



Rapid, one-pot synthesis of α,α -disubstituted primary amines by the addition of Grignard reagents to nitriles under microwave heating conditions

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 31 March 2009

Revised 21 April 2009

Accepted 22 April 2009

Available online 3 May 2009

ABSTRACT

A series of α,α -disubstituted amines have been prepared in a simple and efficient one-pot procedure by the addition of Grignard reagents to a series of aliphatic, aromatic, and heteroaromatic nitriles. Key to this reported procedure is the unprecedented addition of the Grignard reagent to the nitrile under heating by microwave irradiation which both significantly improves reaction yields and reduces reaction times. In general, the Grignard addition reaction is complete within 5–10 min at 100 °C followed by rapid reduction with sodium borohydride to give the target amines.

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The importance of α,α -disubstituted amines and amides in biologically relevant pharmaceutical and agricultural compounds is well documented in the literature.¹ While there is a variety of commercially available α,α -disubstituted amines, we recently needed a set of non-commercially available compounds. Our motivation for preparing these unique amines stems from our on-going efforts to synthesize chemical libraries of medicinally relevant compounds.²

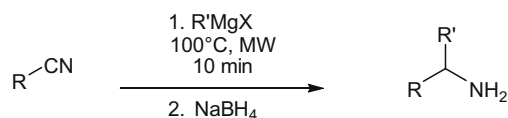
Among the myriad of synthetic methods for the preparation of amino groups, the reaction of nitriles with organometallics, followed by the reduction of the intermediate imine was first reported by Weiberth and Hall³ and later modifications were reported by subsequent research groups.^{4,5} While these procedures were adequately used to prepare a limited number of final targets, it became clear that the current state-of-the-art did not meet our needs. Due to the number of analogs that we needed to prepare (in excess of 25 novel α,α -disubstituted amines) we needed to avoid inconveniently long reaction times, the need for solvent exchange before the reduction step, poor to modest yields of product and/or limited substrate applicability. We therefore set out to develop and refine reaction protocols that allowed for the facile preparation of these amines. The procedures that we developed needed to be robust, tolerate a wide range of functionalities and, due to the number of entities to be prepared, operationally safe and simple.

As has been well documented over the last several years, microwave heating technology has revolutionized many synthetic procedures in the lab, enabling access to high temperatures and pressures that can dramatically shorten reaction times.⁶ Additionally, microwave reactors are designed to work at high pressures and engineered to contain debris in the event of a failure. While

the reaction of Grignard reagents with nitriles tends to proceed safely, we felt that microwave technology, with its inherent ability to increase reaction rates due to safely achieving higher reaction temperatures and pressures, would prove to be an asset for this work.

We report herein a one-pot, operationally simple, safe, and rapid protocol for the preparation of α,α -disubstituted primary amines from a wide range of substituted nitriles and Grignard reagents (Scheme 1). The Grignard reagents may be either commercially available or prepared in situ by metalation of aryl halides under microwave heating conditions.

Our initial experiments focused on the α -methylation of 2-naphthonitrile (**1**). Initially, the conditions reported by Prim and co-workers for the synthesis of heterobiaryl methylamines appeared promising.⁵ After consulting the pertinent literature references, the most prevalent methodology for this conversion was low temperature addition of methylmagnesium bromide to 2-naphthonitrile, followed by replacement of the ethereal solvent with methanol and reduction with sodium borohydride. Initially we performed the reaction in diethyl ether at 0 °C, warmed to room temperature, and stirred for 4 h. Subsequent reduction was carried out with sodium borohydride in methanol at 0 °C overnight. Finally, after standard reaction workup the desired compound was isolated in 35% yield (Table 1, entry 1). Due to the number of amines that we wanted to prepare we felt that such a



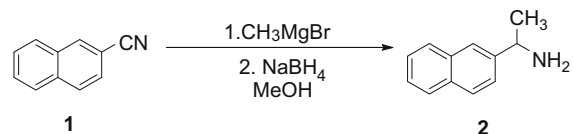
Scheme 1.

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Table 1

Effect of reaction solvent and temperature on the extent of conversion of 2-naphthonitrile (**1**) to 1-(naphthalen-2-yl)ethanamine (**2**)

					
Entry	CH ₃ MgBr (equiv)	Solvent	Time (h)	Temp (°C)	Yield (%)
1	2.5	Et ₂ O	4 h, 12 h ^a	0 °C to rt	35
2	2.5	Et ₂ O	4 h, 12 h ^a	Reflux ^b , rt	61
3	2.5	THF	4 h, 12 h ^b	Reflux ^b , rt	74
4	2.5	THF	15 min, 5 min ^c	MW ^d , 100 °C	88

^a 4-h reaction time for CH₃MgBr addition to **1** followed by 12 h NaBH₄/MeOH reduction.

^b Reaction heated by oil bath.

^c 15-min reaction time for CH₃MgBr addition to **1** followed by 5 min NaBH₄/MeOH reduction.

^d Reaction heated using microwave irradiation.

