

## A Novel Synthesis of Alkyl Chloroformate in the Gas Phase by a Palladium-Catalyzed Reaction Using Cl<sub>2</sub>, CO, and Alkyl Nitrite

Masato MURAKAMI<sup>#</sup> and Noriaki MANADA<sup>\*</sup>

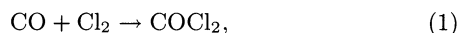
Ube Research Laboratories, Ube Industries Ltd., Ube, Yamaguchi 755

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A novel synthesis of chloroformate was developed by a palladium-catalyzed reaction of Cl<sub>2</sub>, CO, and alkyl nitrite in the gas phase. When PdCl<sub>2</sub>/γ-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> or PdCl<sub>2</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub> was employed as a catalyst, chloroformate was formed in good yield and with high selectivity. It was confirmed that the reaction did not proceed via phosgene. Cl<sub>2</sub> is directly converted to methyl chloroformate. No HCl was formed. The reaction temperature greatly influenced the formation rate of chloroformate, and its selectivity depended on the nitrite/Cl molar ratio very drastically. The dependence of the formation rate on the concentrations of CO and methyl nitrite was also examined.

Organic synthesis using the carbonylation reaction is receiving much attention, and is being applied to many industrial processes. Especially, palladium-catalyzed reactions using alkyl nitrite, not only as substrate, but as re-oxidation reagent of palladium, have been widely explored, and a variety of organic compounds are now being produced by Ube Industries, such as dimethyl carbonate,<sup>1–3)</sup> dibutyl oxalate,<sup>4)</sup> and 3,3-dimethoxypropionitrile,<sup>5)</sup> which is a key intermediate of vitamin B<sub>1</sub>.<sup>6)</sup>

Chloroformates are currently produced by the reaction of phosgene, which is formed by the reaction of Cl<sub>2</sub> with CO over an active charcoal catalyst, with alcohol according to



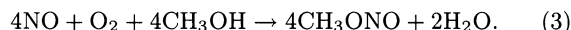
and



Because of the extremely high toxicity of phosgene, it is not a favorable method to produce chloroformate on the industrial scale. Furthermore, it is difficult to completely remove HCl from the product. It has been reported that the reaction of PdCl<sub>2</sub> and LiCl with CO in ethanol gives ethyl chloroformate and two by-products.<sup>7)</sup> The synthesis of perfluoroalkyl chloroformates by direct carbonylation of perfluoroalkyl hypochlorites has also been reported.<sup>8)</sup> Recently, Giannoccaro et al. have reported on chloroformate synthesis using the palladium bis(methoxycarbonyl) complex and CuCl<sub>2</sub>.<sup>9)</sup> However, these methods could not be applied to the catalytic synthesis of the usual alkyl chloroformates.

We report here a novel synthesis of alkyl chloroformate in the gas phase by a palladium-catalyzed reaction using Cl<sub>2</sub>, CO, and alkyl nitrite. This method is safe, since it requires no highly toxic materials, such as phosgene. In this reaction chlorine is converted to methyl chloroformate, and no HCl is produced. Moreover, any NO produced can be used to reproduce meth-

yl nitrite by the following reaction with methanol and oxygen:



### Experimental

**1. Materials.** Methyl nitrite was prepared from controlled amounts of NO and O<sub>2</sub> by passing through methanol. Chlorine was purchased from Nippon Sanso Co., Ltd. as 1% or 10% standard gas (N<sub>2</sub> as the balance). The other gases were also purchased and used without any further purification. A 1% PdCl<sub>2</sub>/γ-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> catalyst was purchased from N. E. Chemcat, and a 1% PdCl<sub>2</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub> catalyst was prepared using aqueous H<sub>2</sub>PdCl<sub>4</sub> solution and silica gel purchased from Fuji Davison Co., Ltd.

