SYNSTORIES

- Di-tert-butylisobutylsilyl, Another Useful Protecting Group
- Silver-Mediated Trifluoromethoxylation of Aryl Stannanes and Arylboronic Acids
- SYNTHESIS/SYNLETT Advisory Board Focus: Professor André B. Charette (Université de Montréal, Canada)
Dear readers,

I would like to take advantage of this editorial to emphasize the importance of your input to the selection of articles to be published in *SYNFORM*. Normally, top quality articles are selected by me following a thorough screening of the current literature, or (less often) are suggested by the Thieme Chemistry Editorial Board members. However, at *SYNFORM* we believe that You, our Readers, could assume the role of protagonists in the selection process, by suggesting high impact articles from the very recent literature that you would like to see featured in *SYNFORM*, including your own papers of course. This is also true for topics of current great interest that you would like to see covered and discussed in *INSIDE STORIES*, or protagonists of organic chemistry that you would like to see in our Young Career Profiles or in ad hoc *INSIDE STORIES* like the interview to Sir Jack Baldwin that was published in issue 01/2008.

We would be delighted to get your suggestions and inputs at synform@chem.polimi.it and we believe that this would make *SYNFORM* even more rich and interesting.

This new issue of *SYNFORM* is in my humble opinion one of the best ever, as it features an outstanding contribution by the group of the Nobel Laureate Professor E. J. Corey (USA) on a novel and highly useful silicon protecting group, and another very exciting piece of research from the group of Professor T. Ritter (USA) about the development of a new methodology for the introduction of the OCF$_3$ group onto aryl stannanes and boronic acids. The issue is completed by an Advisory Board Focus on Professor A. B. Charette (Canada).

Enjoy your reading!

Matteo Zanda

*Editor of SYNFORM*
Silver-Mediated Trifluoromethoxylation of Aryl Stannanes and Arylboronic Acids


Silver-mediated trifluoromethoxylation of aryl stannanes

The trifluoromethoxy group is commonly encountered as a substituent of aromatic groups in drugs and bioactive molecules, but few synthetic methods are available to incorporate this function in organic molecules. Recently, the group of Professor Tobias Ritter from Harvard University (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA) reported a new methodology for the synthesis of trifluoromethoxy arenes based on a cross-coupling reaction of both aryl stannanes and arylboronic acids. The reaction leads to the formation of a new C–OCF₃ bond and is mediated by silver.

The new methodology has a wide scope as it can be used to trifluoromethoxylate a range of functionalized aryl stannanes and boronic acids.

“We began by evaluating the established silver-catalyzed fluorination reaction as a platform to develop the C–OCF₃ bond formation,” said Professor Ritter. “We knew that C–F bonds could be made at 0 °C and were curious to see if we could use what we believe to be multinuclear silver interactions to allow for the trifluoromethoxide anion, an oxidant, and an aryl nucleophile to be cross-coupled at 0 °C or lower.

Some of the products obtained via trifluoromethoxylation of arylstannanes
tem peratures,” he continued. “We found that tris(dimethyl- 
amino)sulfonium trifluorom ethoxide was the most stable 
compound under our reaction conditions and that the best 
conditions involved generating the trifluoromethoxide salt in THF 
while performing the silver-mediated trifluoromethoxylation 
in acetone.” According to Professor Ritter, the use of THF as 
a co-solvent was critical since trifluoromethoxide salt genera-
tion was not successful in acetone. “With boronic acid sub-
strates, one of the challenges was getting the boronic acid to 
transm etalate onto the silver,” he said. “Transmetalation could 
be accomplished effectively in MeOH, thus, a two-step one-
pot procedure was designed for the boronic acid substrates.

“When we designed the project to make C ary l–OC F 3 bonds, 
cross-coupling seemed an attractive approach,” said Professor 
Ritter. “Many of the challenging C–X bond formations have 
been accomplished via palladium cross-coupling. However, we 
recognized that most of these cross-coupling reactions employ 
strongly basic conditions and often temperatures of 80 °C or 
higher.” At these temperatures, explained Professor Ritter, the 
cross-coupling partner to form the C ary l–OC F 3 bond, the tri-
fluoromethoxide anion, could decompose to carbonic difluoride 
before it is able to react with the metal center. “Thus, we want-
ed to explore the possibility of using multinuclear metal inter-
actions to lower the activation barrier for C ary l–OC F 3 bond for-
tomation to temperatures where the trifluoromethoxide salt 
would be stable during the course of the reaction,” he con-
tinued. “Previously, we have speculated that bimetallic silver 
redox catalysis may accomplish challenging C–X bond for-
mations at temperatures lower than those commonly used for 
other cross-coupling reactions (J. Am. Chem. Soc. 2010, 
132, 12150).”

