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- 1 Root fungal endophytes: identity, phylogeny and roles in plant tolerance to metal 2stress
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- Abstract
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Metal trace elements accumulate in soils mainly because of anthropic activities, leading living organisms to develop strategies to handle metal toxicity. Plants often associate with root endophytic fungi, including nonmycorrhizal fungi, and some of these organisms are associated with metal tolerance. The lack of synthetic analyses of plant-endophyte-metal tripartite systems and the scant consideration for taxonomy led to this review aiming (1) to inventory non-mycorrhizal root fungal endophytes described with respect to their taxonomic diversity and (2) to determine the 22 mutualistic roles of these plant-fungus associations under metal stress. More than 1500 species in 100 orders (mainly Hypocreales and Pleosporales) were reported from a wide variety of environments and hosts. Most reported endophytes had a positive effect on their host under metal stress, but with various effects on metal uptake or translocation and no clear taxonomic consistency. Future research considering the functional patterns and dynamics of these associations is thus encouraged.

Keywords: metallic trace element, fungal endophytes, taxonomy, accumulation, mutualism, plant-fungi interactions

Introduction

Metal accumulation in soils is a growing concern in developed and developing countries. Fertilizers and pesticides rich in As, Pb, Cr, Cu and Zn, among others (Senesil et al., 1999), contribute directly to the deposition of metal trace elements (MTEs) in soils. MTEs may also be emitted to the atmosphere by road traffic (Cu, Zn, Pb) (Nikolaeva et al., 2019), industries (Bourennane et al., 2010), or coal combustion (Cd, Cu, Ni, Pb, Zn…) and may be deposited on soil secondarily (Senesil et al., 1999). As metal ions are not biodegradable, they tend to accumulate and persist in soil over more than two years (Senesil et al., 1999).

As primary producers, vascular plants are essential components of the terrestrial food chain. Thus, MTE transfer and its biological effects on plants constitute crucial information for understanding the environmental fate of these pollutants. Contaminated sites present toxicity for plants, leading to scarce vegetation and negatively affecting agriculture and human health. For example, Zn and Cd are easily taken up by plants, causing chlorosis and stunted growth and disturbing N metabolism (Påhlsson, 1989); Cr reduces germination, yield and plant height and leads to the formation of thick roots (Shanker et al., 2005). MTEs in general induce oxidative stress and ionic homeostasis disturbance in plants (Yadav, 2010). However, several plant species developed metal tolerance, either to one metal (Zn for instance (Påhlsson, 1989)) or to several metals with a common mechanism (recapitulative figures in Domka et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2016). Metabolomics, ionomics and proteomics have shown numerous modifications in plant metabolism in the presence of heavy metals (Singh et al., 2016), such as phytochelatins and glutathione, which increase on metal contamination (Seth et al., 2012). Amino acids, organic acids and phenols participate in the chelation and transport of metals, whereas glutathione and alpha-tocopherol are involved in the scavenging of ROS and lipid peroxides. Peptides such as phytochelatins and metallothioneins bind metal ions, and hormones such as salicylic acid or abscisic acid participate in plant systemic responses to abiotic stress (Hu et al., 2020; Raza et al., 2020; Saeed-Ur-Rahman et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2016). Metal ions bound to phytochelatins are transported from the cytosol to the vacuolar compartment, thus detoxifying the cytosol and limiting oxidative stress (Yadav, 2010; Zenk, 1996).

The plant and fungal kingdoms are strongly linked, with more than 85% of vascular plants forming symbiotic associations with mycorrhizal fungi (Brundrett & Tedersoo, 2018). Although seven categories of mycorrhizal symbioses have been reported (Finlay, 2008), two types, namely, arbuscular mycorrhizal and ectomycorrhizal symbioses, have been extensively studied for their role in plant-MTE interactions. Although the literature concerning the role of ericoid mycorrhizal (ErM) fungi is not as extensive as that for arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi (AMF) and ectomycorrhizal fungi (EMF), some data are also available for this group.

