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Electrochemical fluoromethylation triggered lactonizations of alkenes under semi-aqueous conditions

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# Electrochemical fluoromethylation triggered lactonizations of alkenes under semi-aqueous conditions†

Sheng Zhang,<sup>a</sup> Lijun Li,<sup>a</sup> Jinjin Zhang,<sup>a</sup> Junqi Zhang,<sup>a</sup> Mengyu Xue<sup>a</sup> and Kun Xu<sup>a,b</sup>

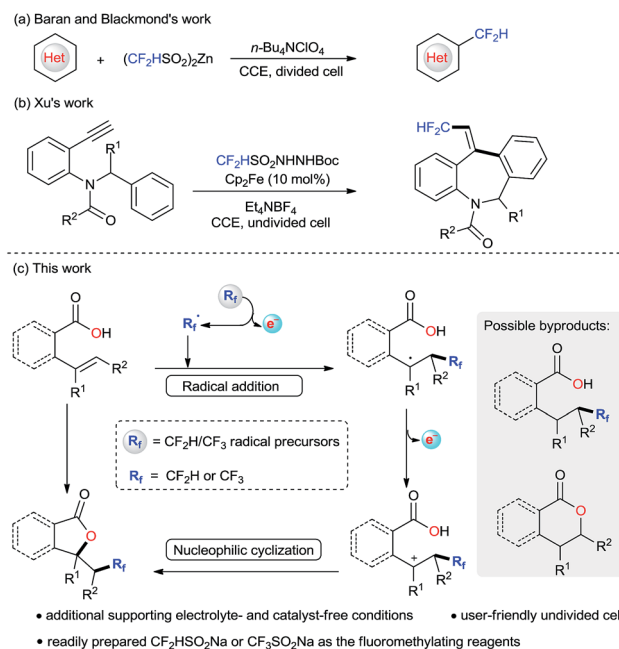
An electrochemical difluoromethylation triggered lactonization of alkenes was developed for the first time. This protocol employs readily prepared  $\text{CF}_2\text{HSO}_2\text{Na}$  as the difluoromethylating reagent, affording unprecedented  $\text{CF}_2\text{H}$ -containing lactones in moderate yields. Moreover, with  $\text{CF}_3\text{SO}_2\text{Na}$  as the trifluoromethylating reagent, a wide array of  $\text{CF}_3$ -containing lactones were obtained under additional supporting electrolyte- and catalyst-free conditions.

## Introduction

The introduction of fluorine atoms into organic molecules has attracted increasing interest because the incorporation of fluorine-containing groups can significantly modify the properties of bioactive molecules.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to various methods for trifluoromethylation of organic substrates,<sup>2,3</sup> direct difluoromethylation is still underdeveloped,<sup>4</sup> even though the difluoromethyl group ( $\text{CF}_2\text{H}$ ) is an intriguing structural motif in drug design.<sup>5</sup> Among the existing methods for direct difluoromethylations, radical processes have played an important role in obtaining  $\text{CF}_2\text{H}$ -containing compounds.<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that there are many recent reports of photoinduced difluoromethylations of heterocycles<sup>7</sup> and alkenes.<sup>8</sup> However, expensive Ir- or Ru-based photoredox catalysts and synthetically challenging  $\text{CF}_2\text{H}$  radical precursors are commonly required. Synthetic electrochemistry has the obvious advantage of generating radicals in a controllable way to minimize the possibilities of radical dimerizations, and can realize some transformations in ways that were previously difficult or inaccessible by traditional methods.<sup>9,10</sup> In this context, Baran, Blackmond and co-workers disclosed an electrochemical difluoromethylation of heterocycles in a divided cell with zinc sulfonates as the difluoromethylating reagent and  $n\text{-Bu}_4\text{NClO}_4$  as the supporting electrolyte (Scheme 1a).<sup>11</sup> Recently, a breakthrough in electrochemical difluoromethylation of alkynes with

$\text{CF}_2\text{HSO}_2\text{NHNHBoc}$  was reported by Xu and co-workers with  $\text{Et}_4\text{NBF}_4$  as the supporting electrolyte (Scheme 1b).<sup>12</sup> Given the importance of the  $\text{CF}_2\text{H}$  group in medicinal chemistry and the advantages of synthetic electrochemistry, the development of new electrochemical difluoromethylation reactions in a user-friendly single cell setup in the absence of an additional supporting electrolyte is attractive.

