

Synthetic Methods

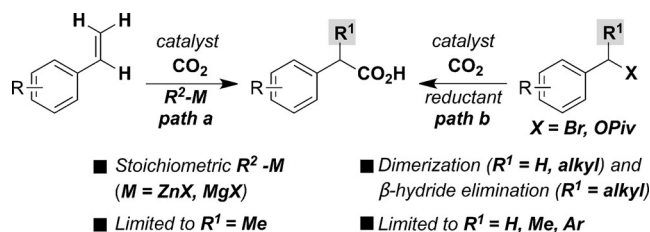
International Edition: DOI: 10.1002/anie.201600697
German Edition: DOI: 10.1002/ange.201600697Nickel-Catalyzed Carboxylation of Benzylic C–N Bonds with CO₂

Toni Moragas, Morgane Gaydou, and Ruben Martin*

Abstract: A user-friendly Ni-catalyzed reductive carboxylation of benzylic C–N bonds with CO₂ is described. This procedure outperforms state-of-the-art techniques for the carboxylation of benzyl electrophiles by avoiding commonly observed parasitic pathways, such as homodimerization or β -hydride elimination, thus leading to new knowledge in cross-electrophile reactions.

Cross-electrophile reactions have recently gained considerable attention, having become direct and practical alternatives to classical nucleophile/electrophile procedures based on stoichiometric organometallic reagents.^[1] Although the utilization of organic halides and homogeneous reagents has become routine in these methods,^[1] extension to other coupling partners is still largely underdeveloped, an important drawback when compared with the broad applicability of classical nucleophile/electrophile events.^[2] Undoubtedly, new catalytic procedures based on unconventional, yet practical, electrophilic partners would be highly beneficial and would facilitate considerable flexibility in terms of synthetic design.

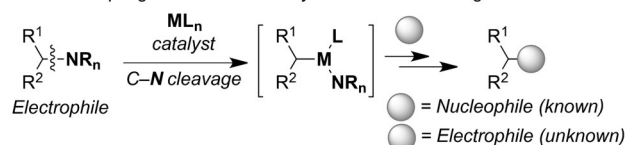
The use of carbon dioxide (CO₂) as a renewable C1 synthon holds significant promise for defining new paradigms in retrosynthetic analysis.^[3] Following the pioneering work of Osakada et al.,^[4] we^[5] and others^[6] have designed reductive carboxylation techniques of organic (pseudo)halides with CO₂, providing alternatives to classical routes requiring organometallic species.^[7,8] Despite the advances realized, a general route towards the synthesis of α -substituted phenylacetic acids, privileged motifs in a myriad of bioactive molecules, still remains elusive. It is worth noting that the current cross-electrophile portfolio of benzyl derivatives, including reductive carboxylation techniques, is unfortunately plagued by unavoidable dimerization and β -hydride elimination, and is restricted by the limited set of substitution patterns that can be introduced (Scheme 1).^[5e,f,9,10] Consequently, filling this gap was deemed crucial, particularly with nontoxic and easy to handle, yet highly reactive, alternative counterparts. Challenged by this perception, we wondered whether air and thermally stable ammonium salts, highly crystalline solids that are readily prepared in one-step from



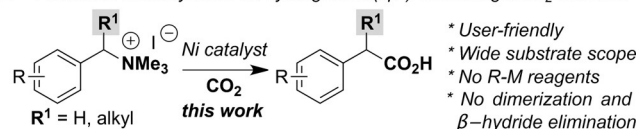
Scheme 1. Reductive carboxylation routes towards the formation of phenylacetic acids.

available amine precursors,^[11] could improve upon carboxylation reactions while leading to rather inaccessible building blocks through unconventional synergistic C–N cleavage/CO₂ insertion. At the outset of our investigations, however, it was unclear whether such a procedure could ever be implemented, as ammonium salts were exclusively employed in nucleophile/electrophile regimes using well-defined stoichiometric organometallic compounds (Scheme 2, top).^[12–14] If

■ Cross-coupling reactions via catalytic C–N bond cleavage



■ Reductive carboxylation via synergistic C(sp³)-N cleavage/CO₂ insertion



Scheme 2. Cross-electrophile reactions through C–N bond cleavage.