**2. Apparatus and Procedures.** The apparatus for the experiment is shown in Fig. 1. A reaction tube (13 mmφ) was filled with the required amount of catalyst and fixed vertically. Then, hot silicone oil was flowed in the jacket around the reaction tube in order to maintain the catalyst at the required temperature. From the top of reaction tube, the reactant gas, which had been passed through a cold trap kept under 5 °C, was introduced at the required flow rate. After being passed through the catalyst at atmospheric pressure, the product gas was analyzed by gas chromatography. Typical reaction conditions are as follows:

Pressure, 1 atm; gas flow rate, 30000 cm<sup>3</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>; catalyst: 1% PdCl<sub>2</sub>/γ-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> or 1% PdCl<sub>2</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub>; catalyst volume, 1–2 cm<sup>3</sup>; temperature, 30–130 °C; CO concentration, 4–10 vol%; Cl<sub>2</sub> concentration, 0.5–1 vol%; nitrite/Cl<sub>2</sub> molar ratio, 2–10; balance gas, N<sub>2</sub>.

**3. Analysis.** The analytical conditions of gas chromatography were as follows:

**Methyl Nitrite:** Column, Chromosorb 101 (60–80 mesh), 2 m; column temperature, 50 °C; carrier gas, He 1.2 kg cm<sup>-2</sup>; detector, FID.

**CO and NO:** Column, Chromosorb 101 0.3 m + Molecular sieve 5A 1.7 m; column temperature, 50 °C; carrier gas, He 1.6 kg cm<sup>-2</sup>; detector, TCD.

**Dimethyl Carbonate and Methyl Chloroformate:** Column, 20% PEG-20M/Chromosorb WAW (80–100 mesh) 3 m; column temperature, 60 °C; carrier gas, He 0.4 kg cm<sup>-2</sup>; detector, FID.

<sup>#</sup>Present address: Chiba Research Laboratories, Ube Industries Ltd., Ichihara, Chiba 290.

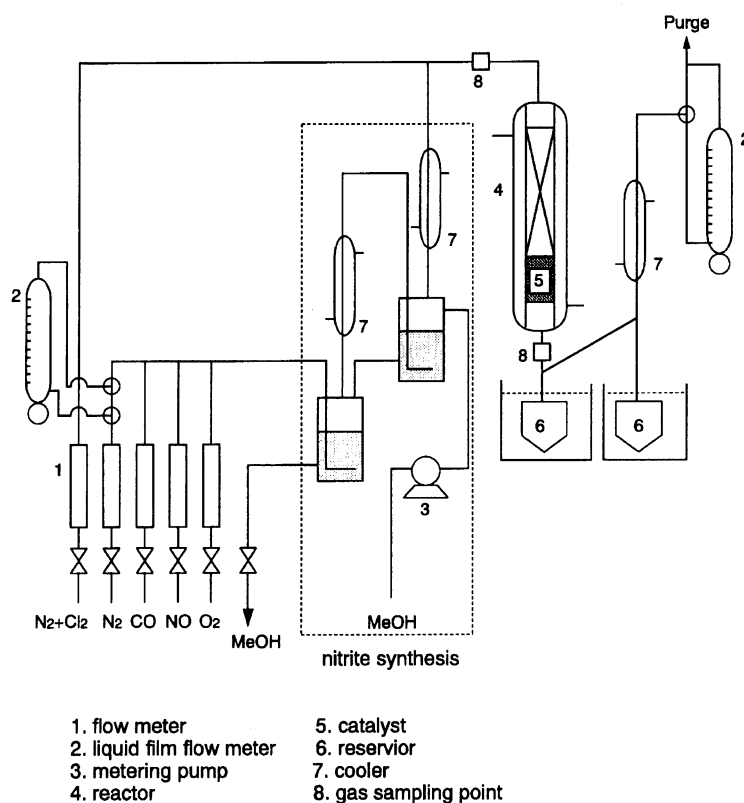


Fig. 1. Apparatus for the experiments.

Table 1. Reaction of Reactant Gas on  $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ <sup>a)</sup>

| Run | Reactant gas concentration (in/out) |                       |                       |          | $\text{Cl}_2$       | Products                        |
|-----|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
|     | CO                                  | MN                    | NO                    | MeOH     |                     |                                 |
|     | vol%                                |                       |                       |          |                     |                                 |
| 1   | 7.1/7.1                             | 0.0/0.0               | 0.0/0.0               | 0.0/0.0  | 1.0/— <sup>b)</sup> | No reaction                     |
| 2   | 10.1/10.3                           | 0.0/0.0               | 0.0/0.0               | 9.7/7.8  | 1.0/— <sup>b)</sup> | MF, ML, DCM, <sup>c)</sup> etc. |
| 3   | 9.4/9.4                             | 6.2/7.0 <sup>d)</sup> | 2.2/1.3 <sup>d)</sup> | 10.4/7.1 | 1.0/— <sup>b)</sup> | MF, ML, DCM, <sup>c)</sup> etc. |

