CHEMISTRY LETTERS, pp. 511-514, 1989.

Studies of cis-trans Isomerization of Stilbene Anion Radicals by Means of a Flow-Electrolysis ESR Method

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Mechanism and kinetics of the cis-trans isomerization of stilbene anion radicals was revealed with a flow-electrolysis ESR method in N,N-dimethylformamide.

The isomerization of cis-stilbene anion radical (CS^-) produced from reduction of cis-stilbene (CS) by a suitable electron donor has been extensively investigated by Szwarc et al.[1-4] They have found that CS^- quantitatively converted into the anion radical (TS^-) of the trans isomer (TS) through the rapid isomerization of the dianion (CS^{2-}). Since the isomerizing intermediate, CS^{2-}, was generated from further reduction of CS^- by the electron donor,[4] this isomerization is obviously promoted by the electron donors. Therefore, for an understanding of the isomerization of CS^- itself, it is inevitable to investigate the isomerization of CS^- in a solution which does not contain electron donors.

Because the spectrophotometric observation of CS^- may induce its photoisomerization,[5] an ESR technique is desirable for the study of the isomerization of CS^-. However, the observation of the ESR spectrum of CS^- is very difficult due to the fact that the isomerization of CS^- to TS^- occurs rapidly, and the full spectrum of CS^- has so far been observed only at a very low temperature of $-90\ ^{\circ}C$.[6]

These problems were overcome by using a flow-electrolysis ESR method which we have developed.[7] This method enables us not only to observe ESR spectra of rather unstable ion radicals but also to adjust their concentrations quantitatively. Therefore, kinetic study of the cis-trans isomerization of stilbene anion radicals could be carried out using this method. Furthermore, electrochemically generated CS^- can be expected to isomerize without the possible interactions of chemical reductants. We report herein that the mechanism and kinetics of the isomerization

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of CS^- itself were revealed for the first time.

An N,N-dimethylformamide (DMF) solution containing 2 mM (1 M = 1 mol dm^{-3}) cis-stilbene and 0.1 M tetraethylammonium perchlorate in a reservoir was deoxygenated and deaerated. The solution flowed into the electrolytic flow-cell and was electrolyzed outside of the ESR cavity. The electrolyzed solution rapidly flowed into the capillary tube placed in the cavity. The dead time of the flow-cell was 10 s at a flow rate of 0.2 cm^3 min^{-1}.

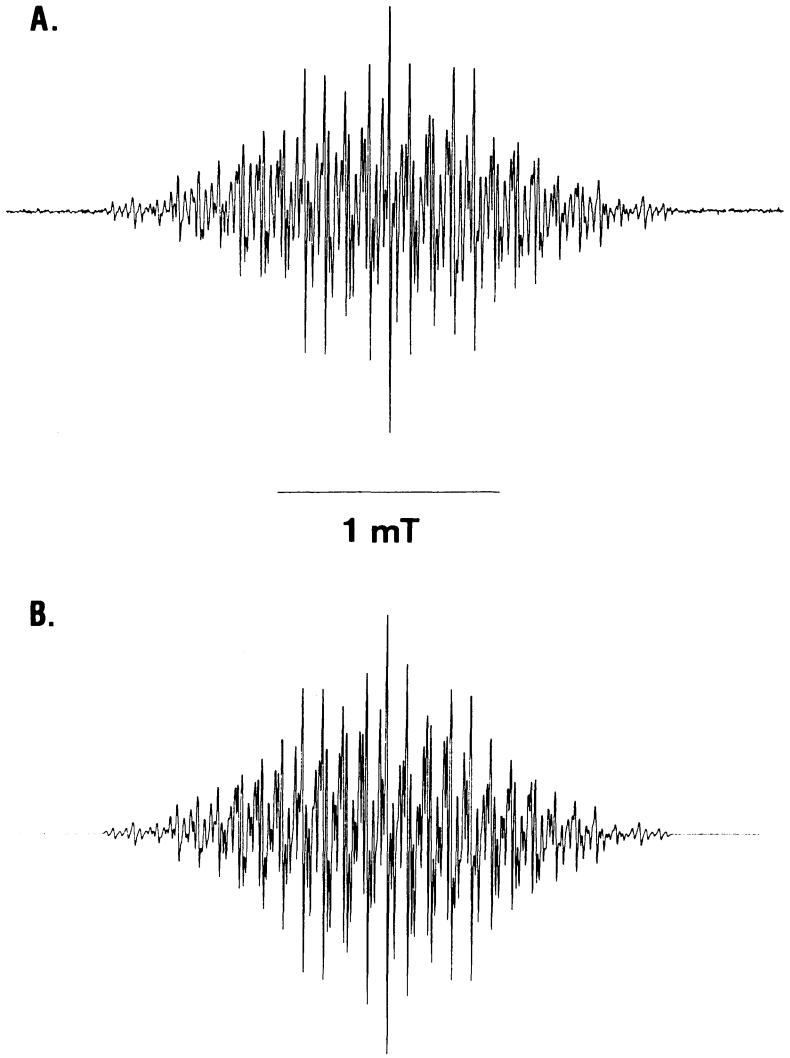

Fig. 1. (A) ESR spectrum of CS^- in DMF at -50 °C; (B) simulated spectrum of (A).

