Molecular Gas Properties of Early-Type Galaxies

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A recent volume-limited survey of early-type galaxies (the Atlas3D sample) has detected ¹²CO emission from molecular gas in approximately 25%. To study the properties of the molecular gas in early-type galaxies we have recently followed up the brightest of these ¹²CO detections in ¹³CO, HCN and HCO⁺ using the IRAM 30m telescope. All of these molecules trace denser gas than ¹²CO, although opacity and abundance effects can also have major roles (especially if AGN are present). The observations detect 15/15 observed in ¹³CO(1-0), 10/12 in HCN(1-0) and 5/12 in HCO⁺(1-0). Comparing the line ratios (based on integrated intensities in a central pointing) of these lines with those found for spiral galaxies reveals that most early-type galaxies with molecular gas have similar dense gas fractions, opacities and abundances to spirals. However, three galaxies are outliers in both the ¹³CO/¹²CO and HCN/¹²CO ratios indicating a higher fraction of dense gas than normally found in spiral disks. Additionally, the ratio of HCN/HCO⁺ is higher than that found for spiral disks in several early-type galaxies, possibly reflecting the effect of an AGN depleting the HCO⁺.