a) Reaction conditions  $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$  1 cm<sup>3</sup>, 60 °C, gas flow rate 30000 cm<sup>3</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>. b) Not determined. c) MN: Methyl nitrite, MF: Methyl formate, ML: Methylal (formaldehyde dimethyl acetal), DCM: Dichloromethane.

## Results and Discussion

### Conversion of Reactant Gases on $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ .

The conversion of reactant gases on  $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$  was examined. The results (listed in Table 1) show that the reaction between CO and  $\text{Cl}_2$  did not proceed to form phosgene (Run 1).  $\text{Cl}_2$  reacted with methanol to give dichloromethane, methylal (formaldehyde dimethyl acetal), methyl formate and a few unknown products. In all cases of Runs 1, 2, and 3, no chloroformate was detected.

**Conversion of Reactant Gas on  $\text{PdCl}_2/\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ .** Similarly, the conversion of reactant gases on 1%  $\text{PdCl}_2/\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$  was examined. Also, in this case, the reaction between CO and  $\text{Cl}_2$  did not proceed.  $\text{Cl}_2$  reacted with methanol to give almost the same results as on  $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$  alone (Table 2). However, quite a different result was obtained when  $\text{Cl}_2$ , CO, and methanol

were reacted together: methyl chloroformate (MCF) was formed (Table 3). In this case, HCl and several kinds of by-products were also formed. Interestingly, when methyl nitrite was added to  $\text{Cl}_2$  and CO, methyl chloroformate was obtained in high selectivity (99.7%) and in very good yield (1650 mg h<sup>-1</sup>) (Run 3).

If methyl chloroformate was formed via phosgene, the theoretical maximum yield should be an equimolar amount of  $\text{Cl}_2$  introduced (see Eqs. 1 and 2). Thus, under the reaction conditions of  $\text{Cl}_2$  1 vol% and a gas flow rate 30000 cm<sup>3</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>, the yield of chloroformate should be 1153 mg h<sup>-1</sup> at most. However, when methyl nitrite was employed as a substrate, the yield (1650 mg h<sup>-1</sup>) exceeded the theoretical value. Furthermore, methyl chloroformate was not formed by the reaction of HCl, CO, and methanol on 1%  $\text{PdCl}_2/\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ . From these experimental facts, it can be concluded that chloroformate was not formed via phosgene.

Table 2. Reaction of Reactant Gas on PdCl<sub>2</sub>/γ-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub><sup>a)</sup>

| Run | Reactant gas concentration (in/out) |         |         |                      |                     | Products                        |
|-----|-------------------------------------|---------|---------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
|     | CO                                  | MN      | NO      | MeOH                 | Cl <sub>2</sub>     |                                 |
|     | vol%                                |         |         |                      |                     |                                 |
| 1   | 1.9/1.9                             | 0.0/0.0 | 0.0/0.0 | 0.0/0.0              | 1.0/— <sup>b)</sup> | No reaction                     |
| 2   | 9.7/10.0                            | 0.0/0.0 | 0.0/0.0 | 0.0/0.0              | 1.0/— <sup>b)</sup> | No reaction                     |
| 3   | 0.0/0.0                             | 0.0/0.0 | 0.0/0.0 | 10.8/— <sup>b)</sup> | 1.0/— <sup>b)</sup> | MF, ML, DCM, <sup>c)</sup> etc. |

a) Reaction conditions 1% PdCl<sub>2</sub>/γ-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> 1 cm<sup>3</sup>, 60 °C, gas flow rate 30000 cm<sup>3</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>.

b) Not determined. c) MN: Methyl nitrite, MF: Methyl formate, ML: Methylal (formaldehyde dimethyl acetal), DCM: Dichloromethane.

