

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Convenient synthesis of pentafluoroethyl thioethers *via* catalytic Sandmeyer reaction with a stable fluoroalkylthiolation reagent†

C. Matheis,‡ B. Bayarmagnai,‡ K. Jouvin and L. J. Goossen\*

Aromatic and heteroaromatic diazonium salts were smoothly converted into the corresponding pentafluoroethyl thioethers by reaction with  $\text{Me}_4\text{NSC}_2\text{F}_5$  in the presence of catalytic amounts of elemental copper. This Sandmeyer-type reaction proceeds at room temperature under mild conditions and is applicable to a wide range of functionalised molecules. It enables the late-stage introduction of pentafluoroethylthio groups, a promising but largely unexplored substituent, into bioactive molecules.

Fluorine-containing groups are of exceptional importance in modern bioactive molecules. Approximately 40% of currently marketed agrochemicals and 25% of pharmaceuticals contain fluorine atoms.<sup>1</sup> The systematic introduction and screening of fluorinated residues has become a standard procedure in drug discovery. Thus, methods for the late-stage introduction of fluorinated substituents into functionalised molecules are highly sought-after. In the past decade, various powerful fluoroalkylation methods have been developed.<sup>2</sup> The attention has recently shifted towards fluoroalkyl thioethers, since the  $\text{SCF}_3$  group induces even higher lipophilicity (Hansch constant 1.44 for  $\text{SCF}_3$  vs. 0.88 for  $\text{CF}_3$ ) and membrane permeability.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary trifluoromethylthiolation reactions of arenes are based on electrophilic,<sup>4</sup> nucleophilic,<sup>5</sup> radical,<sup>6</sup> or oxidative processes,<sup>7</sup> usually starting from arylboronic acids or aryl halides.

Our contribution to the field of fluoroalkyl(thiol)ations has been the development of several Sandmeyer-type processes.<sup>8</sup> We have demonstrated that a Sandmeyer-thiocyanation followed by a Langlois-type nucleophilic  $\text{CN}/\text{CF}_3$ - or  $\text{CF}_2\text{H}$ -exchange allows the convenient synthesis of fluoroalkylthioethers.<sup>8f,9</sup> For laboratory-scale applications, the use of pre-formed reagents such as  $(\text{bpy})\text{CuSCF}_3$ ,<sup>10</sup>  $\text{AgSCF}_3$ <sup>5a</sup> and  $\text{Me}_4\text{NSCF}_3$  are more convenient. The bench-stable reagent  $\text{Me}_4\text{NSCF}_3$  was first synthesised by Roeschenthaler and Yagupolskii<sup>11</sup> and has successfully been employed in trifluoromethylthiolations of vinyl iodides,<sup>12</sup> boronic acids,<sup>7d</sup> aryl

halides,<sup>13</sup> aryl triflates,<sup>14</sup> and aryl C–H bonds<sup>15</sup> catalysed by Cu, Ni, or Pd complexes.

In medicinal chemistry,  $\text{C}_2\text{F}_5$  derivatives have repeatedly been found to exhibit properties that are superior to those of their  $\text{CF}_3$  counterparts. Whereas several methods have been reported for the introduction of pentafluoroethyl groups, there are only few reports on the corresponding pentafluoroethylthio compounds.<sup>16</sup> Pentafluoroethyl thioarenes cannot be prepared by classical halogen/fluorine exchange reactions, *e.g.* Swarts-type processes. Traditional syntheses of  $\text{SC}_2\text{F}_5$  moieties are based on the reaction of  $\text{C}_2\text{F}_5$  radicals or carbanions with disulfides or thiols.<sup>17</sup> However, these methods suffer from harsh reaction conditions and limited availability of sulfur-containing substrates.

Modern methods suitable for the late-stage introduction of  $\text{SC}_2\text{F}_5$  groups include the Friedel–Crafts-type reaction of electron-rich arenes with a pentafluoroethyl sulfenamide reagent described by Billard *et al.*<sup>18</sup> and the electrophilic perfluoroalkylthiolation of indoles with perfluoroalkyl sulfinates in the presence of stoichiometric copper chloride reported by Zhang *et al.*<sup>19</sup> However, these methods are limited to electron-rich arenes and indoles. A generally applicable, regioselective method for the introduction of  $\text{SC}_2\text{F}_5$  groups within a single step, based on widely available substrates and an inexpensive fluoroalkylation reagent, would be highly desirable.

We approached this challenge by investigating Sandmeyer-type pentafluoroethylthiolations (Scheme 1).  $\text{Me}_4\text{NSC}_2\text{F}_5$  appeared to be the reagent of choice, because according to a patent by Roeschenthaler, it is easily accessible from tetramethylammonium fluoride, elemental sulfur and  $\text{TMSC}_2\text{F}_5$ .<sup>11a,20</sup>

In order to probe the viability of our approach, we treated 4-methoxybenzenediazonium tetrafluoroborate with  $\text{Me}_4\text{NSC}_2\text{F}_5$  in the presence of 10 mol%  $\text{CuSCN}$  in acetonitrile at room temperature, conditions previously optimised for

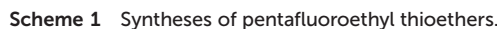
FB Chemie-Organische Chemie, TU Kaiserslautern, Erwin-Schrödinger-Str. Geb. 54, D-67663 Kaiserslautern, Germany. E-mail: goossen@chemie.uni-kl.de;