In the conclusions of the JACS paper, Professor Ritter 
 wrote that “the necessity for toxic aryl stannanes and the two-
step procedure from arylboronic acids currently limits the 
practicality of the presented trifluoromethoxylation reaction.” 
However, he also pointed out that “currently, no other method 
is available to trifluoromethoxylate aryl nucleophiles via 
cross-coupling.” In spite of these limitations, the new metho-
dology is highly valuable and will undoubtedly facilitate 
further work in the area of trifluoromethoxy arenes, allowing 
for a deeper understanding of the true potential of these com-
ounds in drug discovery and materials science.

About the authors

Tobias Ritter was born in 1975 in 
Lübeck (Germany). He received his 
undergraduate education in Braun-
schweig (Germany), Bordeaux 
(France), Lausanne (Switzerland), 
and Stanford (USA), and received a 
Master of Science from Braun-
schweig University in 1999. He has 
done undergraduate research with 
Professor Barry M. Trost at Stan-
ford, obtained his PhD working 
with Prof. Erick M. Carreira at ETH 
Zürich (Switzerland) in 2004, and was a postdoctoral fellow 
with Professor Robert H. Grubbs at Caltech (USA). In 2006, 
Tobias was appointed as Assistant Professor in the Depart-
ment of Chemistry and Chemical Biology at Harvard 
University and promoted to Associate Professor in 2010. 
His research program is based on synthetic organic and 
organometallic chemistry. The Ritter lab currently focuses on 
fluorination chemistry for late-stage functionalization of 
complex natural and unnatural products and bimetallic trans-
ition-metal redox catalysis.
Protecting groups are key elements in synthetic organic chemistry and although there are many good reasons for limiting their use (atom economy, environmental factors, cost of reagents, just to mention a few) they will likely continue to be essential items in the toolbox of organic chemists for the next decades at least. For this reason, the development of new protecting groups having improved chemoselectivity, orthogonality and an optimized profile in terms of stability/reactivity (i.e., deprotection) continues to represent an important and very active area of research. Recently, Professor E. J. Corey and Dr. Huan Liang, an NSERC postdoctoral fellow, from the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology, Harvard University (USA), reported a novel highly versatile and selective silicon-based protecting group, the di-tert-butylisobutylsilyl or BIBS.

“Silicon is well known for its utility in coupling reactions, as a blocking agent, and for its pharmaceutical properties. In this regard, we initiated a project to explore some bulky silicon groups and their applications in chemical reactions,” said Dr. Liang. “We aimed to create a general method to prepare and utilize these silyl groups in the total synthesis of natural products, preparation of drug candidates, green chemistry, and other related areas.” Significant progress was achieved by developing the first synthesis of di-tert-butylisobutylsilyl triflate (BIBS-OTf). “We have developed a very efficient synthesis of this particular compound in two steps from inexpensive, commercially available starting materials,” confirmed Dr. Liang (Scheme 1). In this process, isobutyltrichlorosilane was condensed with 3.5 equivalents of t-BuLi at high temperature to give di-tert-butyl isobutylsilane, which was then reacted with triflic acid to give the corresponding triflate in ~70% yield on large scale (10–20 grams). “Among the different leaving groups, triflate is the most effective in terms of enhancing the electrophilicity of the silicon center, and offsets its low reactivity imparted by the steric bulk of the alkyl groups,” he explained.

Dr. Liang and Professor Corey explained that lack of commercial availability sometimes limits the extensive use of a reagent. “In order to solve this problem, we initiated a collaboration with Gelest, Inc., the world’s largest silicon R&D company, and successfully commercialized this useful reagent (Figure 1),” said Dr. Liang.

Professor Corey and Dr. Liang pointed out that to be qualified as an ideal protecting group, the NMR spectrum of the resulting compound must have an easily recognizable pattern, namely its chemical shifts must be distinguishable from the core molecule’s functional groups. “Di-tert-butylisobutylsilyl
triflate (BIBS-OTf) meets this criterion (Figure 2),” said Dr. Liang. “In a →H NMR spectrum, the two tert-butyl groups show at 1–1.1 ppm as a singlet (with integration of 18 H, peak c) and the geminal methyl groups show at 0.9–1 ppm as a doublet (6 H, peak b); the methylene group (CH₂) shows at 0.6–0.9 ppm as a doublet (2 H, peak d); and the only CH shows at ~2.0 ppm as a septet (1 H, peak a),” he explained.