Table 3. Formation Rate of Methyl Chloroformate<sup>a)</sup>

| Run | Reactant gas concentration (in) |     |     |      |                 | Formation rate<br>MCF | By-Products                     |
|-----|---------------------------------|-----|-----|------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
|     | CO                              | MN  | NO  | MeOH | Cl <sub>2</sub> |                       |                                 |
|     | vol%                            |     |     |      |                 | mg h <sup>-1</sup>    |                                 |
| 1   | 1.9                             | 0.0 | 0.0 | 7.7  | 1.0             | 199                   | MF, ML, DCM, <sup>b)</sup> etc. |
| 2   | 10.2                            | 0.0 | 0.0 | 11.5 | 1.0             | 484                   | MF, ML, DCM, <sup>b)</sup> etc. |
| 3   | 7.0                             | 5.0 | 2.0 | 7.0  | 1.0             | 1650                  | DMC, <sup>b)</sup>              |

a) Reaction conditions 1% PdCl<sub>2</sub>/γ-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> 1 cm<sup>3</sup>, 60 °C, gas flow rate 30000 cm<sup>3</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>.

b) MN: Methyl nitrite, MCF: Methyl chloroformate, MF: Methyl formate, ML: Methylal (formaldehyde dimethyl acetal), DCM: Dichloromethane, DMC: Dimethyl carbonate.

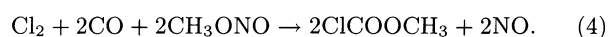
Table 4. Mass Balance of Reactants and Product<sup>a)</sup>

| Reactant gas flow rate<br>(in/out(consumed amount)) |                | Product flow rate<br>(in/out(produced amount)) |                |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| CO                                                  | MN             | NO                                             | MCF            |
| mmol h <sup>-1</sup>                                |                | mmol h <sup>-1</sup>                           |                |
| 51.6/34.2(17.4)                                     | 20.2/3.6(16.6) | 22.4/38.4(16.0)                                | 0.0/11.0(11.0) |

a) Reaction conditions 1% PdCl<sub>2</sub>/γ-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> 1 cm<sup>3</sup>, 60 °C, gas flow rate 30000 cm<sup>3</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>, Cl<sub>2</sub>: 0.5 vol% (6.2 mmol h<sup>-1</sup>), MeOH: 4.24 vol% (51.7 mmol h<sup>-1</sup>).

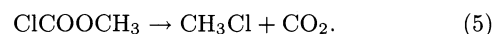
**Verification of the Reaction Path.** As described above, it was found that methyl chloroformate is formed in good yield from CO, Cl<sub>2</sub>, and methyl nitrite. First, the chlorine balance was measured to verify the reaction path. When Cl<sub>2</sub> was introduced at a rate of 7.1 mmol h<sup>-1</sup> to 2 cm<sup>3</sup> of the catalyst (1% PdCl<sub>2</sub>/γ-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>) under the following reaction conditions: gas flow rate, 30000 cm<sup>3</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>; temperature, 65 °C; methyl nitrite, 6.02 vol%; CO, 6.00 vol%; methanol, 2.61 vol%; and NO, 1.22 vol%; methyl chloroformate was formed at a rate of 14.3 mmol h<sup>-1</sup>. It can be concluded from this result that the molar ratio of chloroformate produced to introduced Cl<sub>2</sub> was 2. This means that no HCl was formed under the reaction conditions. Secondly, the mass balance of the reactants and the products was measured. The results are given in Table 4.

Based on these results, the following reaction path can be proposed:



**Effect of the Reaction Temperature.** It was

found that the reaction is very much influenced by the reaction temperature. The results are given in Fig. 2. The formation rate of chloroformate is the highest at around 60 °C, and decreases as the temperature becomes higher. Chloroformate decomposes to chloromethane and CO<sub>2</sub> at high temperatures on γ-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (Eq. 5),<sup>10)</sup>

