

# Kurtosis, a new variable with possible diagnostic value in analysis of jaw muscle surface EMG

Yan Dong<sup>1</sup> | Boxiu Li<sup>1</sup> | Jianlai Hu<sup>1</sup>  | Sven E Widmalm<sup>2</sup> | Tongsheng Zhang<sup>3</sup> | Min Lin<sup>1</sup> | Anders Buvarp<sup>4</sup> | Dong Zhou<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Medicine, Second Affiliated Hospital, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China

<sup>2</sup>School of Dentistry, Department of BMS/Div, University of Michigan, Michigan, USA

<sup>3</sup>Neurosurgery Department, University of New Mexico, Las Cruces, USA

<sup>4</sup>Monument, Colorado, USA

<sup>5</sup>Key Laboratory of E&M, Zhejiang University of Technology, Hangzhou, China

## Correspondence

Yan Dong, Department of Prosthodontics, College of Medicine, Second Affiliated Hospital, Zhejiang University. No. 88, Jiefang Road, Hangzhou, 310009, China. Email: 2304190@zju.edu.cn

## Abstract

**Background:** There is a need for methods to compare differences of voltage levels and distribution anomalies in the study of skeletal muscle function. Calculating the kurtosis values has been found to be of value.

**Aim:** The aim was to record and analyse voltage and kurtosis levels of SEMG recorded bilaterally in the masseter and anterior temporalis areas during rest and clenching and to compare the kurtosis levels between controls and patients with TMJ disc dysfunction.

**Material and methods:** Twenty-three healthy subjects and 21 patients with TMJ disc dysfunction were taken part in this study. Recordings were made with the BioPAK EMG System. Gain was adjusted to record the data within the range of  $\pm 2000 \mu\text{V}$ . SEMG was recorded in four facial areas, the right masseter, left masseter, right anterior temporalis, and left anterior temporalis areas. Kurtosis levels of SEMG, at clenching with maximal force, and mandibular rest, were compared between the control and patient groups.

**Results:** The kurtosis levels of clenches were significantly higher in patients in all four areas with sensitivity, 38.1% to 61.9%, and specificity, 82.6% to 100.0%. No differences were found in kurtosis levels during mandibular rest.

**Conclusion:** The results support that kurtosis values of SEMG recorded during clenching have a potential diagnostic interest.

## KEYWORDS

amplifier gain, Excessive kurtosis, masseter muscle area, sensitivity, specificity, surface EMG, TMD

## 1 | BACKGROUND

Surface electromyographic (SEMG) recording of muscle activity is a commonly used tool in the study of skeletal muscle function, and in the diagnosis and treatment of muscle dysfunction.<sup>1-3</sup> Healthy muscles are expected to be able to contract within a functional force range, and to keep an even activity level, during contractions.<sup>4</sup>

Comparing voltage levels of the recorded activity is a conventional choice in analysis of SEMG recordings from dental patients.<sup>1,2</sup> So far, studies have mostly been focused on changes in mean voltage

levels. However, keeping the activity steady and at a desired level is also important, given the mean voltage values do not reflect differences regarding variations in amplitude height, within one and the same recording. That is, the amplitudes can in one recording have the same height and vary in heights in another, while the mean voltages still are the same in both recordings. There is a need for methods to compare differences due not only to mean voltage levels, but also to distribution anomalies. Increased variation in amplitude heights is reflected in higher kurtosis values and can therefore be used as a measure of the ability to keep an even force level. Calculating the

kurtosis values has been found to be of value in non-dental medical studies.<sup>5-10</sup> If the recorded activity of a patient shows more extreme values than expected, then this would be observed in the kurtosis value, which summarises the extent of values in the tails of a distribution. Kurtosis has been described in jaw muscle research<sup>11</sup> but has not been tested in TMD patients as a possible diagnostic aid. It is of interest to know whether kurtosis can be a useful measure with the potential for improving diagnostic accuracy. The measurement of excess kurtosis is against a Gaussian distribution, which is a commonly used assumption for SEMG values.

