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Ruthenium Catalyzed Reductive Coupling of Paraformaldehyde to Trifluoromethyl Allenes: CF₃-Bearing All-Carbon Quaternary Centers

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Abstract

Trifluoromethyl substituted allenes engage in ruthenium catalyzed reductive couplings with paraformaldehyde to form products of hydrohydroxymethylation as single regioisomers. This method enables generation of CF₃-bearing all-carbon quaternary stereocenters.

Alkene hydroformylation can be performed in an efficient and regioselective manner and represents the largest volume application of homogeneous metal catalysis.¹ Although significant progress toward the hydroformylation of other π -unsaturated reactants has been made (dienes,² alkynes,³ allenes⁴), incomplete regioselectivities and “over-hydroformylation” to form dialdehyde products is often problematic. Alcohol mediated reductive couplings⁵ of paraformaldehyde to allenes,^{6a} alkynes^{6b} and dienes,^{6c,d} which form related products of hydrohydroxymethylation, provide an alternative to hydroformylation wherein alternate regioisomers are efficiently partitioned through the use of ruthenium and nickel catalysts.^{6b,c,d} To advance this emergent technology further, a study of the reductive coupling of CF₃-substituted allenes to paraformaldehyde was undertaken.^{6a} Here, we report a ruthenium catalyzed reductive coupling of paraformaldehyde to CF₃-substituted allenes that displays complete levels of branched regioselectivity, thus delivering all-carbon quaternary stereocenters bearing CF₃ groups.^{7,8,9}

Our study required a method for the synthesis of 1-aryl-1-trifluoromethylallenes. Although syntheses involving propargyl substitution using CF₃ nucleophiles are reported,¹⁰ these methods do not permit formation of 1-aryl-1-trifluoromethylallenes. Syntheses involving introduction of the CF₃ group at an early stage have been reported, but do not employ readily accessible starting materials and are not step-economic.¹¹ Classical strategies for allene synthesis, such as the Doering-LaFlamme method,¹² were unsuccessful. Hence, an effective protocol for the synthesis of 1-aryl-1-trifluoromethylallenes was developed (Scheme 1). Corey-Fuchs olefination of the aryl trifluoromethyl ketones **1a–1f**¹³ delivers the corresponding methylene dibromides **2a–2f**. Lithiation¹⁴ of the resulting methylene dibromides **2a–d** followed by treatment with paraformaldehyde and quenching with

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Supporting Information Available. Spectral data for all new compounds (¹H NMR, ¹³C NMR, ¹⁹F NMR, IR, MS). This material is available free of charge via the internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

methanesulfonyl chloride delivers the allylic sulfonates **4a–4d**, which appear as single geometrical isomers. The allylic sulfonates **4a–4d** were converted to the corresponding allylic bromides *in situ* and then exposed to zinc dust¹⁵ to form allenes **5a–5d** in good isolated yield. The vinyl lithium species derived from methylene dibromides **2e,f** did not react efficiently with paraformaldehyde, but could be methylated in good yield to form adducts **3e,f** as single geometrical isomers. Allylic bromination, which occurs with scrambling of olefin geometry, followed by treatment with zinc dust provided allenes **5e,f**.

Having defined serviceable routes to allenes **5a–5f**, the reductive coupling of allene **5a** to paraformaldehyde was explored. Exposure to conditions previously developed for ruthenium catalyzed reductive coupling of 1,1-disubstituted allenes to paraformaldehyde provided the desired reductive coupling product **6a** in poor yield (Table 1, entry 1).^{6a} Various ruthenium(II) complexes were evaluated (Table 1, entries 2–4). The commercially available complex $\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$ provided a promising 37% yield of **6a** (Table 1, entry 3).¹⁶ Upon addition of DPPF, the isolated yield of **6a** increased to 68%, however, small quantities of over-reduction product **7a** were apparent (Table 1, entry 6). In fact, the extent of over-reduction and conversion exhibited a dramatic dependence on ligand (Table 1, entries 6–15). Eventually, it was found that the combination of $\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$ and DPPM provided a 74% isolated yield of **6a** with nearly complete suppression of over-reduction (Table 1, entry 9).

Under these conditions, 1-aryl-1-trifluoromethylallenes **5a–5f** were reductively coupling to paraformaldehyde to provide the CF_3 -substituted primary neopentyl alcohols **6a–6f** in moderate to good isolated yields (Figure 1). In all cases, complete levels of branched-regioselectivity were observed. Only in the coupling of allene **5e** was any significant quantity of over-reduction product **7e** observed. To illustrate the utility of the reaction products, neopentyl alcohol **6a** was converted to the corresponding *p*-toluenesulfonate and reacted with sodium cyanide in DMSO solvent. Despite the notoriously low rates typically observed in S_{N}^2 reactions of neopentyl electrophiles, nitrile **8a** was formed in moderate yield (eq. 1). Jones oxidation of neopentyl alcohol **6a** followed by Fischer esterification provides the methyl ester **9a** (eq. 2).