Lactones constitute useful building blocks in many pharmaceutically relevant molecules.<sup>13</sup> In this regard, the construction of unprecedented  $\text{CF}_2\text{H}$ -containing lactones may be



<sup>a</sup>Engineering Technology Research Center of Henan Province for Photo- and Electrochemical Catalysis, College of Chemistry and Pharmaceutical Engineering, Nanyang Normal University, Nanyang, 473061, China. E-mail: shengzhang@nynu.edu.cn; xukun@nynu.edu.cn

<sup>b</sup>College of Life Science & Bioengineering, Beijing University of Technology, Beijing 100124, China

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Scheme 1 Electrochemical difluoromethylations.



beneficial for medicinal chemistry.<sup>14</sup> We have been interested in electrochemical lactonizations; however, only C–O bonds were constructed for these transformations.<sup>15,16</sup> Considering the powerfulness of radical alkene difunctionalizations for the enhancement of molecular complexity in a single preparative operation,<sup>17</sup> we speculated that it might be possible to construct CF<sub>2</sub>H-containing lactones *via* an electrochemical difluoromethylation triggered lactonization of alkenes. The proposed synthetic pathway is shown in Scheme 1c. First, electrochemically generated fluoromethyl radical undergoes alkene addition to give a carbon radical intermediate. Further electrochemical oxidation gives a carbocationic intermediate, which undergoes subsequent nucleophilic cyclization to afford desired fluoromethylated lactones. While the proposed reaction pathway appears quite reasonable, its implementation proved to be challenging. First, the electrochemical oxidation of the carbon radical intermediate should occur quickly before H· abstraction. Second, the oxidation potentials of R<sub>f</sub> radical precursors should be much lower than that of alkenes. Otherwise, the undesired single C–O bond formation would be the predominant process instead of desired alkene difunctionalization. In this report, we establish that electrochemical difunctionalization of alkenes can be achieved using semi-aqueous conditions to afford unprecedented CF<sub>2</sub>H-containing lactones with CF<sub>2</sub>–HSO<sub>2</sub>Na<sup>18</sup> as the CF<sub>2</sub>H radical precursor under catalyst-free conditions. Moreover, this environmentally benign protocol could also be applicable for the access to CF<sub>3</sub>-containing lactones in the absence of a metal catalyst, chemical oxidant, and additional supporting electrolyte.

## Results and discussion

Initially, we commenced the electrochemical carboxydifluoromethylation reaction by using **1c** and CF<sub>2</sub>HSO<sub>2</sub>Na (**2**) as

the model substrates in an undivided cell equipped with platinum electrodes (Table 1). When HOAc was employed as the additive with a mixture of CH<sub>3</sub>CN and H<sub>2</sub>O as the solvent, the isolated yield of the corresponding CF<sub>2</sub>H-containing lactone **3c** was obtained to be 67% (entry 1). Interestingly, adding supporting electrolytes into this reaction mixture led to a decrease in the yields (entries 2 and 3).<sup>19</sup> Changing the Pt electrodes to graphite failed to maintain the reaction yield (entries 4 and 5). When the reaction was carried out in the absence of HOAc, only a trace amount of the desired product **3c** was detected (entry 6). This result suggested that the cathodic proton reduction may limit the overall reaction rate.<sup>20</sup> Replacing HOAc with HCl only led to a trace amount of the product **3c** (entry 7). Increasing or decreasing the current density failed to improve the yield (entries 8 and 9).

