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Tetrahedron Letters 46 (2005) 5229-5232

Tetrahedron Letters

Cu-nanoparticles: a chemoselective catalyst for the aza-Michael reactions of N-alkyl- and N-arylpiperazines with acrylonitrile

Akhilesh K. Verma,^{a,*} Rupesh Kumar,^a Preeti Chaudhary,^a Amit Saxena,^b Ravi Shankar,^b Subho Mozumdar^b and Ramesh Chandra^{a,b}

^aSynthetic Organic Chemistry Research Laboratory, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Center for Biomedical Research, University of Delhi, Delhi 110007, India ^bDepartment of Chemistry, University of Delhi, Delhi 110007, India

> Received 7 March 2005; revised 16 May 2005; accepted 25 May 2005 Available online 13 June 2005

Abstract—A novel method for effecting the aza-Michael reactions of N-alkyl- and N-arylpiperazines with acrylonitrile using Cunanoparticles is described. The method features the use of 10 mol % Cu (14-17 nm) nanoparticles under mild reaction conditions to afford the addition products in good to excellent yields. The Cu-nanoparticles selectively catalysed the aza-Michael reaction of N-alkyl- and N-arylpiperazines in the presence of aromatic amino or aliphatic hydroxy groups. © 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

The conjugate addition of amines to carbon–carbon double bonds is a useful protocol in synthetic organic chemistry. ^{1,2} It is used extensively in the synthesis of pharmaceutical intermediates, peptide analogues, antibiotics and other biologically active molecules and drugs. ^{3–5}

In the past few years, a number of alternative procedures have been developed, and in particular, various catalysts have been investigated such as palladium, InCl₃, CeCl₃·7H₂O-NaI, Bi(NO₃)₃, Bi(OTf)₃, bmimBF₄, activated silica gel¹² and clay. However, their use in stiochiometric amounts often poses severe environmental problems in waste disposal. Moreover, the high cost of ionic liquids, elevated temperatures and apprehension regarding the toxicity of some of them have led us to develop a selective, simpler, cheaper and efficient metal catalyst.

Recent work in the field of metal nanoparticles as catalysts in synthetic organic chemistry has gained much interest. ^{14–31} Pioneering work includes: (i) the Mizoroki–Heck reaction using palladium nanoparticles, ^{14–16} (ii) Suzuki cross-coupling reactions using palladium

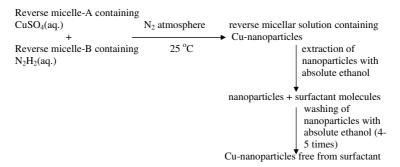
nanoparticles, ^{14,16–23} (iii) Stille type reactions, ^{24–26} (iv) Sonogashira coupling reactions, ²¹ (v) Tsuji–Trost allylation and Pauson–Khand reactions ^{27,28} and other reactions catalysed by nanoparticles ^{29–31} prompted this account. Current literature shows that the application of Cu-nanoparticles as catalysts in organic synthesis has been little explored. Copper nanoparticles are particularly attractive, being cheap (they can be prepared from CuSO₄), are high yielding, need mild reaction conditions and are recyclable. ^{17,32} Rothenberg and co-workers have recently reported the use of copper nanoparticles, which are less harmful to the environment than any other metals in Suzuki cross coupling reactions. ³³

Herein, we report a novel protocol that employs Cunanoparticles as an efficient and selective catalyst in aza-Michael reactions of *N*-alkyl- and *N*-arylpiperazines with acrylonitrile. Additionally, in our protocol, the copper nanoparticles catalysed the aza-Michael reaction selectively in the presence of aromatic amino or aliphatic hydroxy groups. To the best of our knowledge a report by Deshpande and co-workers using a clay catalyst, is the only other example of a chemoselective aza-Michael reaction in the presence of aromatic amino groups.¹³

Reduction of Cu²⁺ ions to Cu(0) in a reverse micellar system was employed to prepare the copper nanoparticles (Scheme 1).^{34–36} The sizes of the Cu-nanoparticles

Keywords: Cu-nanoparticles; Aza-Michael reaction; Piperazine; Cyanoethylation; Acrylonitrile.

^{*}Corresponding author. Tel.: +91 11 55782976; fax: +91 11 27666248; e-mail: akhilesh682000@yahoo.com



Scheme 1. Preparation of Cu-nanoparticles.

prepared at $W_o = 5$ (the water content parameter W_o defined as the molar ratio of water to surfactant concentration, $W_o = [\text{H}_2\text{O}]/[\text{surfactant}])$ were confirmed as 14–17 nm through quasi elastic light scattering data (QELS) (Fig. 1a) and transmission electron microscopy (TEM) (Fig. 1b). The Cu-nanoparticles prepared were round in shape and brown in colour (colloidal state). The metallic nature of the Cu(0)-nanoparticles was confirmed by a characteristic UV absorption of particles dispersed in cyclohexane (580 nm) (see Supporting information for the calculation and preparation of Cunanoparticles).

Cu-nanoparticles, 14–17 nm in size have been used efficiently for the conjugate addition of *N*-alkyl- or *N*-arylpiperazines to acrylonitrile (Scheme 2).³⁸ A control experiment was conducted in the absence of a catalyst and it was observed that the addition of *N*-phenylpiperazine to acrylonitrile produced the corresponding product in 19% yield in 48 h. Using our protocol, we were able to react acrylonitrile with various *N*-alkyland *N*-arylpiperazines (Table 1) using 10 mol % Cu-nanoparticles.