At metal-contaminated sites, AM fungi are found in more than 80% of plants across a wide diversity and have been shown to promote plant growth (Wang, 2017), demonstrating that not only are fungi tolerant to metals, but they may also help plants tolerate metals. Therefore, the role of AMFs and EMFs on plant tolerance to metal stress has been widely studied (*e.g.,* Luo et al., 2014; Miransari, 2011; Shi et al., 2019, Zhan et al., 2019). AMFs increase plant growth and alleviate metal stress, especially under high metal concentrations. Stress alleviation may come from increased plant growth (metal dilution effect) and/or decreased concentrations of available metals in soil (Miransari, 2011, Khan, 2005) but also from participation and improvement of plant defences (Ferrol et al., 2016). Ectomycorrhizae are present in approximately 2% of plant species, mainly trees (Brundrett, 2009; Brundrett & Tedersoo 2018). Some EMFs immobilize metals in soil, whereas other EMFs promote metal uptake by the host plant. Metal transporters produced by EMFs are important in mediating tolerance (Luo et al., 2014). Thus, in mycorrhizal plants, both AMFs and EMFs can alleviate plant metal stress by sequestrating metal ions, improving the nutritional and antioxidative status of the plant and stimulating the expression of genes involved in metal accumulation in both partners (Shi et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2020). Similarly, ErM favour plant growth under Cu and Zn contamination with lower MTE concentrations in shoots but higher concentrations in roots, suggesting an adsorption mechanism (Bradley et al., 1982), or with lower concentrations in roots, suggesting a filtering effect (Casrrubia et al., 2020). The metal tolerance of fungal partners may explain in some way their host plant metal tolerance (Bradley et al., 1982): in particular, the involvement of several fungal genes coding for antioxidant enzymes, metal transporters, and DNA damage repair proteins are under investigation (Daghino et al., 2016). Transporters and metallothioneins, which could be involved in MTE sequestration in roots or MTE transport into plant tissues, have been identified in all three types of mycorrhizae (Ruytinx et al., 2020) and seem to mitigate oxidative stress (Zou et al., 2020), but the precise mechanism at the plant root-fungi interface remains unknown (Becquer et al., 2019).

In addition to mycorrhizae, other fungi associate with plant roots without forming an exchange structure. Dark-septate endophytes (DSEs) belong to this category. Rather well studied, they are often named "pseudomycorrhizae" (Jumpponen and Trappe, 1998) because of their specific association with plant roots and their mutualistic effects on plants. A meta-analysis of inoculation experiments showed that DSEs have positive or neutral 86 effects on plant growth (Newsham, 2011). Keeping these four groups –AMF, EMF, ErM and DSE– aside, a high diversity of fungi is still found in plants. Some are classified as parasitic despite harbouring non-pathogenic interactions with some plants, while others are not truly studied. *Olpidium* or *Mucor* are examples of less studied fungal genera defined as "endophytes" (Zahoor et al., 2017; Zubek et al., 2016).

Some authors defined the term "endophytes" as either bacterial or fungal symbionts within plant tissues that, during at least part of their life cycle, do not cause any visible signs of tissue damage or adverse effects on the host (Kageyama et al., 2008; Schulz and Boyle 2005; Wilson, 1995).

Numerous reviews on plant-fungus relationships, plant-MTE interactions and fungus-MTE interactions exist (Figure 1). Some of them combine plant, fungi and heavy metal relationships, but most of them are restricted to some plants (trees for example) or some microorganisms (AMFs mainly, DSEs, bacteria, etc.). Only a few studies considered the tripartite plant-endophyte-metal system at the whole ecosystem level, and even fewer used *in situ* analyses. Despite the fact that the roles of fungal endophytes on plant metal tolerance, including DSEs, were well and recently reviewed by Domka et al. (2019), the contemporaneous bibliography did not explore the phylogeny of this large taxonomical group that is formed by endophytic fungi. Fungal endophyte biology may be highly diverse, and as a result, the mechanisms of metal stress alleviation may vary between these groups, although some might be conserved between closely related species.

Consequently, the objectives of this review are (1) to report phylogenetic relationships of fungal endophytes described to date and (2) to explore their mutualistic function in the context of metal contamination and by way of taxonomy. As roots are directly in contact with contaminated soil where MTE transfer occurs, we chose to inventory root fungal endophytes exclusively. Thus, we answered the following questions: which are the fungal endophytes present in plant roots? Do they participate in plant tolerance to metal contamination? Is there any evident relationship between their mutualistic function and their taxonomy?