The *aims* were to compare kurtosis levels of SEMG, at clenching with maximal force, and mandibular rest, between a group of healthy volunteers and a group of TMD patients with the primary diagnosis TMJ disc dysfunction. SEMG was recorded in four facial areas, the right masseter, left masseter, right anterior temporalis and left anterior temporalis areas.

The *hypotheses* were that kurtosis values of SEMG recorded during rest and contractions are higher in patients with TMJ disc dysfunction than in healthy subjects.

In this paper, the words 'clenching with maximal force' and 'clenching', and 'mandibular rest' and 'rest' are used interchangeably.

## 2 | METHODS

### 2.1 | Subjects

All subjects gave informed consent. The experimental protocols were approved by the Zhejiang University Ethical Committee. There were a total of 44 subjects; 14 were men aged  $25.7 \pm 7.23$ , and 30 were women aged  $26.5 \pm 12.00$  years. They were divided into 2 groups.

Group 1 (control group) consisted of 23 subjects, healthy volunteers, without signs or symptoms indicating any of the diagnoses listed in the groups of diagnoses presented under the heading TMD, with a mean age of  $24.5 \pm 5.88$  years, of which 9 men were with a mean age of  $27.7 \pm 8.05$  and 14 women with a mean age of  $22.5 \pm 2.74$  years. Health is defined as a state of optimal, physical, mental and social well-being, but it does not mean that the subjects could not have any asymptomatic disease or infirmity.<sup>12</sup> Such absence can never be guaranteed with any method. Here, healthy means that the control subjects reported that they felt healthy and that no unhealthy signs were detected at the examination.

Group 2 (experimental group) had 21 patients where the primary diagnosis was TMJ disc displacement, with a mean age of  $28.1 \pm 14.06$ . The group consisted of 5 men with a mean age of  $22.2 \pm 4.03$  and 16 women with a mean age of  $29.9 \pm 15.62$  years. 10 patients had disc displacement without reduction (DD) in one or both joints, 10 had disc displacement with reduction (DDR) in one or both joints, and one had DD on the one side and DDR on the other. The only significant age difference was between male and female control subjects, where male subjects were about 5 years older ( $p = .037$ ).

All patients had one of the RDC diagnoses<sup>13</sup> in group II. Some patients had also diagnoses in groups I and III. Regarding the individual

RDC diagnoses, the numbers of patients within each diagnosis subgroup were Ia 0, Ib 1, IIa 8, IIb 10, IIc 4, IIIa 4, IIIb 3 and IIIc 1.

The patients were recruited from those coming for treatment with acute signs or symptoms of TMJ/muscle pain or dysfunction and having a diagnosis belonging to the RDC subgroup II. All diagnoses of disc position were based on examination according to RDC standards,<sup>13</sup> and all, except one, who did not want MRI examination, also on bilateral MR imaging of the TMJs to confirm disc position and morphological characteristics.<sup>14</sup> It is the policy of the clinic to not treat pain-free subjects without jaw movement dysfunction, even if they had clicking of DDR type observed at auscultation.

The subjects underwent bilateral MRI examinations of their TMJs with the jaw in closed and open positions. MRI was performed with a 1.5T magnetic resonance unit (Signa, General Electric Co, Milwaukee, WI). Images were obtained at closed- and open-mouth positions in the sagittal plane and at the closed-mouth position in the coronal plane. Disc position evaluations, both uni- and bilateral, were based on the criteria described by JE Drace, & DR Enzmann.<sup>14</sup> The method was devised to quantify disc displacement in terms of the number of degrees from a 12 o'clock or vertical position relative to the condyle.

### 2.2 | Test movements

We collected our SEMG data from left and side recordings from the four areas, left and right masseter areas and the left and right anterior temporalis areas. The SEMG recordings were made with the subjects sitting in a chair with their back and head upright. They were instructed to clench with maximal force for about 3 seconds at least 6 times with the mandible back in resting position for about 3 seconds between each clench, followed by a 3-second rest after the last clench. They were instructed to stop clenching if they felt pain. Patients, with acute pain, induced when attempting to clench were not included. Persuading them to clench hard, despite pain, might increase the damage to already injured TMJ tissues.