(eq. 1)

(eq. 2)

A plausible catalytic mechanism for the ruthenium catalyzed reductive coupling of CF₃-substituted allenes **5a–5f** to paraformaldehyde has been proposed (Scheme 2). Ruthenium hydride **I** hydrometallates the allene to provide the allylruthenium haptomers **IIa** and **IIb**.^{17,18} Addition to formaldehyde from the primary π -allylruthenium haptomer **IIa** provides the ruthenium alkoxide **III**. At this stage, isopropanol can protonolytically cleave the ruthenium alkoxide **III** to liberate the product **6** and generate ruthenium isopropoxide **IV**, which upon β -hydride elimination regenerates ruthenium hydride **I**. Alternatively, ruthenium alkoxide **III** can undergo formaldehyde addition to form ruthenium alkoxide **V**, which upon β -hydride elimination provides the ester **6-formate**. In all prior ruthenium catalyzed reductive couplings of paraformaldehyde developed in our laboratory,⁶ including reactions of allenes,^{6a} formate esters are generated to a significant extent and are cleaved upon isolation of the product.

In summary, we report a ruthenium catalyzed reductive coupling of allenes **5a–5f** to paraformaldehyde to form CF₃-substituted neopentyl alcohols **6a–6f** under the conditions of isopropanol mediated transfer hydrogenation. This is one of very few methods available for the generation of all-carbon quaternary stereocenters bearing CF₃ groups.⁸ Beyond access to these elusive functional group arrays, the present study also describes novel synthetic routes to 1-aryl-1-trifluoromethylallenes **5a–5f**, which may find use in other methodological endeavors. Future studies will focus on the development of related C-C bond forming transfer hydrogenations, including asymmetric variants of the transformations reported herein.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgments

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aryl group	2a-2f , yield %	4a-4d , yield %	5a-5d , yield %
1a , Ar = Ph	2a , 81	4a , 49	5a , 78
1b , Ar = <i>m</i> -MeOC ₆ H ₅	2b , 82	4b , 37	5b , 86
1c , Ar = <i>p</i> -MeOC ₆ H ₅	2c , 91	4c , 48	5c , 72
1d , Ar = 2-naphthyl	2d , 84	4d , 38	5d , 77
1e , Ar = 3,5-Cl ₂ C ₆ H ₄	2e , 82		
1f , Ar = <i>p</i> -ClC ₆ H ₅	2f , 84

aryl group	3e,f , yield %	4e,f , yield %	5e,f , yield %
1e , Ar = 3,5-Cl ₂ C ₆ H ₄	3e , 73	4e , 56	5e , 56
1f , Ar = <i>p</i> -ClC ₆ H ₅	3f , 81	4f , 43	5f , 84

^aYields are of material isolated by silica gel chromatography. See Supporting Information for further details.

Scheme 1.
Synthesis of CF₃-Substituted Allenes **5a–5f**.^a

Scheme 2.
Proposed Mechanism for Ruthenium Catalyzed Reductive Coupling of CF_3 -Substituted Allenes **5a–5f** to Paraformaldehyde.

^aYields are of material isolated by silica gel chromatography. Ratios of 6:7 were determined by ¹⁹F NMR analyses of crude reaction mixtures. See Supporting Information for further details.

figure 1.
Ruthenium Catalyzed Reductive Coupling of Allenes **5a–5f** to Paraformaldehyde to Form CF₃-Substituted Neopentyl Alcohols **6a–6f**.^a

Table 1

Selected Optimization Experiments in the Ruthenium Catalyzed Reductive Coupling of CF₃-Substituted Allene **5a** and Paraformaldehyde.^a

entry	[Ru]	ligand	yield %	6a:7a
1	$\text{RuBr}(\text{CO})_3(\text{B}^3\text{-C}_3\text{H}_5)$	$t\text{-BuPPh}_2$ ^b	12	20:1
2	$\text{RuH}_2(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$	-	18	>20:1
3	$\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$	-	37	12:1
4	$\text{RuTFA}_2(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_2$	-	41	13:1
5	$\text{RuTFA}_2(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_2$	DPPF	40	1:4
6	$\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$	DPPF	68	12:1
7	$\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$	DiPPF	37	>20:1
8	$\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$	DtBPF	58	>20:1
9	$\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$	DPPM	74	20:1
10	$\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$	DPPM	78	20:1
11	$\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$	DPPE	70	9:1
12	$\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$	DPPP	35	3:1
13	$\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$	DPPB	70	1:4
14	$\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$	DCyPM	68	10:1
15	$\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$	DCyPE	67	17:1
16	$\text{RuHCl}(\text{CO})(\text{PPh}_3)_3$	BINAP	31	10:1

DCyPM = 1,1-bis(dicyclohexylphosphino)methane, DCyPE = 1,1-bis(dicyclohexylphosphino)ethane.

See Supporting Information for ligand definitions and experimental details.

^aYields are of material isolated by silica gel chromatography. Ratios of 6:7 were determined by ¹⁹F NMR analyses of crude reaction mixtures.

^b $t\text{-BuPPh}_2$ (15 mol %).