Professor Corey explained that this unique reagent (BIBS-OTf) finds application in several aspects of chemical synthesis. “For example, BIBS triflate reacts with alcohols, carboxylic acids and phenols to afford the corresponding silyl ethers and esters in good to excellent yields (Scheme 2),” continued Dr. Liang. “In general, protection of amines with silyl-based reagents is not very useful in chemical synthesis because of the instability of the N-Si bond to hydrolysis. BIBS provides a solution to this long-standing problem and demonstrates itself as a new nitrogen-protecting group which survives under various basic and reducing conditions,” he said. “Due to its large steric size, a BIBS group also achieves extremely high selectivity when preparing kinetic BIBS enol ethers from ketone precursors.”

Another key feature of a good protecting group is chemoselectivity. “BIBS-OTF reacts chemoselectively with primary amines or carboxylic acids in the presence of alcohols or phenols in a very efficient manner,” said Dr. Liang. “This unusual reactivity is unprecedented in the traditional silyl groups, such as TBS, TIPS and TBDPS (Figure 3).”
Also in terms of stability, the BIBS group showed very interesting and peculiar properties. “Due to steric hindrance, BIBS ethers showed the highest stability towards deprotection conditions, such as TBAF, HF in pyridine, and hydrolysis, when compared to commonly used silyl ethers (Figure 4).”

“We are confident that our results will be of great assistance to other researchers operating in the area of synthetic organic chemistry. As pointed out by one of the manuscript’s referees, we hope that *This new silyl protecting group will find many applications in our everyday laboratory operations dealing with polyfunctional molecules. It will especially complement the TBDPS/TIPS groups and also extend the repertoire of chemoselective protecting groups,*” concluded Dr. Liang.

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*Matteo Zanda*

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**About the authors**

*From left: Prof. E. J. Corey, Dr. H. Liang*
Background and Purpose. SYNFORM will from time to time portrait SYNTHESIS/SYNLETT Advisory Board members who answer several questions regarding their research interests and revealing their impressions and views on the developments in organic chemistry as a general research field. In this issue, we present Professor André B. Charette, Université de Montréal (Canada).

Interview

SYNFORM | Professor Charette, what are your main current research interests?

A. B. Charette | My main current research interests are in the area of stereoselective synthesis of cyclopropane derivatives, heterocycle synthesis and functionalization as well as simple chemoselective transformations using amides. We are also involved in using phosphonium salts as solubility control groups for reagents, scavengers and solution-phase parallel synthesis.

SYNFORM | What is your most important scientific achievement to date and why?

A. B. Charette | One of the most important scientific achievements to date is in the area of the enantioselective cyclopropanation of allylic alcohols to generate either 1,2- or 1,2,3-substituted cyclopropanes using zinc carbenoids. This transformation is quite important, since it is one of the most effective ways to make this class of compounds. It is also good to see that this chemistry is used industrially.

SYNFORM | Can you mention a recent discovery in the area of organic chemistry, which you consider to be particularly important?

A. B. Charette | Most of the chemistry involving direct C–H functionalization reactions is quite impressive. We are now able to do things that we could not have imagined doing before. I also like flow chemistry a lot, but this is considered to be more a new technique than a fundamental discovery.

SYNFORM | What is the main goal in your scientific career?

A. B. Charette | My main goal is really to continue having fun doing chemistry. I believe that when you enjoy what you do and are passionate about doing research and teaching, good things happen naturally. One of the greatest satisfactions I get from work is to witness how my students evolve as chemists over the years and to see what career path they
end up choosing after they leave my group. It’s always nice
to hear from them and to know that they are successful in the
career they are pursuing and that they too enjoy it. I always
feel like I must have played some role in their education.

SYNFORM | Do you have hobbies, besides chemistry?

A. B. Charette | I do a lot of cardiovascular activities
(cycling, running, swimming,). This allows me to have
enough energy to deal with chemistry and family-related
activities.
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In the next issues:

SYNSTORIES

- Copper-Catalyzed Enantioselective Additions to Oxocarbenium Ions (Focus on an article from the current literature)
- Enantioselective Preparation and Chemoselective Cross-Coupling of 1,1-Diboron Compounds (Focus on an article from the current literature)

FURTHER HIGHLIGHTS

SYNTHESIS
Review on: Supported Synthesis of Halogenated Organic Compounds
(by V. Gouverneur et al.)

SYNLETT
Account on: ‘Pseudo-halide’ Derivatives of Grubbs- and Schrock-Type Catalysts for Olefin Metathesis
(by E. B. Anderson, M. R. Buchmeiser)

SYNFACS
Syndact of the Month in category “Synthesis of Materials and Unnatural Products”: An All-Organic Porphyrin and its Properties

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