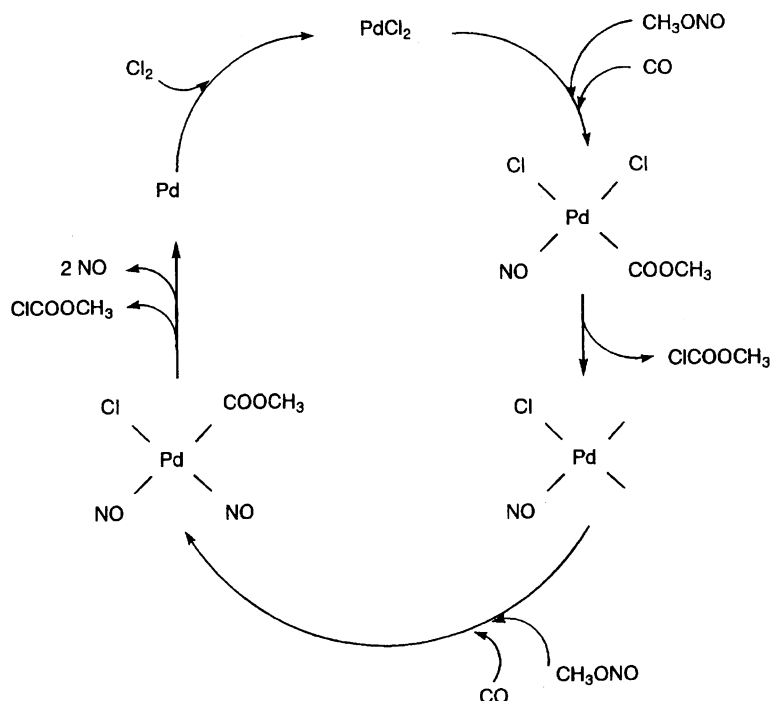


At a temperature higher than 60 °C, dimethyl carbonate (DMC) begins to form.

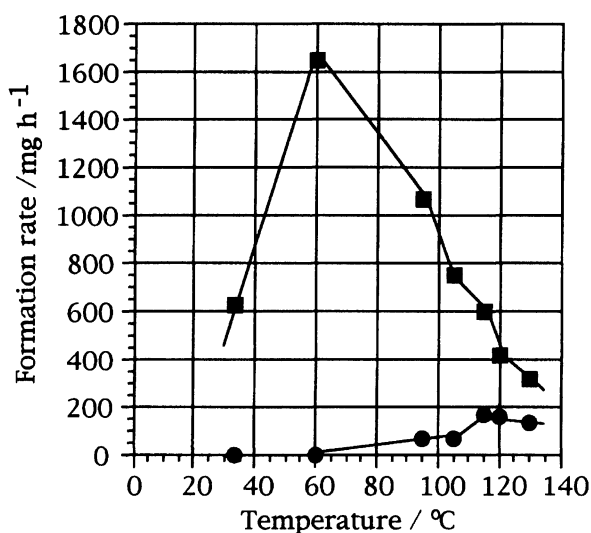
**Effect of the Reactant Concentration.** The concentrations of CO and methyl nitrite also influence the formation rate of the products. The results are given in Figs. 3 and 4, respectively.

The formation rate of chloroformate is dependent on the concentration of CO, almost by first order. When the concentration of methyl nitrite is lower than twice the Cl<sub>2</sub> concentration, the rate is dependent on the concentration of methyl nitrite, also by first order.

**Effect of the Nitrite/Cl Molar Ratio.** It was

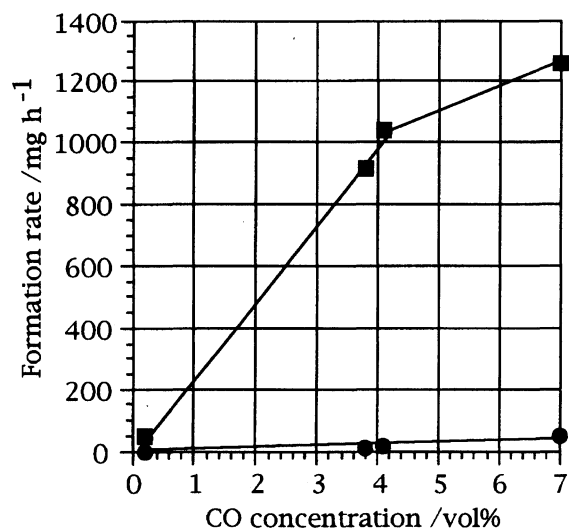


Scheme 1. Proposed catalytic mechanism for the formation of chloroformate in the presence of methyl nitrite.