### 2.3 | Recording of jaw muscle area surface EMG

Recordings were made using the BioPAK System version 7.2 (Bio Research Associates Inc., Milwaukee, WI, USA).<sup>15</sup> Bilateral SEMG was collected in both masseter and anterior temporalis areas during the tests.

The BioPAK EMG System is embedded with optically isolated differential amplifiers. The input impedance of the amplifiers was  $10^{11}$  Ohms in the BioPAK III model. The common-mode rejection ratio (CMRR) of the amplifiers was guaranteed at  $>130$  dB at 50/60 Hz and remaining at 120 dB at the LP cut-off frequency. The input common-mode voltage range of the system is  $\pm 3.0$  volts that is large enough to reject the powerline interference in our experiments in the clinic. The analogue EMG signals from the last 32 subjects were recorded with a gain of 2500, reduced from the default amplification of 5000 by increasing the amplitude range

| Muscle areas | Control group, N=23 |              | Patient group, N=21 |              | p    |
|--------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|------|
|              | Mean and SD         | Range        | Mean and SD         | Range        |      |
| RM           | 111.9 ± 85.71       | 16.3 – 371.4 | 59.1 ± 39.44        | 7.4 – 138.0  | .013 |
| LM           | 105.9 ± 81.20       | 20.6 – 331.8 | 66.2 ± 49.01        | 12.4 – 208.7 | .059 |
| RAT          | 85.6 ± 47.42        | 7.0 – 185.6  | 48.4 ± 29.16        | 16.4 – 115.0 | .003 |
| LAT          | 87.3 ± 57.24        | 20.8 – 238.9 | 49.3 ± 29.25        | 7.8 – 121.1  | .009 |

LAT, left anterior temporalis; LM, left masseter; RAT, right anterior temporalis; RM, right masseter.

from ±1000  $\mu$ V to ±2000  $\mu$ V in the system. No amplitude clipping was observed in the first 11 subjects. Clipping still occurred in a few subjects, and those recordings were excluded in our post-analysis.

In the BioPak System, the amplifiers included both a 12 dB/octave high-pass proprietary linear filter with a high-pass (HP) cut-off frequency of 10 Hz and a 6 dB/octave low-pass proprietary linear filter with a low-pass (LP) cut-off frequency of 1000 Hz in the amplifier.

The signal-to-noise ratio is 54 decibel (dB). All recordings were digitised with a 16-bit A/D card. The theoretical 16-bit resolution is 0.03  $\mu$ V, but the BioPAK program rounds off to the nearest 0.1 microvolt. Due to the very high common-mode rejection ratio, the maximum signal-to-noise ratio is 106:1.

The HP and LP filters embedded in the BioPak limited the noise and other artefacts. All recordings were checked for remaining noise by power spectral analysis. Some had remaining noise, such as dc (0 Hz) with levels of up to about 0.11  $\mu$ V, and high frequency noise above 1000 Hz. Such remaining noise was further removed by a proprietary filter written by one of the authors (ZT).<sup>16</sup> Data on the validity of the filters were not available, so all decisions were made on a visual inspection of the power spectra.

Surface electrodes (BioFLEX; Bioresearch Associates, Inc., Milwaukee, WI, USA, 2 conductive polyester adhesive rectangular contacts of 144 square millimetres with 20 mm centre-to-centre spacing) were placed after cleaning the skin with 95% alcohol, according to generally accepted standards<sup>1</sup> in the middle of each muscle area. Lines through the centres of electrodes on each masseter side were parallel to the muscles' anterior borders. The ground reference electrode was placed on the wrist.

