



Communication

Gold-catalyzed oxidation of propargylic ethers with internal C–C triple bonds: Impressive regioselectivity enabled by inductive effect

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ABSTRACT

Inductive perturbations of C–C triple bonds are shown to dictate the regiochemistry of gold-catalyzed oxidation of internal C–C triple bonds in the cases of propargylic ethers, resulting in highly regioselective formation of β -alkoxy- α,β -unsaturated ketones (up to >50/1 selectivity) via α -oxo gold carbene intermediates. Ethers derived from primary propargylic alcohols can be reliably transformed in good yields, and various functional groups are tolerated. With substrates derived from secondary propargylic alcohols, the development of a new *P,N*-bidentate ligand enables the minimization of competing alkyl group migration to the gold carbene center over the desired hydride migration; the preferred migration of a phenyl group, however, results in efficient formation of a α -phenyl- β -alkoxy- α,β -unsaturated ketone. These results further advance the surrogacy of a propargyl moiety to synthetically versatile enone function with reliable and readily predictable regioselectivity.

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Introduction

α,β -Unsaturated ketones (hereafter called enone) are essential substrates for organic synthesis due to their versatile reactivities. In a multi-step synthesis, however, the enone moiety, as it is prone to react with a wide range of reducing, oxidizing, and nucleophilic reagents, can often be problematic if carried over multi-step synthetic sequences. An ideal solution would be to have it masked as a relatively unreactive moiety and reveal it reliably and predictably when needed.

We [1] have previously showed that via gold-catalyzed [2] intermolecular oxidation [3] of internal alkynes a propargyl moiety can be converted into an enone moiety under exceptionally mild reaction conditions, thereby providing a solution for masking synthetically versatile enones [1e]. Scheme 1 shows a generic reaction with the proposed mechanism outlined. Hence, a gold-activated alkyne is initially attacked by a pyridine/quinoline *N*-oxide, which is a mild nucleophilic oxidant; driven by the weak O–N bond, the nascent alkenylgold intermediate **A** undergoes fragmentation, generating the α -oxo gold carbene **B**; this metal carbene is highly

reactive and rapidly transformed into the enone **2** via a hydride migration/metal elimination sequence. A vital issue for the practicality of this strategy is controlling the regioselectivity in the generation of **B** or its regioisomer **B'**, which in general is challenging for intermolecular reactions [4] of internal alkynes [5] lack of direct electronic perturbation [1e,6]. In our initial study [1e], we reported that both steric differences between the groups at the opposite ends of the C–C triple bond and electronic delocalization (conjugation) found in arylalkynes and enynes permit predictable and often synthetically desirable regioselectivities. We also exploited the inductive effect [7] as it could polarize the C–C triple bond toward regioselective nucleophilic attack [8]. Indeed, propargylic carboxylates undergo highly regioselective alkyne oxidation, consistent with the inductive polarization of the alkynes by strongly electron-withdrawing carboxy groups (e.g., Scheme 2) [1k]. Notably in this reaction, carboxy groups migrate preferentially over hydrogen to the carbene center, yielding α -acyloxyenone products. The same phenomenon is observed with propargylic carbonates [3p].

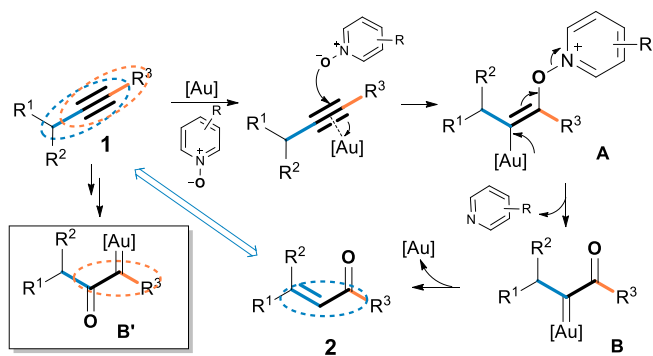
To further exploit the inductive effect of other functional groups in facilitating regioselective gold-catalyzed oxidation of alkynes, we examined propargylic ethers [9], which possess less electron-withdrawing alkoxy groups. Herein, we report that high regioselectivities could be achieved with this class of substrates, resulting in efficient formation of β -alkoxyenone products, which are synthetically versatile and can serve as precursor to the Danishefsky's diene [10] and its congeners [11], functionalized tetrahydropyrans [12], and enynones [13].

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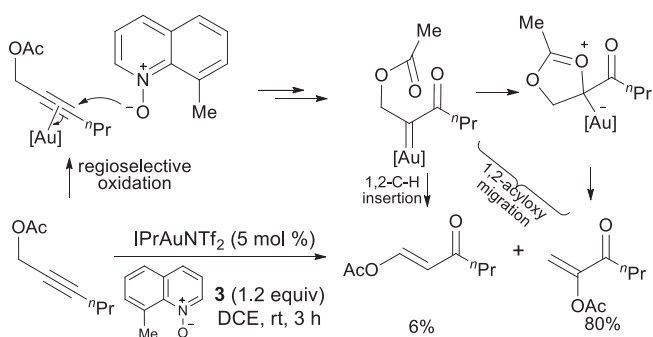
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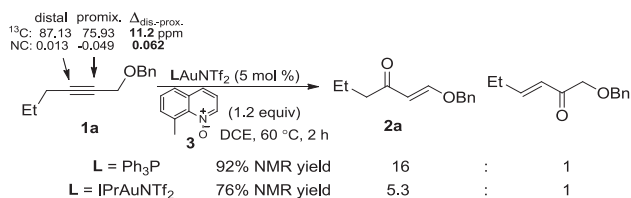
Scheme 1. Using propargyl moieties as masked enones.