Having established the optimized reaction conditions, we then examined the substrate scope of electrochemical difluoromethylation triggered lactonization of alkenes. As shown in Table 2, the aromatic carboxylic acids were tolerated

Table 2 The substrate scope of electrochemical carboxydifluoromethylation<sup>a</sup>

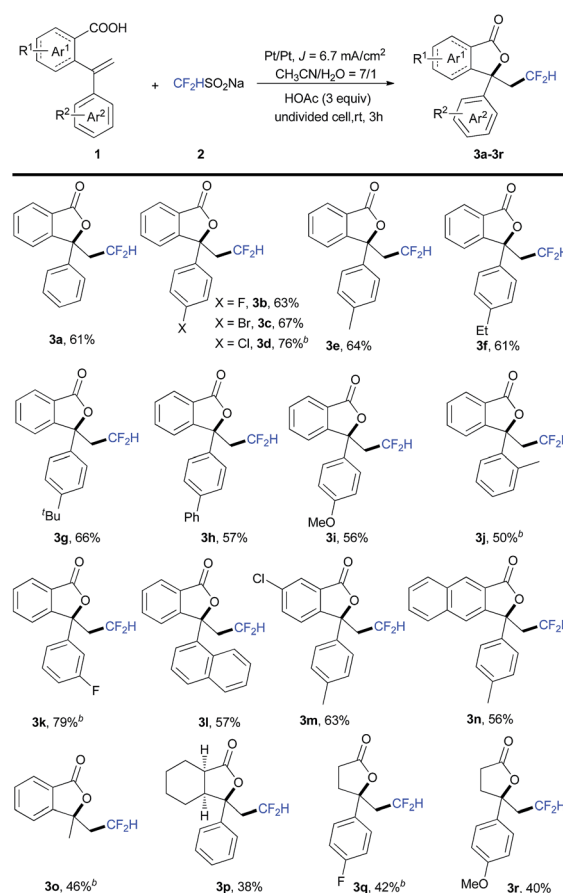


Table 1 Optimization of carboxydifluoromethylation of alkenes<sup>a</sup>

| Entry | Changes from standard conditions  | Yield <sup>b</sup> (%) |
|-------|---|------------------------|
| 1     | None  | 67                     |
| 2     | 0.1 M <sup>n</sup> Bu <sub>4</sub> NPF <sub>6</sub> was used as the electrolyte | 59                     |
| 3     | 0.1 M LiClO <sub>4</sub> was used as the electrolyte                            | 52                     |
| 4     | Graphite(+) and Pt(–) were used as the electrodes                               | 47                     |
| 5     | Pt(+) and graphite(–) were used as the electrodes                               | 39                     |
| 6     | No HOAc   | Trace                  |
| 7     | HCl was used instead of HOAc  | Trace                  |
| 8     | <i>J</i> = 10 mA cm <sup>–2</sup>   | 61                     |
| 9     | <i>J</i> = 5 mA cm <sup>–2</sup>  | 43                     |

<sup>a</sup> Reaction conditions: undivided cell, Pt plate (1.5 × 1.5 cm<sup>2</sup>, *J* = 6.7 mA cm<sup>–2</sup>), **1c** (0.5 mmol), **2** (1.25 mmol), CH<sub>3</sub>CN/H<sub>2</sub>O (7/1 mL, v/v), rt, 3 h, and 3.4 F. <sup>b</sup> Isolated yield.