Signal analysis was made using scripts written in MATLAB (version R2017a; MathWorks, Inc., Natick, Massachusetts). BioPAK files stored in TRC format were converted to txt (ASCII) format inside BioPAK and imported into MATLAB for analysis. Means and standard deviation (SD) values of absolute voltage levels were calculated. The original amplitude values after pre-processing, as mentioned above, to remove all artefacts in the data were used to compute kurtosis values.<sup>17</sup> Hereafter, all the original data indicate the pre-processed one, in comparison with the amplitudes after Fourier transformation.

## 2.4 | Statistical methods

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS (version 24; SPSS Inc., Chicago, Ill, USA). For each subject, SEMG recordings were made

TABLE 1 SEMG activity during clenching. Means and SDs of mean absolute SEMG  $\mu$ V values from 6 clench recordings per subject.

TABLE 2 Clenching voltage levels: sensitivity and specificity.

| Levels                | Sensitivity | Specificity |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| RM $\mu$ V $\geq$ 86  | 76.2%       | 56.5%       |
| LM $\mu$ V $\geq$ 86  | 76.2%       | 47.8%       |
| RAT $\mu$ V $\geq$ 67 | 81.0%       | 60.9%       |
| LAT $\mu$ V $\geq$ 67 | 76.2%       | 60.9%       |

LAT, left anterior temporalis; LM, left masseter; RAT, right anterior temporalis; RM, right masseter.

in the left and right masseter areas and the left and right anterior temporalis areas. The subject was asked to consecutively clench, then rest, six times. For each pre-processed SEMG recording, two quantities were computed: the mean of the absolute values and the kurtosis value. For each subject, for each area, we then computed the means of the 6 values, resulting in one mean of 6 absolute mean values and one mean of 6 excess kurtosis values in each area and for clenching/resting. The variability in these values across subjects is presented in Tables 1, 3, 5 and 7. Two measures of the recorded voltage activity, the arithmetic mean of the absolute values and excess kurtosis in the original data, were used to compare recorded activity between healthy subjects and patients. The mean of absolute values was preferred to the mean of the original values because the latter is often very close to 0. The kurtosis value indicates whether the distribution is relatively peaked (more values in the centre) or more flat-topped (more values in the tails). Kurtosis can be defined as the ratio of the fourth moment about the mean to the square of the second moment about the mean (the variation). The presence of large positive or negative values in the SEMG values is indicated by excessive kurtosis over the value of 3, where 3 is the kurtosis value for the normal distribution.<sup>18</sup>

Comparisons of means (of the absolute means and of the kurtosis values) between the two groups (healthy controls and patients) were based on the independent-samples t test. For validity of this test, we rely on the assumption that SEMG values are normally distributed. The significance level for a hypothesis test was 0.05, and the confidence level for confidence intervals was 95%.

Predictive ability was assessed using sensitivity and specificity. Sensitivity is the percentage of patients correctly identified as having TMJ disc dysfunction. Specificity is the percentage of healthy patients correctly identified as not having TMJ disc dysfunction.<sup>17</sup> To determine the presence of TMJ disc dysfunction, values, halfway between the groups' mean voltage values, were chosen as predictive

**TABLE 3** SEMG activity during clenching. Means and SDs of excess kurtosis values of SEMG  $\mu$ V values from 6 clench recordings per subject.

| Areas | Control group, N=23 |           | Patient group, N=21 |            | p     |
|-------|---------------------|-----------|---------------------|------------|-------|
|       | Mean and SD         | Range     | Mean and SD         | Range      |       |
| RM    | 1.36 $\pm$ 0.918    | 0.28–4.15 | 2.43 $\pm$ 2.158    | 0.22–8.27  | 0.046 |
| LM    | 1.34 $\pm$ 0.846    | 0.44–4.11 | 2.34 $\pm$ 2.003    | 0.28–8.03  | 0.044 |
| RAT   | 0.88 $\pm$ 0.486    | 0.15–2.19 | 3.29 $\pm$ 4.346    | 0.35–16.90 | 0.020 |
| LAT   | 0.92 $\pm$ 0.471    | 0.15–1.94 | 3.22 $\pm$ 3.889    | 0.33–14.40 | 0.014 |

LAT, left anterior temporalis; LM, left masseter; RAT, right anterior temporalis; RM, right masseter.

levels for activity during clenching and mandibular rest. If there was really no difference between healthy subjects and patients, the overall mean would be an appropriate summary for all subjects.