Scheme 2. Au-catalyzed regioselective oxidation of propargylic carboxylates.

Results and discussion

At the outset, we subjected the propargyl benzyl ether **1a** to the gold-catalyzed oxidation (Eq. (1)). Much to our delight, an excellent regioselectivity (16/1) was observed by using 8-methylquinoline *N*-oxide (**3**) [1e] as the oxidant and Ph₃PAuNTf₂ [14] as the gold catalyst. Moreover, the β-benzyloxyenone **2a** was formed in 92% NMR yield. This outstanding selectivity can be rationalized by inductive polarization of the C–C triple bond by the electronegative ethereal oxygen. Since natural charges (NC) obtained via natural population analysis [15] have been shown to correlate well with properties such as pK_a [16] and ¹³C NMR [17], we calculated the natural charges at the sp-hybridized carbons using Density Functional Theory (B3LYP/6-31G*, Spartan06). The NC is 0.013 for the distal carbon and –0.049 for the proximal carbon to the oxygen atom, revealing that the distal alkyne end is more electron-deficient. These data are consistent with their ¹³C NMR shifts and can explain the observed regioselectivity. Notably, a recently published Pt-catalyzed hydrosilylation on a similar substrate showed only a 3.2:1 regioselectivity [8d]. This unexpectedly high selectivity is attributed to the augmentation of the electronic bias of the C–C triple bond by the gold activation. Indeed, when IPrAuNTf₂, a less Lewis acidic catalyst, was used, the selectivity decreased substantially.



NC: natural charges calculated by DFT calculations (B3LYP/6-31G*)

(1)

The scope of this gold-catalyzed oxidation was then probed. First, we examined the substrates with no propargylic substitution. As shown in Table 1, besides the benzyl group, other ethereal protecting groups such as Me (**1b**), MOM (**1c**), and TIPS (**1d**) were readily allowed, and the reactions all proceeded with good yields and excellent regioselectivities. With the sterically biased methyl ether **1e**, the electronic bias easily overrode the opposing steric preference [1e], when bulky Me₄tBuXPhosAuNTf₂ [1g] was used. An even higher selectivity was observed with the phenyl ether **1f**, consistent with the fact that phenoxy as a group is more electron-withdrawing than methoxy. The use of bulky Me₄tBuXPhosAuNTf₂ enhanced the regioselectivities in both cases of **1e** and **1f** as Ph₃PAuNTf₂ rendered ratios of **2/2'** as 5.3/1 and 20/1, respectively. This ligand effect can be attributed to the preference of a bulkier gold complex residing at the less hindered alkyne end, thereby augmenting the desired regioselectivity. As the inductive effect is inversely correlated to distance, the regio preference with the bisether **1g** and the ethereal acetate **1h** were expected; however, the high selectivities observed in both cases were pleasingly surprising. Interestingly, the 1,6-enyne substrate **1i** did not undergo the typically facile enyne cycloisomerization [2c,2e,18]; instead, the oxidation proceeded smoothly, affording the allyl vinyl ether **2i** in 80% yield.

For the methyl ether **1j** with a Me group substituted at the propargylic position (Scheme 3), the steric bias and the inductive effect worked in sync, and the gold-catalyzed oxidation exhibited expectedly excellent regioselectivities (>25). However, the gold carbene intermediate apparently, upon generation, underwent competing 1,2-H and 1,2-Me migrations, leading to the formation of **2j-H** and **2j-Me**, respectively. When Ph₃PAuNTf₂ was the catalyst, **2j-Me** was formed in 50% yield. By using the much bulkier ^tBuXPhos as the ligand, the desired **2j-H** became the major product, although the migration selectivity was still poor.

We have recently reported that gold complexes with P,N/P,S bidentate ligands such as Mor-DalPhos [19] can stabilize carbene and make it less electrophilic via the formation of tri-coordinated

Table 1

Highly regioselective gold-catalyzed oxidation of propargyl ethers: access to β-alkoxy/aryloxy-α,β-unsaturated ketones.^a

R-C≡C-OR		Ph ₃ PAuNTf ₂ (5 mol %)		R-C=C-OR		R'-C=C-OR	
1		3 (1.2 equiv), DCE, 60 °C		2		2'	
1	2	Yield/2/2'	1	2	Yield/2/2'	1	2
		86% >50			81% >35 ^{b,d}		
		83% >15 ^{b,c}			79% 15		
		72% 10			80% 16		

^a [1] = 0.05 M; isolated yields shown.

^b Me₄tBuXPhosAuNTf₂ was used as the catalyst.

^c **2/2'** = 5.3/1 with Ph₃PAuNTf₂ as the catalyst.

^d **2/2'** = 20/1 with Ph₃PAuNTf₂ as the catalyst.

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