9(\sigma_g^+)$	441.4	438.5(0)	438.47757 ⁴⁷
$\nu_7 + \nu_9(\sigma_u^+)$	700.5	696.3(0.8)	701.8939 ²⁹
$\nu_6 + \nu_9(\sigma_u^+)$	857.0	843.9(0.01)	845.655513 ²⁹
$\nu_8 + \nu_9(\sigma_g^+)$	857.0	843.9(0)	848.365918 ²⁹
$\nu_7 + \nu_8(\pi_u)$	1116.1	1103.1(0.6)	1111 ⁴⁵
$\nu_6 + \nu_8(\sigma_u^+)$	1272.6	1244.7(21.8)	1241.060828 ⁴⁶
$2\nu_6 + \nu_8(\pi_u)$	1909.0	1864.6(0.0)	1863.2512 ⁴⁴
$\nu_2 + \nu_9(\pi_u)$	2460.9	2410.0(0.04)	2406.4251 ⁴⁴
$\nu_5 + \nu_7(\pi_u)$	2533.9	2489.0(0.01)	2500.6458 ⁴⁴
$\nu_5 + \nu_6(\pi_u)$	2690.4	2637.0(0.04)	2643.32323 ⁴⁶
$\nu_2 + \nu_8(\pi_u)$	2876.6	2810.9(0.4)	2805 ⁴⁵
$\nu_1 + \nu_9(\pi_u)$	3686.5	3551.6(0.1)	3551.56158159 ⁴⁶
$\nu_1 + \nu_8(\pi_u)$	4102.1	3946.9(0.7)	3939 ⁴⁵
$\nu_4 + \nu_6(\pi_u)$	4102.3	3947.8(0.7)	
$\nu_2 + \nu_5(\sigma_u^+)$	4294.3	4194.0(0.1)	
$\nu_4 + \nu_3(\sigma_u^+)$	4357.0	4192.3(0.1)	
$\nu_1 + \nu_4(\sigma_u^+)$	6931.7	6557.2(3.4)	6565.472 ⁴⁹
Anharmonic ZPE	= 7966.9		

^a Intensities in km mol^{-1} are given in parentheses.

showed that, for diacetylene, the average o-c value with CCSD(T)/ANO2 is comparable to that for the ANO1 basis set ($\sim 6 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ and $\sim 4 \text{ cm}^{-1}$, respectively). Moreover, the time cost of (fc)-CCSD(T)/ANO2 calculations compared to (fc)-CCSD(T)/ANO1 far outweighs the minor frequency differences, and does not justify the higher computational cost of the ANO2 basis set in predicting the fundamental frequencies of longer polyynes.

The (fc)-CCSD(T)/ANO1 anharmonicity constants (x_{ij} , ESI[†]) also accurately account for the known combination bands of acetylene and diacetylene (Tables 2 and 3, respectively). All the combination bands are within 5 cm^{-1} of their observed values. For both acetylene and diacetylene, the ANO1 basis set is able



Table 6 Harmonic and anharmonic (VPT2) frequencies (in cm^{-1}) of tetraacetylene fundamental and selected combination bands