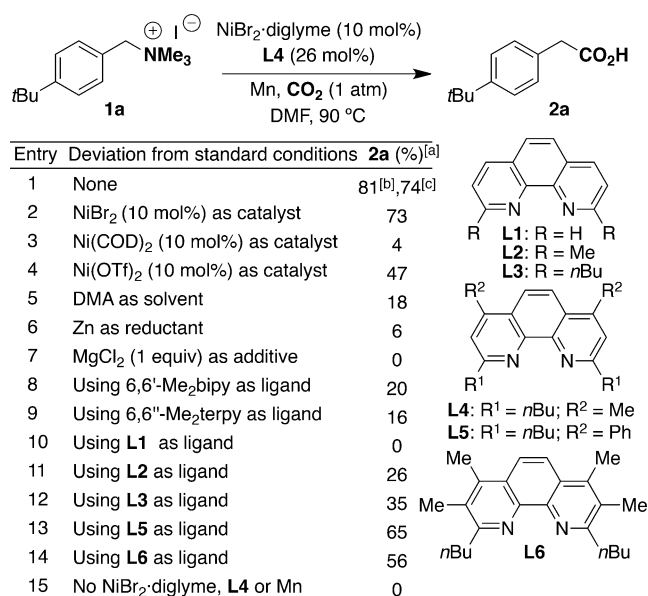
successful, such a method would provide a new opportunity to promote C–N activation in cross-electrophile reactions. Herein, we describe our initial investigations towards this goal (Scheme 2, bottom). This user-friendly and operationally simple new procedure operates at an atmospheric pressure of CO₂ and outperforms all other procedures for the carboxylation of benzyl electrophiles (Scheme 1), demonstrating that ammonium salts are not merely substitute reagents for organic (pseudo)halides. We believe these results will pave the way for utilizing ammonium salts in cross-electrophile coupling events where homodimerization and β -hydride elimination pathways cannot be avoided, thus leading to new knowledge in the synthetic design.

Our study began by evaluating the reaction of **1a** with CO₂ at atmospheric pressure (Scheme 3). Notably, not even traces of **2a** were detected under conditions previously

[*] Dr. T. Moragas, Dr. M. Gaydou, Prof. R. Martin
Institute of Chemical Research of Catalonia (ICIQ)
The Barcelona Institute of Science and Technology
Av. Països Catalans 16, 43007, Tarragona (Spain)
E-mail: rmartinromo@iciq.es

Prof. R. Martin
Catalan Institution for Research and Advanced Studies (ICREA)
Passeig Lluís Companys, 23, 08010, Barcelona (Spain)

Supporting information and the ORCID identification number(s) for the author(s) of this article can be found under <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/anie.201600697>.

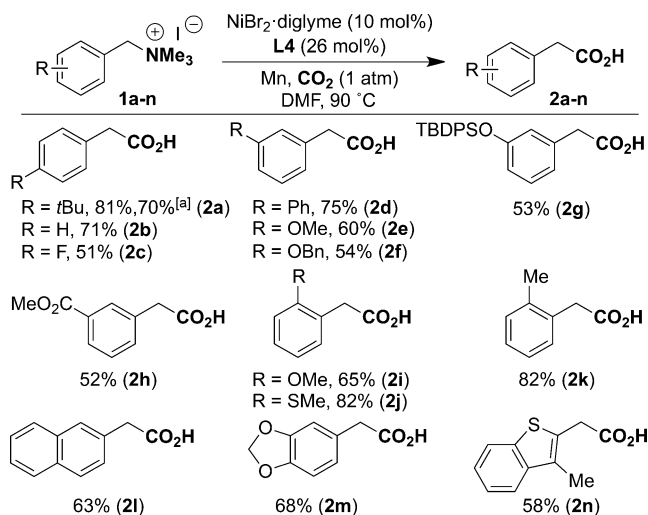


Scheme 3. Screening of reaction conditions. Reaction conditions: **1a** (0.20 mmol), $\text{NiBr}_2 \cdot \text{diglyme}$ (10 mol%), ligand (26 mol%), Mn (0.40 mmol), CO_2 (1 atm) in DMF (0.40 M) at 90 °C for 72 h. [a] Yields determined by HPLC using anisole as internal standard. [b] Yield of isolated product. [c] **L4** (10 mol%).