This review identifies fungal endophytes described in various plant roots and environments and places them in a global phylogeny of Fungi. Then, different aspects of metal stress alleviation by endophytes are reported in light of taxonomy. We propose future investigations to further elucidate the roles of endophytic fungi in plant metal tolerance.

Identification and phylogenetic analysis

This first chapter presents an inventory of fungal endophytes that were identified in plant roots (Table 1): this review does not include mycorrhizal fungi. A total of 144 articles studied fungal root communities and identified them by sequencing approaches. The complete inventory is available in the supplementary data (Table S1), with more than 1500 different species referenced. Hereafter, all orders of identified species are presented.

Root endophytes were found wherever scientists searched for them by using molecular sequencing. Indeed, from grasslands to aquatic systems, deserts, forests, bogs, dunes, mountains and metal-polluted environments, fungi belonging to 101 orders, 40 classes and 12 divisions were retrieved and included in this review. However, many fungi are still of undetermined order.

Fungal communities may vary according to the season, site, soil characteristics and host plant. Root fungal communities were extremely different between the early and late seasons in *Bouteloua gracilis* and *Gutierrezia sarothrae* (Kageyama et al., 2008), and root culturable endophytes were strictly different between spring and summer in the carnivorous plant *Drosera rotundifolia* (Quilliam and Jones, 2010). The colonization percentage by DSEs was 6-fold higher in May (12%) than in April (2%) in *Salix humboldtiana* (Becerra et al., 2009). Thus, communities of fungal endophytes are highly variable in quality and quantity during the growing season, indicating temporal variability, which may be related to different fungal growth velocities, different fungal phenologies or variable fungal recruitment by the plant, depending on its growth state and environmental changes.

Endophyte communities also vary in terms of diversity and colonization levels between geographical sites. For example, the DSE colonization percentage in *Solanum nigrum* varied from 1 to 10% between four sites at three different elevations (Muthukumar and Sathya, 2017), and endophyte richness was greater in *Festuca paniculata* roots in unmown grasslands than in mown grasslands, with Eurotiomycetes being specific to mown grasslands (Mouhamadou et al., 2011). Local pedoclimatic conditions may represent abiotic filters limiting fungal colonization and include the variation of physico-chemical parameters such as elevation, slope orientation, climate, and soil characteristics (pH, N and K concentrations, granulometry, etc.). For instance, in the halophyte plant *Inula crithmoides*, one undetermined DSE belonging to the Pleosporales was positively correlated with the salt gradient (Maciá-Vicente et al., 2012). Nevertheless, these differences between sites may also be explained by limited fungal dispersion or biotic filters or even by the abundance of DSEs in soil that were not systemically recorded.

Each order of Fungi is found in several types of plants (e.g., Pleosporales and Chaetosphaeriales in Orchidaceae, trees, subshrubs and shrubs, Poaceae, and forest plants, while Pleosporales is also reported in aquatic plants, forbs, halophytes, and hyperaccumulators) (Table 1, Table 2), indicating rather generalist plant-fungus associations. However, fungal endophyte communities depend on the host plant. Indeed, endophytic assemblages differ between two plant species belonging to the same genera, for example, between the halophyte *Inula crithmoides* and the nonhalophyte *Inula viscosa* (Maciá-Vicente et al., 2012). The frequencies of association between endophytes and different trees (*Betula papyrifera*, *Abies balsamea*, and *Picea glauca*) revealed the preferences of some fungi for a specific tree; for example, *Phialocephala fortinii* associates preferentially with *P. glauca* and *Oidodendron* sp. with *B. papyrifera* (Kernaghan and Patriquin, 2011). Similarly, in two grasses, *Phoma herbarum* and *Microdochium* sp*.* were found only in *Bouteloua gracilis*, whereas *Lophiostoma* sp*.* was found only in *Gutierrezia sarothrae* (Kageyama et al., 2008).

Root fungal endophytes were found among the great majority of Ascomycota (52 identified orders, Table 1), followed by Basidiomycota, Chytridiomycota, Mucoromycota, and Oomycota (32, 5, 3 and 2 orders, respectively, Table 2). Orders that are found in a large number of studies (more than a quarter of studies) are Hypocreales (Sordariomycetes), Pleosporales (Dothideomycetes), Helotiales (Leotiomycetes), Eurotiales (Eurotiomycetes) and Xylariales (Sordariomycetes) (Figure 2).