	CCSD(T)/ANO1 ^a		Experimental
	ω	ν	ν
$\nu_1(\sigma_g^+)$	3462.0(0)	3330.5(0)	
$\nu_2(\sigma_g^+)$	2263.2(0)	2208.0(0)	
$\nu_3(\sigma_g^+)$	2134.6(0)	2094.2(0)	
$\nu_4(\sigma_g^+)$	1296.4(0)	1285.8(0)	
$\nu_5(\sigma_g^+)$	470.0(0)	455.3(0)	
$\nu_6(\sigma_u^+)$	3461.6(223.1)	3328.8(214.2)	3329.4 ⁶⁴
$\nu_7(\sigma_u^+)$	2254.7(1.0)	2227.6(0.5)	
$\nu_8(\sigma_u^+)$	2064.3(0.3)	2026.6(0.6)	2023.3 ⁶⁴
$\nu_9(\sigma_u^+)$	911.6(3.2)	922.4(2.0)	
$\nu_{10}(\pi_g)$	632.4(0)	620.0(0)	
$\nu_{11}(\pi_g)$	489.3(0)	486.0(0)	
$\nu_{12}(\pi_g)$	422.3(0)	419.5(0)	
$\nu_{13}(\pi_g)$	158.8(0)	157.9(0)	
$\nu_{14}(\pi_u)$	632.6(79.6)	619.7(79.9)	621.5 ⁶⁴
$\nu_{15}(\pi_u)$	474.2(0.1)	470.9(0.2)	
$\nu_{16}(\pi_u)$	267.7(3.2)	266.7(3.1)	
$\nu_{17}(\pi_u)$	61.0(2.3)	60.7(2.2)	
$\nu_{11} + \nu_{17}(\sigma_u^+)$	550.3	546.5(0.6)	
$\nu_{13} + \nu_{15}(\sigma_u^+)$	633.0	628.5(1.7)	
$\nu_{12} + \nu_{16}(\sigma_u^+)$	690.1	684.8(3.1)	
$\nu_{12} + \nu_{15}(\sigma_u^+)$	896.5	871.9(3.5)	
$\nu_{11} + \nu_{15}(\sigma_u^+)$	963.5	970.5(1.3)	
$\nu_{10} + \nu_{15}(\sigma_u^+)$	1106.6	1092.2(0.6)	
$\nu_{10} + \nu_{14}(\sigma_u^+)$	1265.1	1236.7(37.5)	1229.7 ⁶⁴
$\nu_2 + \nu_9(\sigma_u^+)$	3174.8	3130.1(0.5)	
$\nu_4 + \nu_8(\sigma_u^+)$	3360.7	3311.4(0.5)	
$\nu_6 + \nu_{10}(\pi_u)$	4094.0	3939.1(0.8)	
$\nu_1 + \nu_{14}(\pi_u)$	4094.6	3940.6(0.8)	
$\nu_1 + \nu_6(\sigma_u^+)$	6923.6	6550.8(5.7)	
Anharmonic ZPE = 12218.2			

^a Intensities in km mol^{-1} are given in parentheses.

in the work of Vázquez and Stanton and Matthews *et al.*⁸⁵ This combination of Fermi and Darling–Dennison interactions shifts the ν_5 predicted frequency from 3333.1 to 3329.5 cm^{-1} , which is able to reproduce the experimentally observed frequency [3329.0533(2) cm^{-1}]⁶¹ with the same accuracy seen for diacetylene ($\text{o-c} \sim 0.5 \text{ cm}^{-1}$). The combination bands involved are similarly shifted: $\nu_2 + \nu_7$ from 3329.5 to 3362.2 cm^{-1} , and $3\nu_7$ from 3526.7 to 3498.7 cm^{-1} . Since the shift is most pronounced for the two combination bands, future experimental work to observe either of these bands is required to confirm this prediction.

The vibration–rotation interaction constants for triacetylene are given in Table 4, and are consistent with the previous CCSD(T)/cc-pCVQZ theoretical study⁶² and experimentally determined values.^{57–59,61} Consequently, the calculated ground state rotational constant $B_0 = 0.044092 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ is within 0.2% of the experimentally observed $B_0 = 0.0441735(12) \text{ cm}^{-1}$.⁶¹

3.4 Spectroscopic properties of tetraacetylene

The (fc)-CCSD(T)/ANO1 harmonic and VPT2 frequencies of the fundamental and combination bands for tetraacetylene are given in Table 6, and the (fc)-CCSD(T)/ANO1 anharmonicity constants (x_{ij}) are given in the ESI.† For the four experimentally observed bands, agreement of the observed and calculated frequencies is good at 7 cm^{-1} , which is comparable to the uncertainty of the low resolution measurements. Furthermore,

the ANO1 VPT2 frequencies are able to reproduce the experimental frequencies far better than the previous harmonic frequency calculations, which had o–c values of $\sim 20\text{--}100 \text{ cm}^{-1}$.⁶⁴ Of the predicted fundamental and combination bands, there are a number of bands that are found/predicted to have sufficient intensity and/or relatively unique frequency range that could offer viable target transitions to use to search for tetraacetylene in future laboratory or astronomical spectra. For example, in the IR the $\nu_1 + \nu_6$ at 6550.8 cm^{-1} or $\nu_{12} + \nu_{15}$ at 871.9 cm^{-1} combination bands have both comparable predicted intensity to measured bands of di- and triacetylene, and have transitions in relatively clean regions of the spectrum. In terms of astronomical searches, the ν_{17} mode at 60.7 cm^{-1} , offers a unique target transition, since its low frequency makes it accessible by far-IR observations, similar to the ν_2 bending mode of C_3 .⁹²