The symmetric ESR spectrum observed on reduction of CS at room temperature was identical with that of TS^-. However, it changed considerably with decreasing the temperature. When CS was reduced at -10 °C, the ESR spectrum showed an asymmetric pattern, indicating that both TS^- and CS^- were present in the solution. At a lower temperature of -30 or -50 °C, the ESR spectrum became symmetric again, and it was quite different from that of TS^-. Figure 1A shows the ESR spectrum obtained at -50 °C. The ESR spectrum (Fig. 1B) simulated using the hyperfine coupling constants (hfcc's, in mT) of **a**(2H, ethylene) 0.271, **a**(2H, ortho-1) 0.198, **a**(2H, ortho-2) 0.291, **a**(2H, meta-1) 0.031, **a**(2H, meta-2) 0.090, **a**(2H,

para) 0.381 is in excellent agreement with the experimental one and the hfcc values determined were almost same as those reported, i.e., **a**(2H, ethylene) 0.268, **a**(2H, ortho-1) 0.194, **a**(2H, ortho-2) 0.291, **a**(2H, meta-1) 0.030, **a**(2H, meta-2) 0.088, **a**(2H, para) 0.386.[6] Therefore, the detected radical was assigned to be CS^-.

Because the total spectral extension of CS^- was markedly narrower than that of TS^-, the progress of the isomerization from CS^- to TS^- could be monitored by looking at the ESR signal which was not overlapped with those of CS^-. Figure 2A shows the low-field part of the ESR spectrum of CS^- which was recorded at -50 °C in the flowing solution. The signal indicated by the arrow in Fig. 2A was ascribed to that of a minute amount of TS^-. After the stop of the flow, the intensity of this signal gradually increased (Fig. 2B). The same ESR spectrum as that of TS^- was observed after the signal intensity attained to a constant value. Fig. 2C shows the low-field part of the spectrum.

It was found that the isomerization was 2nd order with respect to CS^- by analyzing the growing curves observed for the various initial concentrations of CS^- and CS. Moreover, the 2nd-order rate constants (k_2's) were independent of the concentration of CS. Therefore, the present isomerization obeys the rate equation represented by Eq. 1.

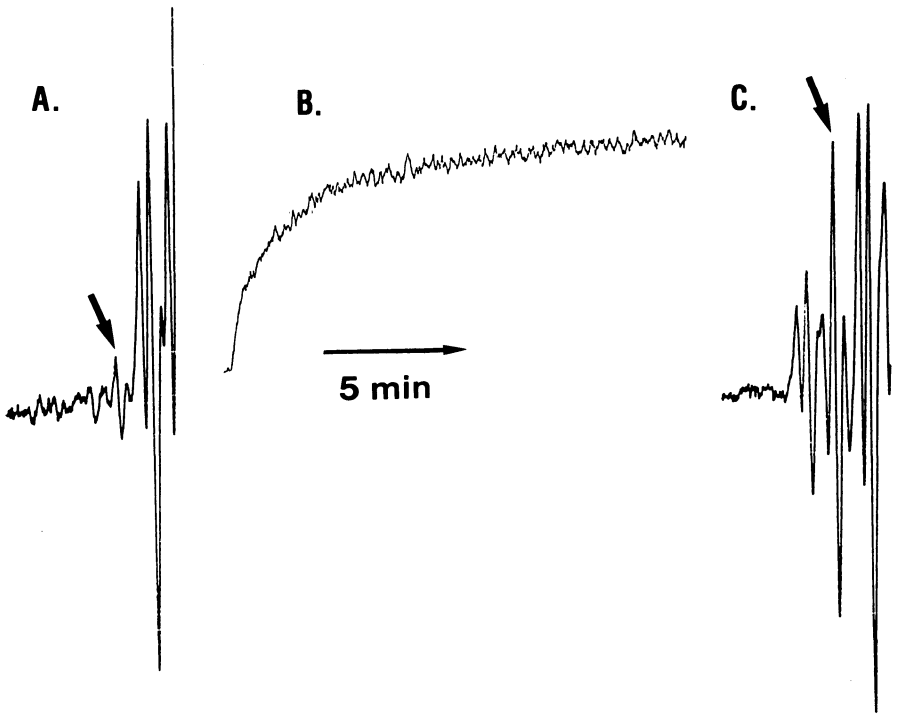

Fig. 2. (A) The low-field part of the ESR spectrum of CS^- in flowing at -50 °C; (B) the time-course of the signal indicated by the arrow in (A) after the stop of the flow; (C) the part of the spectrum observed after the signal attaining to a constant value.

$$d[CS^-]/dt = -k_2 [CS^-]^2 \quad (1)$$

After the consideration of possible mechanisms of the isomerization of CS^- to TS^-, it turned out that only Mechanism I could account for this rate equation.

Mechanism I

$$2CS^- \xrightarrow{k_2} CS^{2-} + CS \quad (I\text{-}1)$$

$$CS^{2-} \xrightarrow{\text{fast}} TS^{2-} \quad (I\text{-}2)$$

$$CS + TS^{2-} \xrightarrow{\text{fast}} CS^- + TS^- \quad (I\text{-}3)$$

It is concluded that the isomerization of CS^- in the simplest reaction system proceeds through Mechanism I and that the rate-determining step is the disproportionation of CS^-'s (Step I-1). The rate constant of the disproportionation (k_2) was determined to be 6.5 $M^{-1}s^{-1}$ at -50 °C and 77 $M^{-1}s^{-1}$ at -30 °C in DMF.

Mechanism I exhibits that the isomerization of CS^- proceeds via CS^{2-}. Thus, it is proved that the spontaneous isomerization of CS^- is considerably unfavorable while the isomerization of CS^{2-} takes place very rapidly.

It is of interest to compare the isomerization mechanism induced by the chemical reduction[1-4] with that induced by the electrochemical reduction. Although CS^{2-} involves in both cases (Step I-2), it is generated from reduction of CS by the electron donor in the former, and from the disproportionation of CS^-'s (Step I-1) in the latter. The disproportionation of CS^-'s has not so far been considered in the interpretation of the isomerization of CS^-. The details of this study will be described elsewhere.

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(Received January 12, 1989)