### 3 | RESULTS

#### 3.1 | Voltage levels during clenching

The mean voltage levels at clenching (Table 1) were significantly lower in patients in the right masseter (RM) ( $p = 0.015$ ), the left anterior temporalis (LAT) ( $p = 0.003$ ) and the right anterior temporalis (RAT) ( $p = 0.007$ ) areas, than in the control subjects, but not in the left masseter (LM) area ( $p = 0.059$ ).

#### 3.2 | Sensitivity and specificity of clenching activity

The sensitivity values for the left and right masseter areas were the same (76.2%), while for the left and right anterior temporalis areas, they were different (76.2% and 81.0%) (Table 2). The specificity values for the left and right masseter areas were 47.8% and 56.5%, respectively, but 60.9% for both the left and the right temporalis areas.

#### 3.3 | Excessive kurtosis levels of clenching

In the control subjects, the means and ranges of the excessive kurtosis levels in the left and right masseter and anterior temporalis areas (Table 3) were  $1.13 \pm 0.541$  (SD), that is significantly lower than in the patients ( $p < 0.001$ ), where it was  $2.84 \pm 2.955$  (SD). Overload (clipping) was found to cause a recording error by lowering the values of excessive kurtosis.

#### 3.4 | Sensitivity and specificity of excessive kurtosis of clenching activity

Excessive kurtosis ( $\geq 2$ ), as a predictor of disc displacement, had the sensitivity of 42.9% and 47.6%, and specificity of 82.6% and 87.0% in the right and left masseter areas, respectively (Table 4). In the temporalis areas, the sensitivity vs. specificity was 38.1% vs. 95.7% on the right side and 61.9% vs. 100.0% on the left side.

**TABLE 4** SEMG activity during clenching: excessive kurtosis, and sensitivity and specificity.

| Levels         | Sensitivity | Specificity |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| RM $\geq 2.0$  | 42.9%       | 82.6%       |
| LM $\geq 2.0$  | 47.6%       | 87.0%       |
| RAT $\geq 2.0$ | 38.1%       | 95.7%       |
| LAT $\geq 2.0$ | 61.9%       | 100.0%      |

Note: LAT, left anterior temporalis; LM, left masseter; RAT, right anterior temporalis; RM, right masseter.

#### 3.5 | Voltage levels during mandibular rest

There were no significant differences found between controls and patients regarding resting levels in the anterior temporalis and masseter areas (Table 5).

#### 3.6 | Sensitivity and specificity of voltage levels during mandibular rest

There were no significant differences found between controls and patients regarding excessive kurtosis of resting activity in the anterior temporalis and masseter areas (Table 6). The predictive levels for disc dysfunction had in the masseter areas sensitivity of 33.3% and 42.9% and specificity 69.6% and 78.3%. In the anterior temporalis areas, the sensitivity values were 33.1% and 38.1% and the specificity values were 60.9%.

#### 3.7 | SEMG activity during mandibular rest: excessive kurtosis

There were no significant differences between muscles or groups (Table 7).

#### 3.8 | Sensitivity and specificity of excessive kurtosis of activity during mandibular rest

The sensitivity vs. specificity levels were in the masseter areas 38.2% and 42.9% vs. 52.2% (Table 8). In the temporalis areas, they were 47.6% vs. 69.6% and 78.3%.

| Area | Control group, N=23 |          | Patient group, N=21 |         | p     |
|------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|---------|-------|
|      | Mean and SD         | Range    | Mean and SD         | Range   |       |
| RM   | 2.161 ± 1.874       | 0.8–8.2  | 2.208 ± 1.849       | 0.7–7.6 | 0.935 |
| LM   | 2.395 ± 2.173       | 0.9–8.6  | 1.960 ± 1.249       | 0.6–4.4 | 0.426 |
| RAT  | 3.345 ± 2.347       | 0.8–11.0 | 2.697 ± 2.165       | 0.8–8.6 | 0.348 |
| LAT  | 3.125 ± 1.887       | 0.7–9.0  | 2.914 ± 2.149       | 0.8–8.0 | 0.730 |

Note: RM, right masseter; LM, left masseter; RAT, right anterior temporalis; LAT, left anterior temporalis.