Based on the results discussed for the other small polyynes, the theoretical vibration–rotation interaction constants given in Table 4 are sufficient to assist in identification of ro-vibrational bands of tetraacetylene. The α_i results in a theoretical ground state rotational constant of $B_0 = 0.018844 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ that agrees within errors with the experimentally determined value, $B_0 = 0.020(3) \text{ cm}^{-1}$.⁶⁴ Overall, for polyynes the difference between the experimental and calculated rotational constants (ΔB_0) decreases from 0.001 to 0.00008 cm^{-1} as the chain length is increased, which is consistent with the trend seen for other carbon chain molecules (*e.g.*, HC_nN , HC_n , C_nO).⁹³ Therefore, if the trend continues as expected then the ΔB_0 for tetraacetylene is equal to or smaller than that seen for triacetylene, and the determined ground state rotational constant is a good approximation of the true value.

4 Conclusions

Accurate equilibrium geometries have been determined at the AE-CCSD(T)/cc-pCVQZ level of theory, and the full cubic and semidiagonal quartic force field have been determined at the (fc)-CCSD(T)/ANO1 level of theory for acetylene and the three smallest polyynes. No scaling or adjustments had to be included to match theoretical values with those determined by experiments. The resulting VPT2 fundamental vibrational frequencies and vibration–rotation interaction constants agree with known experimental values, showing about a 5 cm^{-1} deviation in frequencies for bands with high-resolution infrared information. For bands with only low-resolution data, the theoretical frequencies are able to confirm mode assignments or suggest a reassignment, as in the case of the observed band at 1115.0 cm^{-1} of triacetylene to the $\nu_9 + \nu_{11}$ combination band, which has previously been attributed to the ν_7 fundamental. The provisional *ab initio* method used here is also able to accurately reproduce the observed frequencies of combination bands.

The calculated fundamental frequencies for triacetylene and tetraacetylene give insight as to why tetraacetylene has not yet been observed in space. Observation of centrosymmetric molecules in astronomical environments is mainly through infrared detection of the high intensity bending modes; *e.g.*, ν_8 [628.040776(36) cm^{-1}]²⁹



and $\nu_6 + \nu_8$ [1241.060828(38) cm^{-1}]⁴⁶ of diacetylene, or ν_{11} [621.34011(42) cm^{-1}]⁶⁰ and $\nu_8 + \nu_{11}$ [1232.904295(74) cm^{-1}]⁵⁸ of triacetylene. However, the analogous modes for tetraacetylene are the ν_{14} [621.5(5) cm^{-1}]⁶⁴ and $\nu_{10} + \nu_{14}$ [1229.7(5) cm^{-1}]⁶⁴ and are predicted to be significantly weaker in intensity due to lower column densities.^{34,35} Consequently, at these frequencies and resolutions of the previous infrared observations where polyynes were detected,^{20–22,24,25} the transitions of tetraacetylene are blended with those of triacetylene. Other bands of tetraacetylene would be more suitable for identification, such as $\nu_1 + \nu_6$, $\nu_{12} + \nu_{15}$, or ν_{17} that are expected to be equally strong as bands already used to identify di- and triacetylene.

Overall, the resulting computed geometries lead to equilibrium rotational constants (B_e), which when corrected for vibrational zero-point effects give ground state equilibrium constants (B_0) that agree with experimental values (0.2%). Based on the small o-c values for acetylene, diacetylene, and triacetylene, we are confident that the fundamental frequencies and spectroscopic constants determined here offer an accurate guide for spectroscopic searches focused on detection of ro-vibrational bands of triacetylene and tetraacetylene. Such work is underway in our laboratory.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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