■ : Methyl chloroformate  
● : Dimethyl carbonate

Fig. 2. Formation rate of products vs. reaction temperature. Reaction conditions: Pressure, 1 atm; Gas flow rate, 30000  $\text{cm}^3 \text{h}^{-1}$ ; Catalyst, 1%  $\text{PdCl}_2/\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ ; Catalyst volume, 1  $\text{cm}^3$ ;  $\text{CO}$ , 7 vol%;  $\text{Cl}_2$ , 1 vol%; methyl nitrite, 5–6 vol%;  $\text{NO}$ , 1–2 vol%; methanol, 6–10 vol%. Closed squares and circles in the figure correspond to methyl chloroformate and dimethyl carbonate, respectively.



■ : Methyl chloroformate  
● : Dimethyl carbonate

Fig. 3. Formation rate of products vs.  $\text{CO}$  concentration. Reaction conditions: Pressure, 1 atm; Temperature, 60 °C; Gas flow rate, 30000  $\text{cm}^3 \text{h}^{-1}$ ; Catalyst, 1%  $\text{PdCl}_2/\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ ; Catalyst volume, 2  $\text{cm}^3$ ;  $\text{Cl}_2$ , 0.5 vol%; methyl nitrite, 1.5–2.5 vol%;  $\text{NO}$ , 0.6–0.9 vol%; methanol, 3–4 vol%. Closed squares and circles in the figure correspond to methyl chloroformate and dimethyl carbonate, respectively.

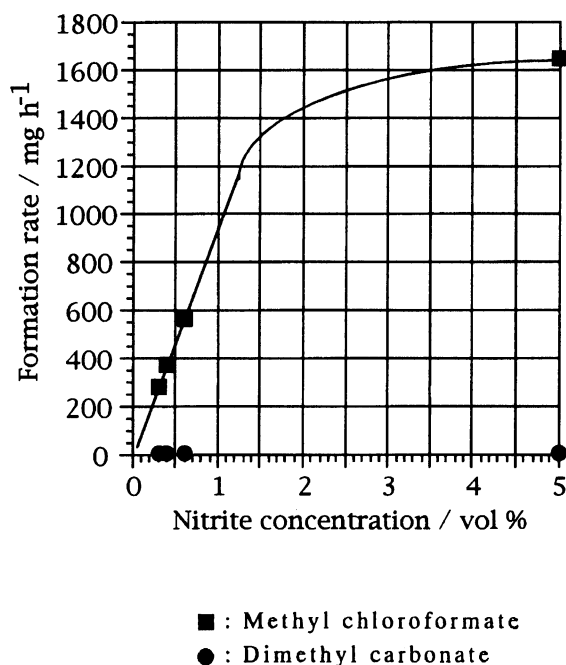


Fig. 4. Formation rate of products vs. methyl nitrite concentration. Reaction conditions: Pressure, 1 atm; Temperature, 60 °C; Gas flow rate, 30000 cm<sup>3</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>; Catalyst, 1% PdCl<sub>2</sub>/γ-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>; Catalyst volume, 1 cm<sup>3</sup>; Cl<sub>2</sub>, 1 vol%; CO, 7 vol%; NO, 0–1 vol%; methanol, 7–11 vol%. Closed squares and circles in the figure correspond to methyl chloroformate and dimethyl carbonate, respectively.

also found that the nitrite/Cl molar ratio influences the selectivity of methyl chloroformate very drastically. The results are given in Fig. 5. The selectivity is defined as follows:

$$\text{MCF selectivity (\%)} = \frac{\text{MCF}(\text{mmol h}^{-1}) \times 100}{\text{MCF}(\text{mmol h}^{-1}) + \text{DMC}(\text{mmol h}^{-1})} \quad (6)$$

Interestingly, when the nitrite/Cl molar ratio is less than 2, the selectivity is almost 100%. As the concentration of methyl nitrite increases relative to the Cl<sub>2</sub> concentration, the selectivity decreases due to the formation of carbonate.