TABLE 6 SEMG activity during mandibular rest: voltage levels, and sensitivity and specificity.

| Levels       | Sensitivity | Specificity |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| RM ≥2.18 μV  | 33.3%       | 78.3%       |
| LM ≥2.18 μV  | 42.9%       | 69.6%       |
| RAT ≥3.02 μV | 33.3%       | 60.9%       |
| LAT ≥3.02 μV | 38.1%       | 60.9%       |

Note: LAT, left anterior temporalis; LM, left masseter; RAT, right anterior temporalis; RM, right masseter.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

The main result was that the variable, kurtosis, known for a long time, but not tested before for possible use in diagnoses of TMJ disc displacement, or other TMD disorders, was found to be of possible interest in basic jaw muscle physiology and clinical TMD research. The kurtosis levels of clench recordings were significantly higher in disc displacement patients than in healthy controls (Table 3), indicating less ability by the patients to keep a steady contraction level. The sensitivity levels (Table 2) were low, but it is important, and of clinical value, if confirmed in prospective larger studies, that the specificity was high (Table 2).

The use of kurtosis is new in analysis of jaw muscle SEMG recordings. The values at clenching were found to differ significantly between patients with TMJ disc displacement and control volunteers in the masseter and anterior temporalis areas, and are of interest, because they indicate that this variable has the potential of being of value when screening patients for signs of TMJ disc/muscle dysfunction.

The mean voltage values at clenching had a large range in both groups. The lowest values in the control group's range need consideration of the symmetry of SEMG activity in deeper synergists, such as the medial pterygoid muscles, where the SEMG activity of some cannot be accurately measured.

A possible explanation, for low contraction values, could be that the subjects did not follow or understand the instructions. This was considered, and efforts were made to make sure that the subjects understood.

Regarding voltage levels, as predictors of TMJ disc dysfunction, the results indicate that sensitivity values are high enough (76% to 81%), but specificity, being between 48 and 61%, may be too low to be of interest. Values above 50%, even if low, do have some weight.

TABLE 5 SEMG activity during mandibular rest. Voltage levels in μV. None of the differences between patients and controls was significant.

For clenching, sensitivity values were greater for levels, and specificity for excessive kurtosis. This suggests that the mean levels are better at predicting dysfunction, whereas the excessive kurtosis values are better at predicting lack of dysfunction.

The finding is that overload (clipping) (Figure 1) makes it impossible to accurately calculate kurtosis in strong contractions, wherein the amplitudes were out of the range of ±1000 μV. The future of EMG kurtosis in clinical research depends therefore, to at least some degree, on what technical details manufacturers of the needed equipment will consider to be of commercial interest.

No differences were found between groups regarding kurtosis levels of SEMG during mandibular rest (Table 7). Theoretically, that does not mean that significance and specificity values could not have been of interest. They were, however, also found to be too low, both for voltage levels (Table 6) and for kurtosis levels (Table 8) to be of clinical interest. The current results are consistent with our previous study.<sup>19</sup>

The levels of voluntary strong, close to maximal, contractions, did not differ significantly between male and female patients. Our results did not support that gender had any significant effect on any of the SEMG distribution parameters in this study, and therefore, male and female data were pooled in the statistical analysis.<sup>18</sup> However, this might have been because the group sizes were too small. As expected, means of voltage levels in contraction recordings were much lower for patients, significantly so in 3 of the 4 areas where recordings were made.

