



Piers' borane-mediated hydrosilylation of epoxides and cyclic ethers†

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We report the first diarylborane-catalysed hydrosilylation of epoxides and cyclic ethers. Mechanistic studies on the *in situ* generated Piers' borane (C_6F_5)₂BH with hydrosilanes in the presence of an epoxide revealed that an alkyloxy(diaryl)borane (C_6F_5)₂BOR is readily formed as a catalytically competent species for the outer-sphere hydrosilylation of epoxides and cyclic ethers.

Epoxides are a highly useful synthetic building unit frequently employed for the construction of multi-functionalized and/or complex molecules in organic synthesis¹ and polymer chemistry.² Among various transformations, selective reduction of unsymmetrical epoxides has drawn special attention since it could selectively afford one of the two isomeric alcohol products. For instance, heterogeneous hydrogenolysis of epoxides by a Pd-based catalyst system has been well studied.^{3,4} Although this procedure offers a straightforward synthetic route to alcohols from epoxides, it often suffers from low selectivity and a narrow substrate scope.⁵ In this regard, the hydrosilylation of epoxides using well-defined homogeneous catalysts could be a competent alternative to the hydrogenolysis. In fact, a number of homogeneous catalysts have been developed for the epoxide hydrosilylation by several research groups (Scheme 1a).⁶ The working mode of these catalysts can be divided into four types: (i) a silylium ion-mediated outer-sphere pathway; (ii) an inner-sphere path involving an epoxide C–O bond insertion into a metal hydride; (iii) a radical process involving a metal-centered radical species; and (iv) a route *via* a base-initiated outer-sphere hydride transfer.

On the other hand, a highly electron-deficient arylborane $B(C_6F_5)_3$ is known to be an efficient catalyst for the conversion of ethers and alcohols with hydrosilanes to provide a range of silyl ethers.⁷ One critical limitation in this procedure is an

exhaustive reduction giving rise to alkanes. Such a deoxygenative path is mainly driven by intrinsically high Lewis acidity of $B(C_6F_5)_3$ (Scheme 1b).^{7c–f} The $B(C_6F_5)_3$ -catalysed hydrosilylative transformation has been postulated to proceed *via* a silyloxonium ion bearing a borohydride anion [$HB(C_6F_5)_3^-$], where the borohydride attacks the α -carbon of oxonium leading to the C–O bond cleavage. In this context, we hypothesized that a less Lewis acidic Piers' borane (C_6F_5)₂BH that is readily generated *in situ* from the reaction of (C_6F_5)₂BOH with hydrosilanes can mediate the hydrosilylation of epoxides and cyclic ethers without the exhaustive deoxygenation.

Here, we report the hydrosilylation of epoxides mediated by *in situ* generated Piers' borane (C_6F_5)₂BH with an emphasis on the catalytic pathway (Scheme 1c).⁸ Mechanistic investigations revealed that an alkyloxy(diaryl)borane (C_6F_5)₂BOR is formed upon the reaction of *in situ* generated Piers' borane with epoxides, and that it acts as a competent catalyst for the outer-sphere hydrosilylation of epoxides. Stoichiometric studies suggested that the generation of Piers' borane from the alkyloxyborane is slower relative to the alkyloxyborane-mediated hydrosilylation process. Most significantly, it was found that the selectivity for the ring-opening of epoxides is reversed between the Piers' borane and the $B(C_6F_5)_3$ catalyst.



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Previously, we reported a selective C–O bond cleavage of sugars *via* hydrosilylation catalysed by Piers' borane (C_6F_5)₂BH generated *in situ* [eqn (1)].⁹ This reductive transformation of sugars was proposed to proceed *via* an outer-sphere ionic



Scheme 1 (a) Homogeneous catalysts for epoxide hydrosilylation. (b) B(C₆F₅)₃-catalysed C–O bond cleavage of alkylethers with hydrosilanes. (c) Bis(pentafluorophenyl)borane-promoted hydrosilylation of epoxides (this work). TBAF = tetrabutylammonium fluoride, TMDS = 1,1,3,3-tetramethyldisiloxane.