<sup>a</sup> Reaction conditions: undivided cell, Pt plate (1.5 × 1.5 cm<sup>2</sup>, *J* = 6.7 mA cm<sup>–2</sup>), **1** (0.5 mmol), **2** (1.25 mmol), additive HOAc (1.5 mmol), CH<sub>3</sub>CN/H<sub>2</sub>O (7/1 mL, v/v), 3 h, and 3.4 F. <sup>b</sup> Additive HOAc was replaced with TFA (1.5 mmol).





well to give the corresponding CF<sub>2</sub>H-containing lactones in moderate yields (**3a–3o**). For the substituents on the Ar<sup>2</sup> ring, the *para*-substituents had little effect on the chemical yields (**3b–3i**). The *ortho*-substituted substrate **1j** showed decreased reactivity to give the corresponding product **3j** in 50% yield with TFA as the acidic additive instead of HOAc. When the fluoro group was placed at the *meta* position of the Ar<sup>2</sup> ring, the corresponding lactone **3k** was obtained in 79% yield. Replacing the phenyl group with the 1-naphthyl group decreased the yield of **3l** to 57%.

When Ar<sup>2</sup> was replaced with the methyl group, the corresponding lactone **3o** was afforded in 46% yield. It is noteworthy that the challenging substrates of aliphatic carboxylic acids could also be tolerated to give the corresponding lactones **3p–3r** in 38–42% yields.

To make this synthetic methodology more appealing, the electrochemical trifluoromethylation triggered lactonization of alkenes was then examined. As shown in Table 3, moderate to excellent yields of CF<sub>3</sub>-containing lactones were obtained regardless of the electronic nature of *para*-substitutions on the Ar<sup>2</sup> ring (**5a–5i**). Changing the substitution on the Ar<sup>2</sup> ring from the *para*-position to the *ortho*- or *meta*-position caused lower yields (**5j–5l**). The substrate containing a disubstituted Ar<sup>2</sup> group was also tolerated well affording the product **5m** in 64% yield. The fused ring substituted substrates also underwent the

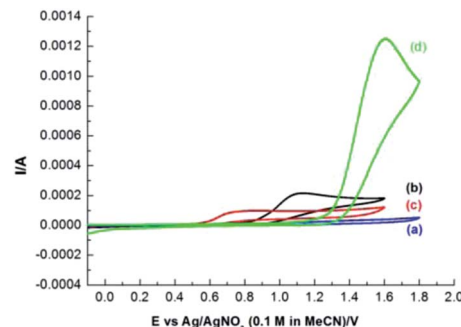


Fig. 1 Cyclic voltammograms of substrates in 0.1 M LiClO<sub>4</sub>/CH<sub>3</sub>CN, using a Pt wire working electrode and glassy carbon and Ag/AgNO<sub>3</sub> (0.1 M in CH<sub>3</sub>CN) as counter and reference electrodes at a 100 mV s<sup>−1</sup> scan rate: (a) background (0.1 M LiClO<sub>4</sub> in CH<sub>3</sub>CN), (b) CF<sub>3</sub>SO<sub>2</sub>Na (5 mmol L<sup>−1</sup>), (c) CF<sub>2</sub>HSO<sub>2</sub>Na (5 mmol L<sup>−1</sup>), and (d) **1a** (5 mmol L<sup>−1</sup>).

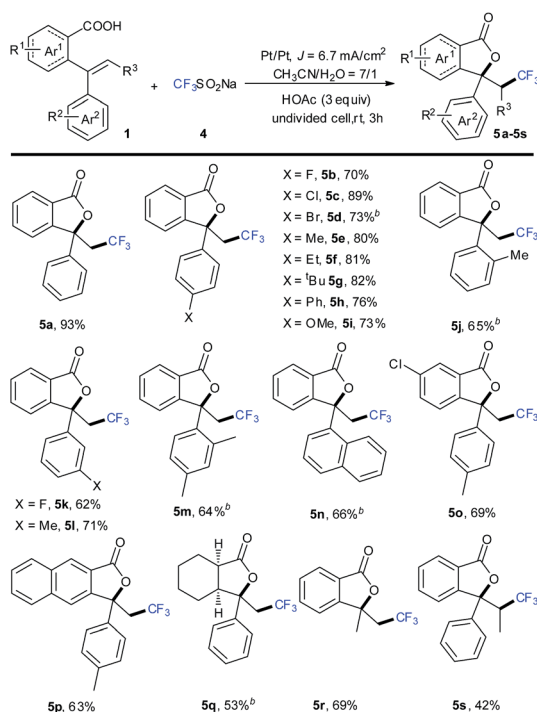
cyclizations smoothly to give the corresponding lactones **5n** and **5p** in 66% and 63% yields, respectively. Replacing the aromatic Ar<sup>1</sup> or Ar<sup>2</sup> group with aliphatic ones decreased the reaction efficiency, giving the corresponding lactones **5q** and **5r** in 53% and 69% yields, respectively. More importantly, the trisubstituted olefin was demonstrated to be a suitable substrate to give the lactone **5s** in 42% yield.