The limits for being of clinical value, and motivating treatment, depend on many factors, such as effects on pain and function, costs for treatment, possible side effects, and are not discussed here. It should, however, always be of interest to know the figures, whatever the levels are for being of clinical interest, and how high those levels should be, which is therefore not discussed in this report. That topic is for separate future studies.

### 4.1 | Limitations

Regarding contractions, it has been reported that, after correcting for skinfold thickness, mean voltage levels did not differ between males and female patients.<sup>20</sup> This is a possible source of error, when comparing means of voltage levels. Future studies are needed to show whether it also affects the kurtosis values. Occlusion was not included as a factor, because it was beyond the resources to do such an evaluation. It should, however, be mentioned that none of the

**TABLE 7** SEMG activity during mandibular rest: voltage levels ( $\mu\text{V}$ ) and excessive kurtosis.

| Areas | Control group, N=23 |           | Patients group, N=21 |           | p     |
|-------|---------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|-------|
|       | Mean and SD         | Range     | Mean and SD          | Range     |       |
| RM    | 1.96 $\pm$ 1.764    | 0.01–6.90 | 1.48 $\pm$ 1.077     | 0.07–3.39 | 0.282 |
| LM    | 1.85 $\pm$ 1.077    | 0.06–6.73 | 1.40 $\pm$ 0.943     | 0.00–3.08 | 0.267 |
| RAT   | 1.48 $\pm$ 1.077    | 0.28–5.07 | 2.02 $\pm$ 1.216     | 0.25–5.15 | 0.149 |
| LAT   | 1.57 $\pm$ 1.267    | 0.32–5.30 | 1.94 $\pm$ 1.110     | 0.25–5.15 | 0.306 |

Note: LAT, left anterior temporalis; LM, left masseter; RAT, right anterior temporalis; RM, right masseter.

**TABLE 8** SEMG activity during mandibular rest: excessive kurtosis, and sensitivity and specificity.

| Levels          | Sensitivity | Specificity |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------|
| RM $\geq$ 1.67  | 42.9%       | 52.2%       |
| LM $\geq$ 1.67  | 38.2%       | 52.2%       |
| RAT $\geq$ 1.75 | 47.6%       | 78.3%       |
| LAT $\geq$ 1.75 | 47.6%       | 69.6%       |

Note: LAT, left anterior temporalis; LM, left masseter; RAT, right anterior temporalis; RM, right masseter

controls, and only one patient, had malocclusion motivating referral for orthodontic treatment.

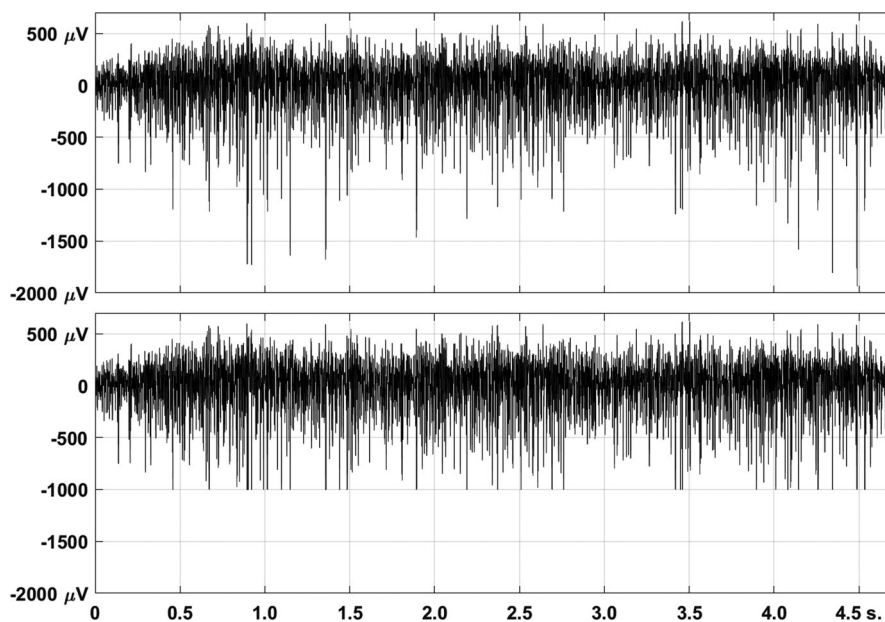
The gain was still too high for a few recordings. One of the co-authors (TZ) has been working on the construction of an amplifier with a larger range of gain settings.