Thus, fungal root endophytes are highly diverse. We placed them on a phylogenetic tree of Eumycetes (Figure 3). Similar to foliar endophytes (Higgins et al., 2007), root endophytes are found throughout the phylogeny of Eumycetes and do not form a monophyletic group. This suggests, similar to mycorrhizae (Fitter and Moyersoen, 1996), that the ability to live within plant roots without harming them appeared several times in evolution.

Among all fungal endophytes, the dark septate endophyte (DSE) morphological group is commonly – and more than other endophytes - studied for its potential beneficial association with plants. Several orders were reported to contain DSEs: Capnodiales, Chaetosphaeriales, Chaetothyriales, Dothideales, Elaphomycetales, Eurotiales, Helotiales, Hypocreales, Leotiales, Microascales, Onygenales, Pleosporales, Pezizales, Saccharomycetales, Sordariales, Taphrinales, and Xylariales (Grünig et al., 2011; Jumpponen and Trappe, 1998; Knapp and Kovács, 2016; Newsham, 2011). DSEs therefore constitute a paraphyletic group (Yuan et al., 2011), defined by their similar morphology *(i.e.*, intercellular melanised and septate hyphae and intracellular microsclerotia). We note that the seven orders that were the most often found from our results (Hypocreales, Pleosporales, Helotiales, Eurotiales, Xylariales, Capnodiales and Sordariales) are known to contain DSEs (Knapp and Kovács, 2016; Jumpponen and Trappe 1998; Newsham 2011).

Root fungal endophytes are commonly found in metal-contaminated soils (Domka et al., 2019; Lacercat-Didier et al., 2016) and increase plant metal tolerance (Domka et al., 2019). The high diversity of root endophytes observed in this

study suggests that their roles in plant metal tolerance may strongly differ as well as their mechanisms of tolerance to metal. Thus, in this work, the role of these organisms in plant metal tolerance and accumulation is analysed and compared with respect to their taxonomic diversity.

Fungal endophytes and plant metal tolerance

We made an inventory of root endophytes that were experimentally tested on plants in the context of metal contamination (Table 3). When described, we reported the effect of those endophytes on plant growth, metal uptake and metal translocation from roots to aerial parts. A complete inventory of the effects of endophytes on other plant traits in the context of metal contamination is available in the supplementary data.

Of the 118 plant-fungus associations for which the MTE was specified, Cd was the most commonly studied (49), followed by Pb (24) and Zn (15) (Figure 4A). These contaminants are particularly abundant in anthropized soils, especially originating from coal combustion (Bourennane et al., 2010; Senesil et al., 1999) and agriculture for Cd (Bourennane et al., 2010). These three elements presented enrichment factors from 10 to 30 in soils of industrial regions, much higher than those of other trace elements (Bourennane et al., 2010). A relatively equal number of studies examining monocontamination (35 associations) or polycontamination (27 associations) was observed (Figure 4B). Nine pot experiments directly tested field soil or wastewater contamination, in contrast to the rest of the studies that used artificially mono- or polycontaminated soils. Metal availability for plants is related to its speciation in soil (Kabata-Pendias, 2004), which cannot be controlled in greenhouses. Using field soil as a substrate for experiments limits this bias and should be encouraged, although it makes the interactions between different metals more complex. Almost all tested endophytes led to better welfare of plants in the presence of MTE (Table 3, Table 4, Figure 5A).

Plant metal tolerance may be associated with both metal accumulation in roots - metal uptake (Figure 5B) or shoots - metal translocation (Figure 5C) or with a reduction in the metal concentrations of plant parts (i.e., exclusion). This shows two strategies of metal tolerance: MTE avoidance and MTE storage, confirming the previously reported smaller 198 inventory of Domka et al. (2019).