employed for other benzyl electrophiles (Scheme 1, path b),^[5e,f] indicating that the activation of C(sp³)–N bonds would be more problematic than anticipated. After a judicious screening of all reaction parameters,^[15] $\text{NiBr}_2 \cdot \text{diglyme}$ and **L4** (Scheme 3), a bench-stable ligand preparable in one step and on a multigram scale,^[15] were combined with Mn as the reducing agent in DMF to afford **2a** in 81 % yield (entry 1).^[16] Importantly, no traces of homodimerization products were detected in the crude reaction mixtures, in direct contrast to related carboxylation techniques (Scheme 1, path b).^[5e,f] While other Ni^{II} sources provided lower yields (entries 2 and 4), we found that $\text{Ni}(\text{COD})_2$ (COD = 1,5-cyclooctadiene) was not a suitable precatalyst, suggesting that COD might compete with substrate binding (entry 3).^[17] As shown in entries 5 and 6, the use of the structurally related solvent dimethylacetamide (DMA), Zn as reducing agent, or the inclusion of MgCl_2 as an additive had a deleterious effect.^[18] As anticipated, subtle differences in the ligand backbone exerted a profound influence on the reaction outcome. Specifically, we found an increased reactivity of 1,10-phenanthrolines over bipyridines or terpyridines, presumably due to their significant backbone rigidity compared to nonfused analogues. Although speculative, we believe that the greater activity of **L4** over the **L1**–**L6** series is attributed to an intimate interplay of electronic and steric effects of the substituents on the 1,10-phenanthroline backbone, thus increasing the robustness, reactivity, and stability of the propagating Ni^0L_n species.^[19] As expected, control experiments revealed that all reaction parameters were critical for success (entry 15).^[15,20]

With these conditions in hand, we focused our attention on the preparative scope of our Ni-catalyzed direct carboxylation reaction of primary benzyl ammonium salts with CO_2

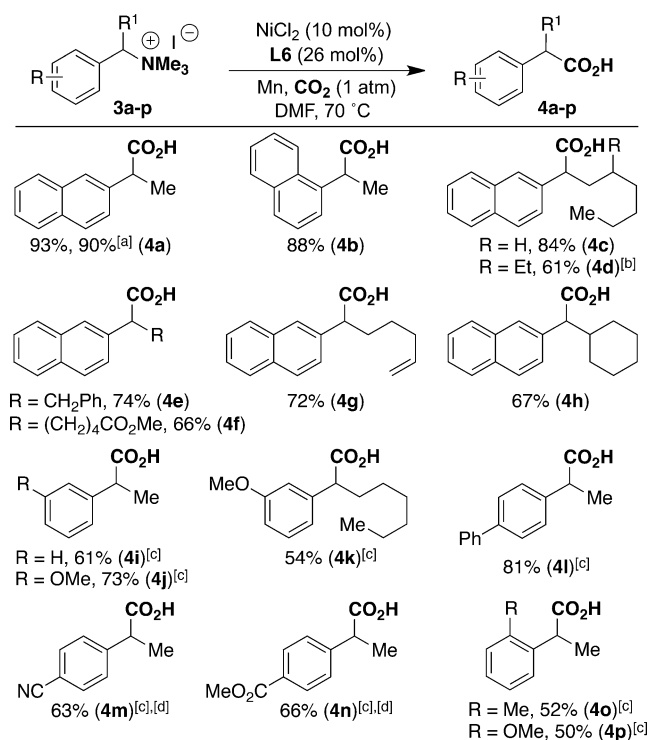
(Scheme 4). Importantly, **1a**–**1n** were all prepared from the corresponding amines in one step and used without further purification, thus representing a significant advantage from a practical standpoint. As becomes evident from the results compiled in Scheme 4, our synergistic C(sp³)–N cleavage/ CO_2 insertion reaction was largely insensitive to electronic changes on the aromatic ring and could perfectly accommo-



