Short Research Article

Opportunities for isotopic labelling via phase-tagged synthesis with organogermanium linkers†

ALAN C. SPIVEY1,*, LAETITIA J. MARTIN1, CATHERINE NOBAN1, TEYRNON C. JONES2, GEORGE J. ELLAMES3 and ANDREW D. KOHLER3

1Department of Chemistry, South Kensington Campus, Imperial College, London SW7 2AZ, UK
2Department of Chemistry, Sheffield University, Sheffield S3 2HF, UK
3Department of Isotope Chemistry and Metabolite Synthesis, sanofi-aventis, Willowburn Ave., Alnwick, Northumberland NE66 2JH, UK

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Abstract: Strategies for the use of germanium-based linkers for the phase-tagged synthesis of isotopically labelled intermediates are described. Protocols of potential use in the devolatilization of volatile intermediates prepared from [14C]-CO2 and [14C]-PhBr to aid ADME studies on drug substances and their metabolites are discussed in relation to SR47035 (an advanced intermediate en-route to the 5-HT2 receptor antagonist SR46349B) and 4-amino-4-phenylpiperidine (a key intermediate in the synthesis of NK3 receptor antagonist SR142801, osanetant). Additionally, protocols with potential for the preparation of [123I] and [18F]-labelled SPECT/PET imaging/diagnostic agents are discussed in relation to an [123I]-labelled analogue of SR141716 (rimonabant, a CB1 receptor antagonist) and 6-[18F]-(S)-DOPA (for diagnosis of Parkinson’s disease). Copyright © 2007 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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Introduction

Phase-tagged synthesis encompasses methods of synthesis in which either the reagents/catalysts or substrates used in a synthetic sequence are covalently attached to a ‘phase-tag’ which allows the molecule to be readily separated from compounds that are not tagged.1,2 The best known example is solid-phase synthesis (SPS) wherein an insoluble polymer support is used as the phase-tag and separation is by simple filtration; which can be automated. In an isotopic labelling context, SPS offers two additional benefits: firstly, the process of phase-tagging renders the substrate involatile and secondly, if an appropriately low loading of the substrate onto the tag is achieved, then conveniently handled quantities of, e.g. derivatized polymer can be used for the preparation of the extremely small quantities of labelled product required for many applications. Herein, we describe the development of potentially generic strategies for the preparation of isotopically labelled compounds of...
pharmaceutical/pharmacological interest exploiting the above features of phase-tagged synthesis. Additionally, we exploit the unique properties of an arylgermanium bond between the substrate and the phase tag.3–6 The precise properties of the arylgermanium linkage can be tuned by varying the two ‘spectator groups’ on the germanium atom,6 but in general this linkage is extremely resistant to cleavage by basic and nucleophilic conditions but is readily cleaved in a ‘traceless’ fashion by, e.g. TFA or with concomitant introduction of functionality at the position of previous attachment by, e.g. I+, Br+, Cl+ and F+. This allows ‘traceless’ devolatilization on the one hand and late-stage introduction of potentially isotopically labelled I and F atoms for SPECT/PET imaging on the other. All the work described has been performed using non-isotopically enriched materials as proof-of-concept for the approaches – clearly, optimization will be required prior to ‘hot’ application.

Results and discussion

Preparation of the germanium-based linkers

The efficient synthesis of germanium-based linkers for SPS from commercial GeCl4 has been described previously (Scheme 1).3,4,6

Immobilization of an aromatic substrate to a polymer support in this fashion provides a robust platform for further chemical manipulation while benefiting from the above-mentioned synthetically appealing attributes of the germanium-aryl bond.

Devolatilization of potentially 14C-labelled pharmaceutical intermediates for ADME studies

Radioisotopically labelled intermediates are generally toxic at high concentrations and require rigorous containment. Issues of containment are invariably most acute during the first steps in a synthesis starting from a volatile-labelled starting material and proceeding via low-molecular weight volatile synthetic intermediates. Devolatilization by direct immobilization of the labelled precursor onto a polymeric support would clearly solve these problems by rendering the labelled material completely involatile during subsequent transformations. That only a limited set of isotopically labelled ‘building blocks’ are employed routinely by radiochemists is advantageous for developing generic devolatilization protocols – only a limited number of key immobilization techniques and subsequent functionalization protocols need to be developed in order for these techniques to be widely applicable. It was therefore our objective to develop modes of attachment that would prove as robust and flexible as possible.

Our initial objective was to provide proof-of-concept for the devolatilization of [14C]-labelled intermediates formed following carboxylation of an aryl lithium species with CO2 generated from [14C]-BaCO3. Specifically, we decided to develop a SPS approach to SR47035, which is an advanced intermediate en-route to the sanofi-aventis 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT2) receptor antagonist, SR46349B. During preliminary studies within sanofi-aventis towards the synthesis of a [14C]-labelled analogue it had been noted that the 2-fluoroacetophenone intermediate was appreciably volatile (Scheme 2).
We developed a solution-phase surrogate for SPS using an ethoxyethyl functionalized derivative of a dimethylgermyl linker as a mimic for the same linker attached to a commercial polyethylene glycol (PEG)-grafted polystyrene (PS) resin (Scheme 3).