Metal uptake and metal translocation are not correlated (Table 4): fungi may increase metal concentrations in roots but decrease metal translocation to shoots (like AMF (Miransari, 2011)). Fungi may also decrease metal uptake but increase its translocation. Finally, metal uptake and translocation may both vary together, either increasing or decreasing in the presence of fungi. These effects depend on fungus/plant/metal identities, with the same fungal species having various effects according to its host plant and the contaminant. For example, *Trichoderma asperellum* does not have any effect on *Lactuca serriola* growth (Ważny et al., 2018), whereas it favours onion and *Suaeda salsa* growth in association with decreased metal uptake and translocation (Li et al., 2019; Téllez Vargas et al., 2017). Similarly, *Penicillium janthinellum* facilitates metal exclusion in *Solanum lycopersicum* in the presence of Cd (Khan et al., 2014) but increases metal accumulation in the presence of Al (Khan et al., 2015). Unfortunately, data are lacking concerning metal uptake and translocation induced by many fungal endophytes.

These strategies are not linked with taxonomy, and much variability in strategies is observed, including within a single species. We observed that some fungi, such as *Fusarium oxysporum*, commonly considered pathogens (Michielse and Rep, 2009; Poletto et al., 2020), may have positive effects on plant growth in the context of metal contamination (Mostafa et al., 2019). This fungus has also been shown to decrease some biomarkers of oxidative stress in the legume *Cicer arietinum* under Cd contamination, probably acting like a filter (Laib et al., 2020).

Considering plant taxonomy, we did not observe any common strategies for trees or members of the Poaceae. Even for a given plant species, different fungi may have different effects. Indeed, under Cd/Pb polycontamination, *Brassica napus* is always stimulated by endophytes, but the metal uptake and translocation strategies differ; the fungal endophyte *Lasiodiplodia* sp*.* increases metal uptake and translocation (Deng et al., 2014), whereas *Fusarium* sp., *Mucor circinelloides* and *Mucor racemosus* have no effect on these parameters (Shi et al., 2017; Zhu et al., 2015). *Peniciilium* sp*.* have no effect on metal uptake but increase Cd (but not Pb) translocation to shoots (Shi et al., 2017). For *Zea mays*, metal uptake and translocation may be increased by some strains of the endophyte *Peyronellaea* sp*.* (Shen et al., 2013), but metal translocation is decreased by *Exophiala pisciphila* (He et al., 2017; Li et al., 2011). Thus, in the presence of metal, the different fungi present in a given plant could have antagonistic effects.

Therefore, fungal endophytes have more than one way to improve metal tolerance in plants, and the different strategies are not linked to taxonomy. Different mechanisms of plant protection against MTE by fungal endophytes were reviewed in Domka et al. (2019) : for example, endophytic fungi can accumulate high quantities of MTE in their 228 mycelia (48.6 mg Cr/g dry fungal biomass, corresponding to 81% of the total Cr in media concentrated at 600 μ g/mL) (Zahoor et al., 2017). The accumulation occurs through the production of metal chelating molecules such as glutathione (GSH), phytochelatins and metallothioneins (Domka et al., 2019). These small molecules bind toxic metals and lead to their detoxification and storage in the vacuole. Endophytic fungi may also secrete chelating molecules in the rhizosphere, preventing metals from entering the root. These molecules include citrates, organic acids, siderophores, exopolysaccharides (EPSs), and phenolic compounds. Melanin, present in the fungal cell wall, is reported for its ability to bind metal ions. In contrast, fungi may improve plant metal accumulation by stimulating plant detoxification systems. Endophytes may indirectly improve plant growth in contaminated soil in other ways, such as the production of phytohormones or the mobilization of nutrients (Domka et al., 2019). If the global metal content in roots or shoots is not an indicator of plant tolerance, it is possible that subcellular locations of metal ions would be more important for plant welfare. The DSE *Exophiala pisciphila* was shown to increase the subcellular compartmentalization of *Zea maize* in response to Cd and to engage in the remodelling of plant cell walls, correlating with an increase in Cd content (Shen et al., 2020).

Thus, endophytic fungi may immobilize MTE in the rhizosphere or within their mycelia. They may also favour plant (hyper)accumulation and storage and/or favour plant health independently of MTEs. All three strategies lead to better 243 tolerance of host plants to MTEs.

Perspectives on the roles of endophytic fungi in plant metal tolerance

Ecology and evolution of plant-endophyte associations

This review, including major inventories of root fungal endophytes and their effect on plant metal tolerance, highlights the high taxonomic diversity of endophytes and their different effects on metal accumulation (uptake and translocation) in plants.