Scheme 4. Carboxylation of primary ammonium salts. Reaction conditions: as for Scheme 3, entry 1; yields of isolated products are given as an average of at least two independent runs. [a] **1a** (1.0 mmol), $\text{NiBr}_2 \cdot \text{diglyme}$ (5 mol%). Bn = benzyl; TBDPS = *tert*-butyldiphenylsilyl.

date non-extended π systems.^[21] Similarly, the inclusion of *ortho* substituents posed no problems (**2i**–**2k**). The reaction showed an excellent chemoselectivity profile, with ammonium salts containing various functional groups, such as esters (**1h**), fluorides (**1c**), silyl ethers (**1g**), or acetals (**1m**), being easily accommodated. Although one might argue that the inclusion of thioethers might be problematic due to the strong binding affinity of sulfur atoms to Ni centers,^[22] we found that such motifs did not interfere with the formation of **2j**. Likewise, the presence of heteroaryl rings could be tolerated with equal ease (**2n**). This operationally simple procedure was also found to be scalable, and catalyst loadings could be decreased to 5 mol % without significant erosion in yield (**2a**; 70 % yield).

Prompted by the inherent limitations posed by the available catalytic reductive carboxylation techniques for the synthesis of α -substituted phenylacetic acids (Scheme 1), we wondered whether our procedure could be extended to secondary benzyl ammonium salts possessing β -hydrogen atoms (Scheme 5). Although parasitic homodimerization or β -hydride elimination pathways could be anticipated, an issue previously observed in a myriad of cross-electrophile reactions of benzyl derivatives, this was not the case, and we found that a $\text{NiCl}_2/\text{L6}$ regime afforded **4a** in 93 % yield.^[23,24] As for Scheme 4, we found that catalyst loadings could be decreased to 5 mol % without deterioration in yield at a large scale. Importantly, a number of substrates possessing β -hydrogen

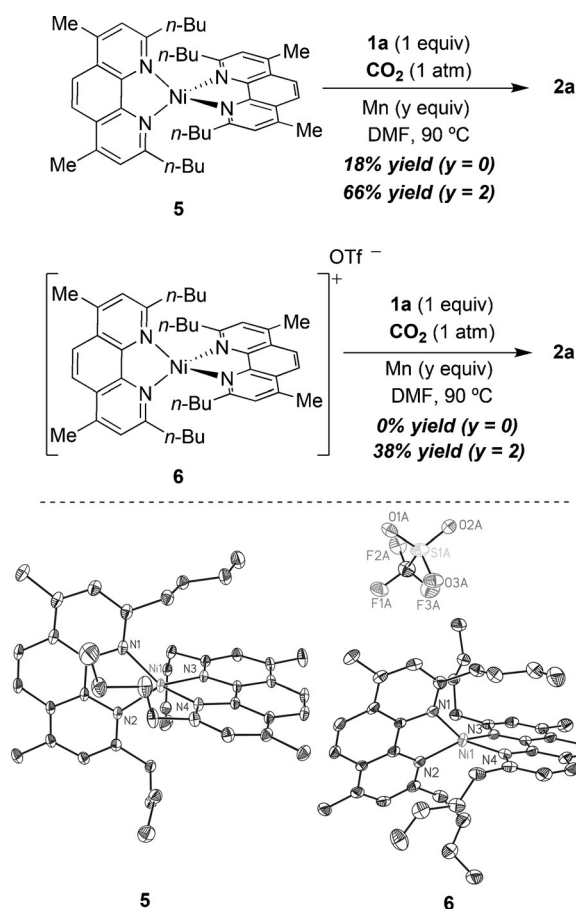


Scheme 5. Carboxylation of secondary ammonium salts. Reaction conditions: **3** (0.20 mmol), NiCl_2 (10 mol %), **L6** (26 mol %), Mn (0.80 mmol), CO_2 (1 atm) in DMF (0.20 M) at 70 °C for 16 h; yields of the isolated products given as an average of at least two independent runs. [a] **3a** (1.0 mmol), NiCl_2 (5 mol %). [b] **4d** (1:1 d.r.). [c] 90 °C for 72 h. [d] Isolated as the corresponding methyl ester upon treatment with TMSCHN_2 .

