Transition State Structure in the Reaction of Benzyl Bromides with Imidazoles and Pyridines

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Received April 4, 2001

Keywords : Menschutkin reaction, Imidazole, Pyridine, Ab initio MO.

The Menschuckin reaction of benzyl derivatives with pyridine have been studied many researchers in various solvents and at both atmospheric and high pressure. From these reactions, such researchers attempted to gain a detailed mechanism by checking mainly substituent effects. Imidazole contains both a pyridine-type nitrogen in the five membered ring and a pyrrole-type nitrogen. Imidazole (pK_a = 7.1) is a much stronger base than pyridine (pK_a = 5.2) and an important compound among its various derivatives is the biologically active histidine.

There is a few report in regards to the Menschutkin reaction attacking the nucleophilic imidazole. In this connection, the Menschutkin reaction of substituted benzyl bromides with substituted imidazoles and pyridines has been studied in acetonitrile in order to investigate the substituent effect in substrate and both nucleophiles. The mechanistic information was gained from the linear free energy relationships using both notable Hammett and Brönsted type relationships

\[ \beta = \partial \log k / \partial \sigma \]  
\[ \rho = \partial \log k / \partial pK \]

In this paper, the variation of the TS structure for imidazole and pyridine within the above reactions has been reported. Detailed results will be reported in due course.

Results and Discussion

The Second-order rate constants, two Brönsted β_{nu} and Hammett ρ_{Y} of pyridine, are summarized in Table 1. The substituent effect was accelerated by an electron-donation to both the substrate and nucleophiles of imidazole and pyridine, while electron-withdrawing reversed the effects in the substrate and both nucleophiles. Meanwhile, the second-order rate constants for the reaction of imidazole are larger than those of pyridine, due to mainly a larger basicity of imidazole without 4-amino pyridine. The | β_{nu} | values are increased toward to electron-withdrawing substituents and also are accord with the β_{nu} values in the Y-substituted pyridine series. The magnitudes of the | ρ_{Y} | and β_{nu} values are degree of bond formation of benzyl α-carbon with N atom of nucleophile (C···N). Therefore, this is the reason why the electron withdrawing group, Z = p-NO_2 has a large | β_{nu} | and β_{nu}.

A comparison of β_{nu} of imidazole to that of pyridine is shown in Table 1. The values are very similar within the range of 0.29-0.36 both, suggesting that the degree of bond formation within both nucleophiles is similar in TS structure.

In Table 2, the negative ρ_{Y} value for the entire range of substituents indicates the dominance of bond fission in the transition state. When the ρ_{Y} value of imidazole is compared with that of pyridine, the former is less negative than that of pyridine, indicating that the degree of bond breaking is more advanced in the reaction of pyridine than in that of imidazole. These results are confirmed by the bond distance (C_a···Cl) as shown in the final column of Table 3, using the RHF/G

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nucleophile, (Y)</th>
<th>(Z)=4-CH_3</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>4-Br</th>
<th>3-NO_2</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Imidazole</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>62.12</td>
<td>49.42</td>
<td>42.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-CH_3</td>
<td>76.35</td>
<td>60.62</td>
<td>52.83</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-CH_3</td>
<td>90.95</td>
<td>72.31</td>
<td>64.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(β_{nu})</td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
<td>(0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>β_{nu} R</td>
<td>0.999</td>
<td>0.999</td>
<td>0.999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyridine</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>50.87</td>
<td>29.89</td>
<td>25.45</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-CH_3</td>
<td>73.31</td>
<td>46.02</td>
<td>39.81</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-CH_3</td>
<td>768.3</td>
<td>513.6</td>
<td>527.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(β_{nu})</td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
<td>(0.30)</td>
<td>(0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>β_{nu} R</td>
<td>0.999</td>
<td>0.999</td>
<td>0.999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Determined conductometrically in duplicate; average deviation ≤ ±3%.

Table 1. Second-order Rate Constants [10^{4} k_2 (L/mol·s)] and Hammett ρ_{Y} (or Brönsted β_{nu}) Constants for the Reactions (Z)-Substituted Benzyl Bromides with (Y)-Substituted Imidazoles and (Y)-Pyridines in Acetonitrile at 45 °C.

The Second-order rate constants, two Brönsted β_{nu} and Hammett ρ_{Y} of pyridine, are summarized in Table 1. The substituent effect was accelerated by an electron-donation to both the substrate and nucleophiles of imidazole and pyridine, while electron-withdrawing reversed the effects in the
As shown in Table 3, the magnitude of the Mulliken charge of N on the imidazole is larger than that of pyridine, while the (Cα) of benzyl fragments and the (Cl) of leaving fragments are smaller. The large positive charge of the N atom in imidazole indicates that the larger electron transfer from imidazole to the reaction center, and also shows that the positive charge of substrate (Cα) is smaller than that of pyridine.

In conclusion, in the reaction of benzyl bromides with pyridines and imidazoles and the degree of bond formation between the two nucleophiles in the transition state is similar. In regards to the bond breaking of these reactions, the former is more advanced the latter as shown in the transition state structure in Figure 1.

Acknowledgment. This work was supported by Korea Research Foundation Grant, (KRF-99-015-D10061).

References