We referenced endophytes identified in plants growing in all types of environments and representing a large taxonomic diversity of Fungi. This suggests the convergent and redundant appearance of endophytism in different times and spaces during the co-evolution of plants and fungi. Present in plants without generating any symptom of disease, endophytes can shift their lifestyle, being latent saprotrophs or pathogens, temporary residents, mutualists or commensal (Suryanarayanan, 2013). Some endophytes can survive as decomposers on leaves after the death of plant tissues, suggesting that mutualism could derive from saprophytism (Suryanarayanan, 2013). This theory relates directly to the saprotrophism, symbiosis and pathogenesis continuum described by Veneault-Fourrey and Martin (2011) and the potential transition of some fungi from saprotrophism to the ectomycorrhizal lifestyle (e.g., brown-rot fungi). Using a phylogenetic approach, Delaye et al. (2013) showed that at least four changes occurred in fungi when shifting from endophytism to necrotrophism (fungi living in dead tissues) and at least four other different shifts occur

when the transition occurs in the opposite direction. However, when shifts occurred towards biotrophic pathogenicity, no return towards endophytism occurred. Thus, pathogenicity is an evolutionarily stable trait, but endophytism is not (Delaye et al., 2013). According to paleobotany, endophytism (including all living fungi in unharmed plant tissues) dates as far back as 400 MYA in terrestrial plants with differentiated organs as well as in prostrate plants (Krings et al., 2012). The major groups of Fungi were already diversified, and the structures involved in plant-fungus interactions were similar to those of today. The association of plants with fungi may have been a prerequisite for land colonization by plants.

This wide association between plants and fungi and the evolutionary convergence and redundancy of this association raises the question of the costs and benefits of the association for both partners. Leaf endophytes may protect plants against fungal pathogens, herbivory and abiotic stress but probably also interfere with photosynthesis (change the 269 photosynthetic spectrum, consume photosynthetates, and use $CO₂$ for respiration) (Suryanarayanan, 2013). Under extreme resource limitation, because they utilize host photosynthates, endophytes are thought to be a cost for plants. Indeed, the leaf endophyte *Neotyphodium lolii* was shown in *Lolium perenne* to reduce photosynthetic activity and the proportion of living shoots (Cheplick, 2007). However, the costs and benefits of root endophyte associations in plants as well as the costs and benefits from the point of view of the fungus are rarely discussed (but see Kusari et al. (2012)).

MTE avoidance or accumulation

In this review, we particularly explored the benefits of root endophytes in plant metal tolerance. Two main strategies of plant tolerance via fungi are observed: MTE avoidance and MTE accumulation.

We were not able to retrieve any fungal taxonomic patterns related to a given effect on plant metal tolerance: taxonomy does not seem to be a good predictor of the diversity of mechanisms of plant metal stress alleviation by endophytes. Furthermore, the same fungal species showed antagonistic effects on different plants, decreasing or increasing metal accumulation. This is the case for *Piriformospora indica*, which increases wheat but decreases maize metal uptake (Asilian et al., 2019; Shahabivand et al., 2012), or *Trichoderma asperellum*, which has no effect on *Lactuca serriola* metal uptake and translocation but shows a negative effect on onion and *Suaeda salsa* metal uptake and translocation (Li et al., 2019; Téllez-Vargas et al., 2017; Ważny 2018). It has been shown for AMF that fungal tolerance may vary individually, with local adaptation to metal contamination at the intraspecific level (Colpaert et al., 2004; Jourand et al., 2010; Vallino et al., 2011). Similarly, the endophyte *Peyronellaea* sp. displays various effects on metal uptake and translocation, depending on the tested strain (Shen et al., 2013). Thus, further studies should be

developed to analyse the effects of each fungal species at the infraspecific level before integrating them at the fungal community level to better assess their effect on plant metal tolerance. Fundamental studies should further identify functional similarities between fungi that share the same strategies or the conditions that determine the balance between different strategies.