Fax: +49 631 205 3921

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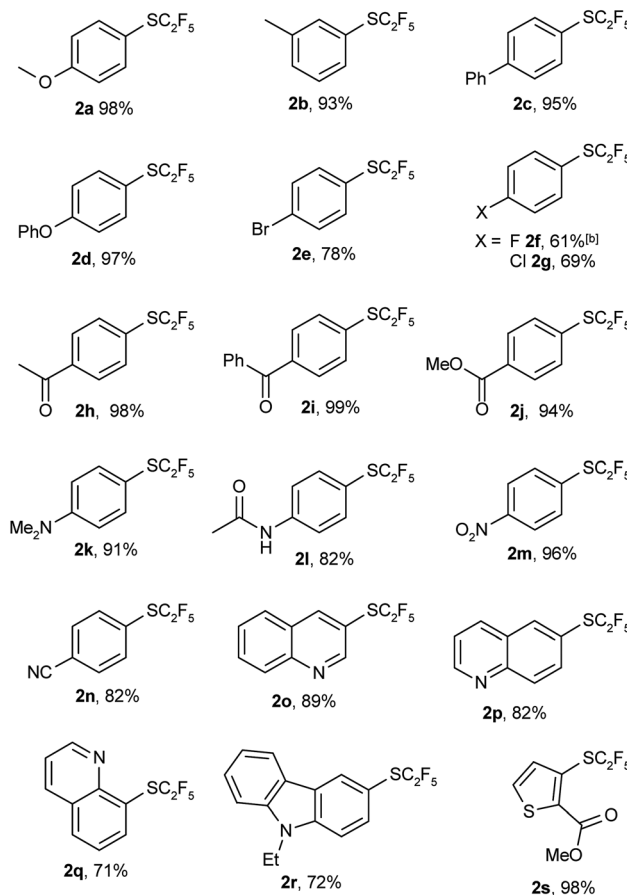
‡These authors contributed equally to this work.





Having thus found an effective protocol for the Sandmeyer pentafluoroethylthiolation, we next investigated its scope. Various arenediazonium tetrafluoroborates were smoothly converted into the corresponding pentafluoroethyl thioethers in high yields (Table 2).

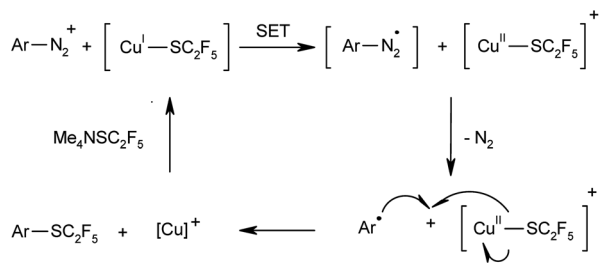
<sup>a</sup> Reaction conditions: dropwise addition of 0.5 mmol of **1a** in 1 mL acetonitrile to 1.5 equiv. Me<sub>4</sub>NSC<sub>2</sub>F<sub>5</sub> and the copper source in 1 mL acetonitrile, 15 h at room temperature. Yields were determined by <sup>19</sup>F NMR using trifluoroethanol as an internal standard. <sup>b</sup> 1 h reaction time.

$$\text{R-C}_6\text{H}_4\text{-N}_2^+\text{BF}_4^- \xrightarrow[\text{MeCN, 15 h, rt}]{10 \text{ mol\% Cu, Me}_4\text{NSC}_2\text{F}_5} \text{R-C}_6\text{H}_4\text{-SC}_2\text{F}_5$$


<sup>a</sup> Reaction conditions: dropwise addition of 1.0 mmol of **1** in 2 mL MeCN to 1.5 mmol Me<sub>4</sub>NSC<sub>2</sub>F<sub>5</sub> and 0.1 mmol elemental copper in 2 mL MeCN, 15 h at room temperature. <sup>b</sup> Yields determined by <sup>19</sup>F NMR using trifluoroethanol as an internal standard.

Both electron-rich and electron-deficient substrates give similarly high yields, and various functionalities are tolerated including ester, ether, amino, keto, carboxylate, cyano, and even bromo groups. Various heterocycles were also pentafluoroethylthiolated in good yields. These examples clearly demonstrate the utility of the protocol for late-stage pentafluoroethylthiolations of functionalised intermediates. The products are obtained in reasonable purity after simple aqueous workup, and can be further purified by column chromatography.

It is safe to assume that in analogy to classical Sandmeyer halogenations and trifluoromethylthiolations of diazonium salts, the reaction proceeds *via* a single-electron transfer mechanism as depicted in Scheme 2. The use of metallic copper as source of Cu(I) species in these processes is rare but



**Scheme 2** Sandmeyer pentafluoroethylthiolation of aromatic amines.

not unprecedented.<sup>8e,21</sup> The addition of radical quenchers such as 2,2,6,6-tetramethylpiperidine-*N*-oxyl (TEMPO) or *p*-benzoquinone suppressed the reaction, which confirms that the reaction involves radical intermediates. In order to exclude an alternative cationic pathway for extremely electron-poor substrates, analogous control experiments were conducted with 4-nitrobenzenediazonium tetrafluoroborate. In the absence of copper or in the presence of radical trapping reagents no product formation was detected, which supports a Sandmeyer type mechanism even for substrates in which other pathways are conceivable.

## Conclusions

The Sandmeyer-type process reported herein allows the straightforward synthesis of pentafluoroethylthiolated compounds from the corresponding aromatic amines. The key advantages of this method are its mild reaction conditions (neutral, room temperature), the use of an inexpensive copper catalyst in only 10 mol% loading, and the exceptional functional group tolerance. As a result, this method is well-suited for the late-stage introduction of pentafluoroethylthio groups into drug-like molecules.

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