For this solution-phase model, the key carboxylation step proceeded smoothly using an excess of solid CO$_2$ (78% yield) and traceless cleavage from the linker was accomplished using 50% trifluoromethanesulphonic acid in dichloromethane. As yet, however, yields for the carboxylation step when using strictly one equivalent of gaseous CO$_2$ in conjunction with a hypogel immobilization is to be the very first step, and the immobilized labelled precursor have been poor. Further optimization of this process is ongoing.

We also wanted to address some of the challenges presented by the handling and use of $^{[14C]}$-bromobenzene. This compound is among the most commonly employed labelled starting materials in radiosynthesis after $^{[14C]}$-CO$_2$ and can be difficult to contain. If employed labelled starting materials in radiosynthesis, this compound is among the most commonly developed a solution-phase surrogate for SPS, has established an efficient protocol for immobilization of the Grignard reagent derived from bromobenzene and for its conversion to a mixture of meta- and para-substituted pinnacolatoboric esters (Scheme 4).

Suzuki coupling then allows access to a functionalized styrene derivative that we hope to convert via e.g. hydroamination and then ipso-protodegermylative cleraceous cleavage into the requisite 4-amino-4-phenylpiperidine en route to the target structure.

**Isotopically labelled halo-degermylation → SPECT/PET imaging agents**

Single photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) and positron emission tomography (PET) are emerging medical imaging methods which allow the concentration and movement of short-lived emitters in living tissues to be imaged in real time. Consequently, there is a growing demand for efficient methods for the preparation of molecules containing appropriate nuclei [e.g. $^{[123]}I$ ($t_{1/2}$ 13.2 h) for SPECT and $^{[18]}F$ ($t_{1/2}$ 110 min) and $^{[14]}C$ ($t_{1/2}$ 20 min) for PET]. The preparation of molecules labelled in this manner presents some unique synthetic challenges, primarily due to their short half-lives. As a consequence, a synthesis must be completed from the appropriate precursor and the product purified to a high level very rapidly (within 2–3 half-lives).

Our objective to develop methods for the introduction of isotopically labelled halogens into aromatic precursors concomitant with cleavage from a phase tag via electrophilic ipso-halodegermylation. The analogous process of electrophilic ipso-halodestannylation of several neuroactive pharmaceuticals. Our initial work, using a solution-phase surrogate for SPS, has established an efficient protocol for immobilization of the Grignard reagent derived from bromobenzene and for its conversion to a mixture of meta- and para-substituted pinnacolatoboric esters (Scheme 4).

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aryltrialkylstannane precursors is used widely for this purpose. However, the tin-containing precursors and the tin halide by-products are extremely toxic making precursor synthesis and product purification hazardous. We considered that it would be highly advantageous if the labelling precursor contained non-toxic germanium (cf. tin) and was bound to the solid phase – allowing release of pure labelled product into solution. This would obviate the need for purification thereby saving valuable time and improving activity (and hence imaging resolution).

Our initial objective was to provide proof-of-concept for ipso-halodegermylative cleavage of an aryl group from a solid-supported arylgermane precursor under conditions appropriate for introduction of isotopically labelled iodide [e.g. $^{[123]}$I]-NaI. Thus, treatment of 4-methoxybiphenyl immobilized on argogel resin with dichloramine-T (DCT) as the oxidant in conjunction with unlabelled NaI afforded the analytically pure biaryliodide in 45% yield (unoptimized). This concept was adopted for the preparation of an iodine analogue of CB$_1$ receptor antagonist SR141716 (rimonabant) (Scheme 5).

Iodo-rimonabant was prepared by a route adapted from those of Seltzman and Lan and immobilized onto hypogel resin following conversion to the corresponding Grignard reagent. Oxidative iodination using DCT when applied to this substrate resulted in some oxidative degradation of the hydrazide moiety of rimonabant and so alternative, milder oxidants are currently being screened to optimize the key cleavage step.

We were also interested in introducing fluorine into aromatic compounds in this fashion. 6-$^{[18]}$F-Fluoro-(S)-DOPA is a clinically important tracer molecule which is routinely employed for the diagnosis of Parkinson’s disease by PET. Using the electrophilic fluorinating agent Selectfluor, we found that a suitably protected (S)-DOPA derivative, immobilized via germanium at the 6-position onto a solution phase surrogate for SPS, could be cleaved to give a clean mixture of ipso-fluorodegermylated and ipso-protodegermylated products (Scheme 6).

It is expected that optimization of the cleavage conditions, using $^{[18]}$F-F$_2$ or $^{[18]}$F-AcOF should allow for an improved ratio of fluorinated to protonated products and that the application of microfluidic and microwave technology in combination with a flow-through cell containing the immobilized precursor will enable much shorter reaction and deprotection times.

**Conclusion**

We have provided proof-of-concept for phase-tagged synthesis of isotopically labelled compounds exploiting the unique reactivity profile of an aryl germanium bond between the phase tag and the substrate. The methods hold promise for the devolatilization of early synthetic intermediates derived from $^{[14]}$C-CO$_2$ and $^{[14]}$C-bromobenzene for ADME studies and for the preparation of...
SPECT/PET tracers containing $[^{123}I]$-aryliodide and $[^{18}F]$-arylfluoride moieties.

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