Mechanisms and evolution of metal tolerance in the plant-endophyte association

Cellular mechanisms of metal tolerance pre-exist (i.e., are present but not necessarily expressed), including in some plants growing in uncontaminated sites. These plants are able to grow when transferred to contaminated soil (Meyer et al., 2016). In *Arabidopsis halleri*, the plasma membrane pump HMA4 (HEAVY METAL ATPASE 4) involved in metal translocation and detoxification pre-existed before metal adaptation (Meyer et al., 2016). Metal tolerance may also be the exaptation of another trait: "the current function of a trait may not be that for which the trait originally evolved (the latter being adaptation)" (Boyd, 2004). Indeed, uptake and translocation of toxic elements use the same mechanisms as those dedicated to the acquisition and transport of micronutrients (Tangahu et al., 2011). Plant metal tolerance results from the presence of metal chelators (phytochelatins, metallothioneins, phenols, organic acids, etc.), but also from the presence of molecules limiting oxidative stress, such as alpha-tocopherol or polyphenols, which scavenge ROS and prevent lipid peroxidation (Singh et al., 2016). Glutathione is involved in the production of phytochelatins and the reduction of oxidative stress (Zenk, 1996). Glutathione may be induced by the growth hormone salicylic acid, which is known for regulating many physiological processes, such as local and systemic plant-pathogen resistance and tolerance against abiotic stress (Singh et al., 2016). For both mycorrhizal and nonmycorrhizal fungi, similar mechanisms have been described. Fungi may immobilize metal ions in soil through the excretion of chelators, such as the glycoprotein glomalin from *Glomus* spp., and those on chitin-containing cell walls, which offer many binding sites to metals (Bellion et al., 2006; González-Guerrero et al., 2009). DSEs constitutively produce melanin in their cell walls, and melanin is an important antioxidant (Zhan et al., 2011). This pigment is shown to increase in the presence of Cd (Zhan et al., 2011) and Pb (Ban et al., 2012), suggesting exaptation. In the cytosol, glutathione and metallothioneins chelate metal ions, and efflux pumps are activated to transport these chemical complexes out of the cell or into vacuoles. Finally, oxidative stress induced by metals is neutralized by the induction of superoxide dismutase and the production of antioxidant molecules (Bellion et al., 2006; González-Guerrero et al., 2009). 314 Common molecules to both plant and fungal partners, such as polyphenols (Michalet et al., 2017; Pham et al., 2017), 315 glutathiones, metallothioneins, and metal transporters (González-Guerrero et al., 2009; Zenk, 1996), suggest a

316 potential interaction between the two partners. In particular, plant defences against MTEs (glutathione, 317 phytochelatins and metallothioneins) were reported to be either lowered when associated with an arbuscular 318 fungus (Ferrol et al., 2016; González-Guerrero et al., 2009), or increased (Ferrol et al., 2016). Those correlations 319 between symbiotic fungi and plant defences may be either related to direct production of defence molecules by 320 fungi, or induction of plant gene expression and protein synthesis by fungi (Ferrol et al., 2016). Basal (metabolic) oxidative stress may be amplified by environmental stresses such as salt, cold or drought stresses (Xiong et al., 2002). Thus, metal tolerance mechanisms could derive from plant adaptation to other abiotic stresses. In the same way, plant metal tolerance inherited from the endophyte association may also be an exaptation of the plant-endophyte association that could be seen as an extension of plant functional traits.

Conclusion

A wide variety of fungal endophytes are present in plant roots, all over the world and in all ecosystems where they were searched. They belong in majority to Ascomycota, with some Mucoromycotina and Basidiomycota species. They participate in plant tolerance to metal stress, improving plant growth and physiology. However, if root fungal endophytes influence root metal uptake and root-to-shoot translocation, this is in an inconsistent way. Plant MTE tolerance through the association with root endophytes may result from the beneficial interactions of this association compared to plant investment in their own defence systems and common defensive molecules. The mutualistic function of root fungal endophytes do not seem to be related to their taxonomy, since different association types are observed intraspecifically.

Research perspectives

Endophyte research is often oriented to applications in phytoremediation, agricultural yield improvement or metabolite production. Isolation of endophytes is therefore a purely technical step for many researchers, who thus do not provide information such as plant tissue provenance (e.g., Biswas et al., 2020). It would be of great value to share this information, which can be useful for more fundamental research (the previously cited article and others could not have been included in this inventory for this reason).