atoms could be successfully carboxylated with similar ease, even when the ammonium salt contained sterically encumbered backbones (**3h**) or was functionalized with groups possessing an innate proclivity for β -hydride elimination (**3e**). Similarly, the reaction was not hampered by the inclusion of nitriles (**4m**), esters (**4f**, **4n**), alkenes (**4g**), or *ortho* substituents (**4o**, **4p**). Particularly noteworthy was the ability to couple substrates having β -alkyl chains other than methyl groups (**4c–h**, **4k**), showcasing the utility of this process when compared to benzyl electrophiles or styrene derivatives (Scheme 1).^[5e,f,9] To put these results into perspective, while **4c** was obtained in 84% yield from **3c**, the utilization of organic halides (**3c-Br**) or pivalate analogues (**3c-OPiv**) under the reported optimized conditions^[5e,f] lead exclusively to β -hydride elimination and dimerization. Although inherently predisposed towards intramolecular C–C bond formations, the presence of esters (**3f**) or alkenes (**3g**) on the side chain did not interfere, obtaining exclusively **4f** and **4g**.^[25,26] Taken together, the results of Schemes 4–5 show that ammonium salts cannot be considered as merely substitutes of organic halides, thus leading to new knowledge in the cross-electrophile coupling arena.^[27]

Although a comprehensive study detailing the mechanistic underpinnings of this reaction will require further investigations, we decided to study the reactivity of $\text{Ni}^0(\text{L4})_2$ (**5**) and $\text{Ni}^I(\text{L4})_2$ compounds (**6**). While 18-electron complex **5**

was prepared in quantitative yield by reacting $\text{Ni}(\text{COD})_2$ and **L4** in benzene at 40 °C, complex **6** was prepared from **5** upon exposure to AgOTf in THF at RT.^[15,28] As shown in Scheme 6, both structures were unambiguously characterized by X-ray crystallography.^[29,30] Interestingly, **5** and **6** were found to be catalytically competent when using **1a** as the substrate, delivering compound **2a** in 77% and 76% yield, respectively. Intriguingly, although a non-negligible erosion in yield of **2a** was found when reacting **1a** with **5** in a stoichiometric fashion in the absence of Mn, no reaction took place under otherwise identical reaction conditions under a **6** regime.^[31] Whether these results indicate the involvement of single-electron-transfer processes,^[32–34] comproportionation events^[35] via benzyl Ni^I intermediates,^[36] or other mechanistic implications is the subject of ongoing investigations.



Scheme 6. Stoichiometric experiments with **5** and **6**.

In summary, we have described the first cross-electrophile coupling reaction via unconventional C–N bond cleavage/ CO_2 insertion. The success is attributed to the use of a new set of ligands with unprecedented reactivity while preventing parasitic reaction pathways commonly observed in cross-electrophile reactions, thus outperforming previously developed carboxylation events. The wide substrate scope and the generality of this new procedure might lead to new knowledge in ligand design and augurs well for implementing C–N

counterparts in cross-electrophile events. Further investigations along these lines are currently underway in our laboratories.

Acknowledgements

We thank the ICIQ, the European Research Council (ERC-277883), MINECO (CTQ2012-34054 and Severo Ochoa Excellence Accreditation 2014-2018, SEV-2013-0319) and the Cellex Foundation for support. Johnson Matthey, Umico, and Nippon Chemical Industrial are acknowledged for gifts of metal and ligand sources. Similarly, Klaus Ditrach (BASF) is acknowledged for a gift of amine sources. We sincerely thank E. Escudero and E. Martin for X-ray crystallographic data.

Keywords: carboxylation · C–N activation · homogeneous catalysis · nickel · reductive coupling

How to cite: *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **2016**, *55*, 5053–5057
Angew. Chem. **2016**, *128*, 5137–5141

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Received: January 21, 2016

Published online: March 15, 2016