pathway involving a cyclic silyloxonium ion bearing a borohydride [H₂B(C₆F₅)₂][−], selectively providing a range of linear polyols. Based on this precedent, we were encouraged to apply the procedure for the hydrosilylation of cyclopentene oxide **1a**, which was chosen as a representative substrate for preliminary mechanistic studies in an effort to elucidate the reaction pathway. As envisaged, the reaction of **1a** with 1,1,3,3-tetramethyldisiloxane (TMDS) took place in the presence of (C₆F₅)₂BOH (1 mol%) to furnish the corresponding cyclopentylloxysilane **2a** in 85% yield in 0.5 h [eqn (2)]. Interestingly, ¹⁹F NMR spectroscopy of the reaction mixture exhibited a set of major signals due to cyclopentyloxy-[bis(pentafluorophenyl)]borane **3**¹⁰ at δ −133.5, −150.9, and −162.8, in addition to a dioxane adduct with Piers' borane, (C₆F₅)₂BH-dioxane, as a minor species (see details in the ESI†).

To shed light on the plausible working mode, a series of catalytic and stoichiometric reactions were conducted (Scheme 2). A hydrosilylation reaction of cyclopentene oxide (**1a**) using TMDS-d₂ as a reductant gave cyclopentylloxysilane **2a-d₁** in 85% yield in 0.5 h at room temperature (Scheme 2a). This product was found to contain a deuterium incorporated exclusively at the β-position relative to the oxygen atom of the product. On the other hand, a stoichiometric treatment of cyclopentene oxide with (C₆F₅)₂BH-SMe₂ in the absence of hydrosilane afforded cyclopentyloxyborane **3** in 47% yield in 10 min at room temperature,¹¹ whereas a reaction of cyclopentyloxyborane **3** with excess TMDS (50 equiv.) led to the formation of Piers' borane at a relatively slower rate (10% in 0.5 h) (Scheme 2b and c).



Scheme 2 Preliminary mechanistic experiments.

Notably, cyclopentyloxyborane **3** was shown to catalyse the hydrosilylation of epoxide **1a** by using TMDS to furnish **2a** in 79% yield in 10 min, implying that an outer-sphere ionic path is operative in this process (Scheme 2d). To obtain additional insights, a stoichiometric reaction of **1a**, hydrosilanes, and **3** (1 : 1 : 1) was performed in 1,4-dioxane (Scheme 2e). Cyclopentene oxide **1a** was gradually converted to **2a**, and its progress was found to be dependent on the hydrosilanes employed (87% with TMDS; 46% with Me₂PhSiH in 10 min). ¹H and ¹⁹F NMR spectroscopy of the reaction mixtures displayed a set of major signals for **3** and minor signals for (C₆F₅)₂BH-dioxane (see details in the ESI†).

Based on the observation that the isolated alkoxy(bisaryl)borane (**3**) efficiently mediates both catalytic and stoichiometric hydrosilylation of epoxide **1a** to give **2a** and that the conversion of **3** to (C₆F₅)₂BH with TMDS is rather slow, the species **3** generated *in situ* under the employed catalytic conditions is proposed to be a competent catalyst for the present outer-sphere ionic hydrosilylation involving a silylium ion transfer.¹²

Given the above experimental results, a catalytic cycle of the borane-mediated hydrosilylation of cyclopentene oxide (**1a**) is depicted in Scheme 3. Initially, the Piers' borane (C₆F₅)₂BH is assumed to be generated upon the reaction of (C₆F₅)₂BOH with TMDS in dioxane. The *in situ* generated Piers' borane would be in equilibrium with its dioxane adduct **I**. An epoxide substrate coordinates to the boron center of (C₆F₅)₂BH to form an epoxide adduct **II**, which induces a hydroborative ring-opening of the epoxide¹³ to afford an alkoxy(bisaryl)borane **3**. The species **3** is proposed to catalyse the outer-sphere hydrosilylation of the epoxide *via* a silyloxonium ion intermediacy (**III**), where a nucleophilic hydride transfer is highly facile to occur, releasing an *O*-silyl ether product **2a**. An intuitive path proceeding *via* a direct release of

a competent catalytic species, while the reaction proceeds *via* an outer-sphere ionic pathway. Significantly, a selectivity reversal between Piers' borane and $B(C_6F_5)_3$ catalyst systems was observed, which could be in turn rationalized by the difference in hydride donor ability of the presupposed borohydride species. The present catalyst system is convenient to perform under mild conditions and compatible with functional groups, thus enabling applications in synthetic organic chemistry plausible.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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