It is desirable to increase the number of subjects and to also include patients with diagnoses in RDC groups I and III but that was not possible in the present study that had no funding support.

The variability of electromyographic (EMG) recordings between and within participants is a complex problem. The importance of signal normalisation has long been recognised, but the method used might influence variability.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to reporting the mean amplitude and standard deviation, future EMG studies of clenching should also report the intra-individual variability, preferably using variance ratio (VR) as it is independent of peak amplitude, provides a good measure of repeatability and is insensitive to mean EMG amplitude and the degree of smoothing applied.

It is of interest to know whether differences between SEMG recordings may depend on uni- versus bilateral DD and left vs. right side DD. The number of patients was too small in this study for such comparisons.



**FIGURE 1** Surface electromyographic recording from the right masseter area in a female patient with disc displacement without reduction. The two windows show the same recording. The upper is the original EMG. In the lower window, the same recording has all parts between -1000  $\mu\text{V}$  and -2000  $\mu\text{V}$  removed by a computer program. The figures illustrate that an amplitude range of  $\pm 1000$   $\mu\text{V}$ , which is the maximum in many common EMG equipment used in dental clinics, cannot be used for truthful representation of contraction amplitudes. This may play a little role for mean voltage, but not for kurtosis, values. In the upper window, the mean value is 190  $\mu\text{V}$  with SD  $\pm 256$   $\mu\text{V}$  and excessive kurtosis = 4.09. In the lower window, the mean value is 188  $\mu\text{V}$  with SD  $\pm 249$   $\mu\text{V}$  and excessive kurtosis = 1.86. The level 1.86 in the clipped recording is according to the results in the normal range, but 4.09 in the original recording is well above the border between healthy controls and patients. In the original, but not in the clipped recording, the excessive kurtosis value placed the subject in one group, and the mean voltage value placed the subject in another. This is an example of the finding that contraction recordings should not be evaluated only by calculating the mean voltage values

## 5 | CONCLUSION

A new variable, excessive kurtosis, not tested before in TMD research, was found to be a criterion of possible clinical interest. Sensitivity was found to be high enough to be of interest, but the specificity was too low to support that the variable is of significant clinical value. The sensitivity and specificity levels were found to be high enough to motivate further studies. Voluntary jaw muscle clenching levels are lower in patients with TMJ disc displacement dysfunction than in healthy subjects. To avoid overload and clipping, which can make it impossible to calculate kurtosis in strong contractions, the amplitude range has, however, to be higher, even than the  $\pm 2000 \mu\text{V}$  we used, while it now usually is maximally  $\pm 1000 \mu\text{V}$  in the SEMG equipment usually used by dentists.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors (both the corresponding author and co-authors) confirmed that we do not have a conflict of interest to declare.

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Boxiu Li and Yan Dong were a guarantor of integrity of entire study. Boxiu Li, Sven E Widmalm and Yan Dong conceptualised and designed the study. Boxiu Li, Jianlai Hu and Min Lin involved in literature research, clinical studies, experimental studies and data acquisition. Jianlai Hu, Sven E Widmalm, Tongsheng Zhang and Dong Zhou analysed/interpreted the data and involved in statistical analysis. Boxiu Li, Sven E Widmalm, Anders Buvarp and Yan Dong prepared, edited and revised/reviewed the manuscript. Sven E Widmalm, Anders Buvarp and Yan Dong involved in the final version approval of the manuscript.

### PEER REVIEW

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### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

### ORCID

Jianlai Hu  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3160-1007>

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