**Mechanism.** A mechanism which accounts for the formation of chloroformate is proposed in Scheme 1. PdCl<sub>2</sub> reacts with CO and methyl nitrite to form a methoxycarbonyl complex [PdCl<sub>2</sub>(COOCH<sub>3</sub>)(NO)]. A similar type of complex has been isolated by Bréchet et al. as a phosphine adduct [PdCl<sub>2</sub>(COOBu)(NO)(PPh<sub>3</sub>)] as an active intermediate of the catalytic oxidation of olefin.<sup>11)</sup> From the complex, methyl chloroformate is produced through a reductive elimination to form an unsaturated complex [Pd(NO)-Cl], which reacts with CO and methyl nitrite to form another methoxycarbonyl complex. Then, additional chloroformate is produced together with NO to form Pd, which is reoxidized by Cl<sub>2</sub> to reproduce PdCl<sub>2</sub>.

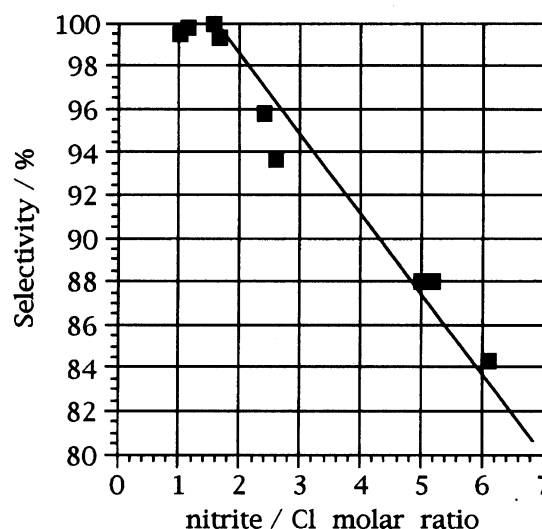
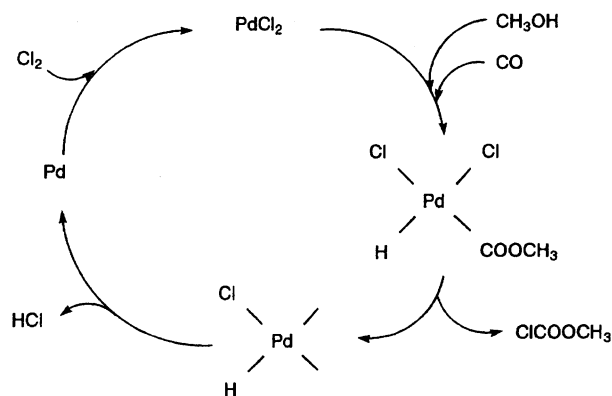


Fig. 5. Selectivity of methyl chloroformate vs. nitrite/Cl molar ratio.

This mechanism is consistent with the fact that a high nitrite concentration causes the formation of carbonate. It can be explained that an excess amount of nitrite reacts with the methoxycarbonyl complex [PdClX(COOCH<sub>3</sub>)(NO)] (X=Cl or NO) to produce carbonate before elimination of the chloroformate. When the nitrite/Cl molar ratio is less than 2, all of the nitrite can be converted to a methoxycarbonyl group on Pd, and to chloroformate by a successive reductive elimination with Cl. Similarly, the formation of chloroformate in the absence of nitrite can be explained by Scheme 2. In this case, half of the Cl<sub>2</sub> reacted on Pd is converted to HCl.

**Another Supports.** Finally, when 2 cm<sup>3</sup> of 1% PdCl<sub>2</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub> was employed as a catalyst, methyl chloroformate was formed at a rate of 607 mg h<sup>-1</sup> under the following reaction conditions: gas flow rate, 30000 cm<sup>3</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>; temperature, 90 °C; Cl<sub>2</sub>, 0.4 vol%; methyl nitrite, 3.1 vol%; CO, 5.1 vol%; methanol, 4.3 vol%; and NO, 0.0 vol%. However, 1% PdCl<sub>2</sub>/α-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> showed



Scheme 2. Proposed catalytic mechanism for the formation of chloroformate in the absence of methyl nitrite.

very low catalytic activity, possibly due to the small surface area of the support.

### Conclusion

A novel synthesis of alkyl chloroformates in the gas phase by a palladium-catalyzed reaction using  $\text{Cl}_2$ , CO, and alkyl nitrite was developed. By this method, methyl chloroformate can be produced in good yield and in high selectivity. The reaction proceeds according to Eq. 4.

This reaction is very clean and suitable for the production of chloroformate in industrial process.

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