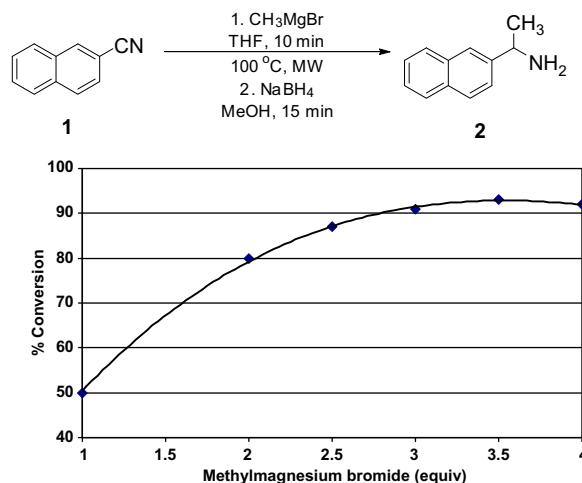
low yielding procedure would be problematic; we therefore set out to develop a more robust and higher yielding reaction protocol.

In our first attempt at optimization, we choose to investigate the effect of temperature on the formation of the magnesium imine complex. After addition of the Grignard reagent to nitrile **1**, the reaction mixture was heated at reflux (35 °C) for 4 h. The reduction and workup were carried out as previously described to give **2** in a much higher yield (61%, Table 1, entry 2). This promising result led us to conclude that higher reaction temperatures may be key to obtaining improved yields. Substitution of THF (reflux at 67 °C) for diethyl ether (reflux at 35 °C) gave an additional improvement in yield (74%, Table 1, entry 3). A further convenience of this protocol is that the THF is not needed to be removed and replaced with methanol for the reduction step. The crude THF solution from the magnesium imine formation could simply be poured into a cooled methanol solution of sodium borohydride. This finding considerably simplified the reaction protocol.

Concurrent with investigating the use of THF, the effect of microwave heating on the magnesium imine formation reaction was explored. A significantly improved yield (88%) was observed for the conversion of **1** to **2** in THF under microwave heating (100 °C for 15 min prior to sodium borohydride reduction) (Table 1, entry 4).

Next we determined the optimum amount of Grignard reagent. Our initial reaction conditions utilized 2.5 equiv of methylmagnesium bromide, giving, in the best case, an 88% isolated yield (Table 1, entry 4). Plotting the % conversion of **1** to **2** versus methylmagnesium bromide equivalents from 1.0 to 4.0 (Graph 1) clearly demonstrates that the maximum yield of **2** corresponds to 3.5 equiv of Grignard. Additional Grignard reagent (>3.5 equiv), was not detrimental to the reaction, but made isolation of the final material more problematic and was therefore avoided.

Having established the optimal solvent and number of equivalents of Grignard reagent for the formation of 1-(naphthalen-2-yl)ethanamine (**2**) from 2-naphthonitrile (**1**) we decided to re-examine the optimal time and temperature for the reaction. As shown in Table 2, optimal reaction conditions were determined to be heating under microwave irradiation at 100 °C for 10–15 min (Table 2, entry 2). It is noteworthy to stress that this not only represents a significant increase in overall isolated yield as compared to traditional reaction conditions, but also represents a dramatic reduction in overall reaction time; from in excess of 12 h to less than 30 min—including reaction workup. An added benefit of the protocol reported herein is that the air- and mois-



Graph 1. Effect of methylmagnesium bromide equivalents on the extent of conversion of 2-naphthonitrile (**1**) to 1-(naphthalen-2-yl)ethanamine (**2**). Conversion (%) determined from HPLC analysis (210 and 254 nm AUC) of crude reaction mixture.

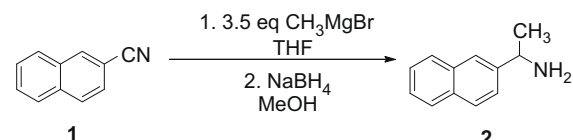
ture-sensitive Grignard reagents undergo negligible decomposition, presumably due to the short reaction times, thereby negating the need for rigorous air- and moisture-sensitive handling techniques; no special precautions were taken for these reagents.

With optimized reaction conditions being obtained for the conversion of **1** to **2** (3.5 equiv Grignard reagent, microwave irradiation at 100 °C for 10 min with THF as reaction solvent),⁷ we set out to explore the scope of this transformation with respect to substrate and reagents.

As shown in Table 3, the microwave enhanced reaction conditions work well for a wide range of aromatic and heteroaromatic nitriles including those possessing electron-withdrawing as well as electron-donating groups. Likewise, a wide array of Grignard reagents gave excellent results.⁸ As a general rule, Grignard bromides gave higher yields than their chloride analogs. The nature of the Grignard reagent also showed some interesting results. The reaction of 4-fluorobenzyl magnesium chloride with **1** gave lower yields (50% and 15%, respectively, Table 3 entries 2 and 15) compared to that of benzylmagnesium chloride (87% and 60%, Table 3 entries 3 and 14). Regardless of the lower reactivity of 4-fluorobenzylmagnesium chloride, microwave heating conditions proved critical for the conversion of **10** to **17**, resulting in an isolated yield of 15% (Table 3, entry 15) compared to 0% at room temperature.

Table 2

Effect of time and temperature (both thermal and microwave irradiations) on the extent of conversion of 2-naphthonitrile (**1**) to 1-(naphthalen-2-yl)ethanamine (**2**)

				
Entry	Grignard (equiv)	Time (min)	Temp (°C)	Conversion ^a (%)
1	3.5	5	MW 100 °C	78
2	3.5	10	MW 100 °C	97
3	3.5	15	MW 100 °C	93
4	3.5	120	25 °C	55
5	3.5	15	MW 60 °C	88
6	3.5	120	60 °C	85

^a Determined by HPLC (210 and 254 nm AUC) of crude reaction mixture.

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