Current research mainly focuses on Cd, letting the effects of other anthropically emitted MTEs, such as Cr and Ni, go largely unexplored. Although approximately half of the studies combine several MTEs, we still do not have a clear understanding of the interactions between MTEs *in situ* (Påhlsson, 1989). Studies using contaminated field soil are encouraged. In amended soils, added metals will not be complexed as they would be *in situ*, leading to different availabilities for plants. Using field soil as a substrate would help to control the bias of metal availability and gain insights into interactions between MTEs. In addition, using field soil could help to determine the processes of microflora recruitment and thus the stability of plant-fungi associations.

One could find here potential applications for phytoremediation: as endophytes stimulate plant growth and, in some cases, phytoaccumulation of MTEs in aerial parts, we could argue that carefully chosen endophytes may be inoculated into polluted soils with particular plants to increase the degree of phytoextraction of metals (Berthelot et al., 2017; Deng and Cao, 2017). However, endophytes will be amended to existing communities, and though some studies have been conducted on the competition between various fungi *in vitro* (Berthelot et al., 2019), we have little idea of their competitive abilities against endogenous communities *in situ*. Further studies should thus include soil collected from the field to disentangle those processes.

Competitive abilities of endophytes are not only determined by direct interactions between fungi, but also by their interactions with the host plant and other microbial and biotic communities. Indeed, plants have evolved some mechanisms to distinguish pathogens from beneficial microbes, through specific receptors, nutrient monitoring, damage sensing, and probably other ways that remain to be explored (Plett and Martin, 2018). Some authors hypothesised that under abiotic stresses, plants may recruit beneficial microbes through the modulation of root secondary metabolism, helping them to better cope with these stress – the "plant call for help hypothesis" (Thijs et al. 2016). Future research should follow considering the mechanisms of the association between plant and fungi and its dynamic: is this association randomly occurring? To what extent does plant recruit fungi that are the most beneficial for it and how?

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- Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Figure Legends

Figure 1: Existing reviews on plant-fungi-MTE interactions. EM: Ectomycorrhiza Fungi, AMF: Arbuscular Mycorrhizal Fungi.

Figure 1: Number of references per order of fungal endophytes.

Figure 3: Endophytes in the phylogeny of Eumycetes. Root fungal occurrences are defined as one fungus/one plant host/one environment/one reference article. Modified from Nagy and Szöllősi (2017).

Figure 4: Research on fungal endophytes in relation to plant tolerance to MTE: which MTE and which protocol? A: number of counts for each metal; B: Number of counts for each protocole of contamination (mono-, poly- contamination or field soil). Each count corresponds to a line of the table 3, i.e. one fungus * one plant host genera * one response dynamic * one reference.

Figure 5: Fungal endophyte effects in the presence of metal on plant growth (A), metal uptake (B) and MTE translocation (C). Green: positive effect, red: negative effect, grey: neutral effect.

Table Legends

Table 1: Fungal root plant endophytes: Ascomycota. ND: not determined, NS: not specified.

Table 2: Fungal root plant endophytes except Ascomycota. ND: not determined, NS: not specified.

Table 3: Fungal endophytes and their effects on plant growth, metal uptake and translocation on metal-contaminated soil. Oth: other endophyte. Root metal concentration was included in metal uptake, and shoot metal concentration was included in metal translocation. A line corresponds to one fungus * one plant host genera * one response dynamic * one reference. Green: positive effect, red: negative effect, ocher: neutral effect. Rs: research, Rv: review.

Table 4: Correlation between the effects of fungal endophytes metal uptake and translocation. Green and bold writing: positive effect on plant growth, *: no effect on plant growth. Lines and columns: effects on metal translocation (lines) and uptake (columns): green: positive effect, red: negative effect, grey: neutral effect.

References Table 1 & 2

Table 1: Fungal root plant endophytes except Ascomycota. ND: not determined, NS: not specified.

Table 1: Fungal endophytes and their effects on plant growth, metal uptake and translocation on metal-contaminated soil. Oth: other endophyte. Root metal concentration was included in metal uptake, and shoot metal concentration was included in metal translocation. A line corresponds to one fungus * one plant host genera * one response dynamic * one reference. Green: positive effect, red: negative effect, ocher: neutral effect. Rs: research, Rv: review.

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