In order to provide a rationale for the reaction pathway proposed in Scheme 1c, cyclic voltammetric (CV) experiments were carried out. As shown in Fig. 1, CF<sub>2</sub>HSO<sub>2</sub>Na and CF<sub>3</sub>SO<sub>2</sub>Na have the oxidation potentials of 0.72 V and 1.06 V, respectively. However, the oxidation potential of alkenes is 1.58 V. These results indicated that CF<sub>2</sub>HSO<sub>2</sub>Na and CF<sub>3</sub>SO<sub>2</sub>Na are much easier to be electrochemically oxidized to generate fluoromethyl radicals than the alkene moiety. The CV experiments which were carried out in CH<sub>3</sub>CN/HOAc or CH<sub>3</sub>CN/H<sub>2</sub>O also indicated that CF<sub>2</sub>HSO<sub>2</sub>Na and CF<sub>3</sub>SO<sub>2</sub>Na are much easier to be electrochemically oxidized than the alkene moiety (see the ESI† for details). The much lower oxidation potentials of CF<sub>2</sub>H and CF<sub>3</sub> radical precursors than that of alkenes are the key to electrochemical carboxyfluoromethylation reactions.

## Experimental

An undivided cell was equipped with a magnet stirrer and platinum plate (1.5 × 1.5 cm<sup>2</sup>) electrodes. The substrate 2-(1-phenylvinyl)benzoic acid **1a** (112 mg, 0.5 mmol), CF<sub>3</sub>SO<sub>2</sub>Na **4** (195 mg, 1.25 mmol) and additive HOAc (86 μL, 1.5 mmol) were added to a mixed solvent of CH<sub>3</sub>CN/H<sub>2</sub>O (7/1 v/v). The resulting mixture was allowed to stir and electrolyze under constant current conditions (*I* = 6.7 mA cm<sup>−2</sup>) at room temperature for 3 hours. Then the volatile solvent was removed with a rotary evaporator and then water (10 mL) was added. The resulting mixture was extracted with ethyl acetate (10 × 3 mL). The combined organic layer was dried over Na<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> and concentrated under vacuum. The residue was purified by column chromatography (ethyl acetate/petroleum ether = 1/15–1/10) on silica gel to afford the desired product **5a** in 93% yield.

Table 3 The substrate scope of electrochemical carboxytrifluoromethylation<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Reaction conditions: undivided cell, Pt plate (1.5 × 1.5 cm<sup>2</sup>), *I* = 6.7 mA cm<sup>−2</sup>, **1** (0.5 mmol), **4** (1.25 mmol, purity > 98%), additive HOAc (1.5 mmol), CH<sub>3</sub>CN/H<sub>2</sub>O (7/1 mL, v/v), 3 h, and 3.4 F. <sup>b</sup> Additive HOAc (1.5 mmol) was replaced with TFA (1.5 mmol).

## Conclusions

We have developed the first example of electrochemical difluoromethylation triggered lactonization of alkenes. Under additional supporting electrolyte- and catalyst-free conditions, a wide array of CF<sub>2</sub>H-containing lactones were obtained in moderate yields. Moreover, this environmentally benign method is also applicable to access pharmaceutically important CF<sub>3</sub>-containing lactones in the absence of a metal catalyst, chemical oxidant, and additional supporting electrolyte.

## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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