When the amino alcohol 2-piperazin-1-ylethanol 4, with an aliphatic hydroxy group and a 2° amino group, was exposed to an excess of acrylonitrile 2 (2.5 equiv) and an excess of Cu-nanoparticles in refluxing THF, only 3-[4-(2-hydroxyethyl)piperazin-1-yl]propanenitrile 5 (Scheme 3) was formed demonstrating the selectivity of the aza-Michael reaction in the presence of an aliphatic hydroxyl group.

The aromatic amines, *p*-anisidine, *p*-toluidine, and *o*-aminophenol did not react with acrylonitrile. A control experiment was performed with an equal mixture of *p*-anisidine and *N*-phenylpiperazine and an excess of acrylonitrile using Cu (14–17 nm) nanoparticles (Table 2). The former remained unaffected while the latter furnished the addition product in high yield.

Under our conditions, we obtained the desired product chemoselectively. This selectivity could be useful in synthetic applications. The catalyst is required to accelerate the rate of the aza-Michael reaction by making acrylonitrile more electrophilic.

Known compounds were identified by comparison of their melting points with those reported in the literature^{36,37} and were also fully characterised from spectroscopic data.³⁹

In summary, these results demonstrate that Cu-nanoparticles (14–17 nm) can catalyse C–N bond formation (aza-Michael reaction) in various N-alkyl- and N-aryl-

Scheme 2. Cyanoethylation of *N*-alkyl- and *N*-arylpiperazines using Cu (14–17 nm) nanoparticles.

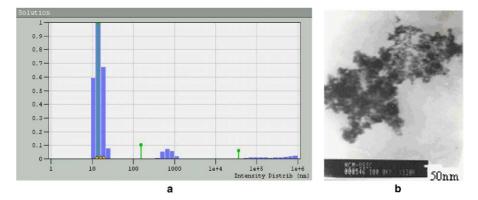


Figure 1. (a) QELS data of Cu-nanoparticles: plot of population distribution in percentile versus size distribution in nanometre, (b) TEM image of Cu-nanoparticles. The scale bar corresponds to 50 nm in the TEM image.

Table 1. The aza-Michael reaction of N-alkyl- and N-arylpiperazines with acrylonitrile using Cu-nanoparticles (10 mol %)^a

Entry	1	3	Time (h)	Yield ^b (%)
1	H-N N-H	H-N_NCN	7	80
2	H-N_N-H	NC N CN	16	70°
3	H ₃ C-NN-H	H ₃ C-NN-CN	9	85
4	Ph-NN-H	Ph-N_NCN	8	82
5	PhH ₂ C-NN-H	PhH ₂ C-NN-CN	8	78
6	N-H OCH ₃	N N CN	8	90
7	N-H	\sim	8	86
8	H ₃ C — N NH	H ₃ C — N N — CN	8	88

^a Reaction conditions: 1.0 equiv of 1, 1.20 equiv of 2, 10 mol % of Cu (14–17 nm) nanoparticles in THF at room temperature stirred under an inert atmosphere.

Scheme 3. A chemoselective aza-Michael reaction of 2-piperazin-1-ylethanol with acrylonitrile using Cu-nanoparticles.

Table 2. A chemoselective aza-Michael reaction of *N*-alkyl- and *N*-arylpiperazines in the presence of aromatic amines with acrylonitrile using copper nanoparticles^a

Entry	R	Product 8	Yield ^b (%)
1	Н	Ph-N N—CN	80
2	OCH_3	Ph-N_NCN	87
3	CH_3	Ph-N_NCN	79
4	ОН	Ph-NNCN	89

^a Reaction conditions: 1.0 equiv of **6**, 1 equiv of **7**, 2.5 equiv of **2** and 15 mol % Cu-nanoparticles in THF at room temperature stirred under an inert atmosphere.

^b Isolated yield.

^c Reaction conditions for entry 2: 1.0 equiv of 1, 2.4 equiv of 2, 15 mol % of Cu (14–17 nm) nanoparticles in THF at 25 °C stirred under an inert atmosphere.

^b Isolated yield.

piperazines that such transformations can be readily achieved chemoselectively in the presence of an aromatic amino or aliphatic hydroxy groups. Our protocol avoids the use of expensive reagents and high temperatures and the catalyst can be recovered. Additional applications are currently under investigation.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge financial support from the Department of Science and Technology, New Delhi, for this work. R.K. and P.C. are thankful to CSIR for SRF and JRF.

Supplementary data

Experimental procedures and characterisation of Cunanoparticles. Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version at doi: 10.1016/j.tetlet.2005.05.108.

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- 38. (a) General procedure for the aza-Michael reaction of N-alkyl- and N-arylpiperazines (Scheme 2): To a stirred solution of amine (1.0 equiv) and acrylonitrile (1.2 equiv) in THF (30 mL), Cu-nanoparticles (14–17 nm, 10 mol %) were added at room temperature and stirring was continued for 8–16 h under nitrogen. After completion of the reaction (TLC), THF was removed in vacuo, the reaction mixture was treated with water and extracted with ethyl acetate. The organic layer was dried over Na₂SO₄ and after the removal of the solvent in vacuo, the residue was purified by column chromatography (silica gel 250–400 mesh size)
- 39. 3-Piperazin-1-ylpropanenitrile, yellow oil; ¹H NMR (CDCl₃, 300 MHz): δ (ppm) 2.89 (t, J = 6.0 Hz, 2H), 2.68 (t, J = 6.0 Hz, 2H), 2.53–2.47 (m, 8H), 1.80 (s, 1H); ¹³C NMR (CDCl₃, 75 MHz): δ (ppm) 119.18 (CN), 53.87, 51.16, 45.84, 15.62; TOF-MS ES⁺ m/z: 140 (M+1).