Advanced Synthesis & Catalysis

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To be cited as: *Adv. Synth. Catal.* 10.1002/adsc.201801240

Link to VoR: http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/adsc.201801240

DOI: 10.1002/adsc.201((will be filled in by the editorial staff))

[OSSO]-Type Fe(III) Metallate as Single-Component Catalyst for the CO_2 Cycloaddition to Epoxides

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Received: ((will be filled in by the editorial staff))

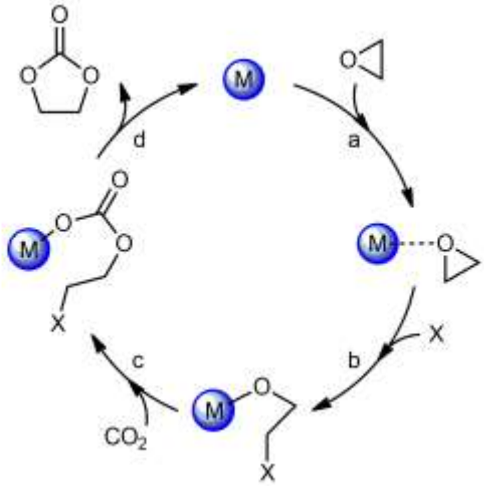
Supporting information for this article is available on the WWW under http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/adsc.201######.((Please delete if not appropriate))

Abstract. A new [OSSO]-Fe(III) metallate complex was prepared and characterized. We demonstrated that such metallate is the real catalytic active species for the cycloaddition of CO_2 to the epoxides, formed from the in situ reaction of the related [OSSO]-Fe(III) neutral complexes and tetrabutylammonium bromide. The metallate complex was used as a single component catalyst for the formation of cyclic organic carbonates from ten epoxides and CO_2 at 1 bar pressure with good activity.

Keywords: carbon dioxide fixation; iron; cycloaddition; homogeneous catalysis

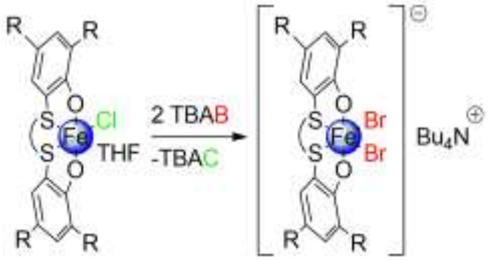
The use of carbon dioxide (CO_2) as chemical feedstock is a growing area of interest for chemists and chemical engineers, not only because CO_2 reutilization can contribute to the reduction of the carbon footprint in many chemical processes, but also because it is a cheap, non-toxic molecule that can be advantageously employed, replacing more toxic C1 sources such as carbon monoxide and phosgene.[1] In this field, the cycloaddition of CO_2 to the epoxides is one of the most studied reaction,[2] due to the favourable thermodynamic of the overall process, and to the usefulness of the target molecules that can be used as high-boiling polar solvents,[3] in batteries as ion carriers,[4] and as chemical intermediates.[5]

The catalysts that have shown the best performances are those based on binary systems, constituted by a Lewis acid and a nucleophile.[2g-k] In the widely accepted mechanistic scenario (Scheme 1) the role of the metal centre is to activate the epoxide (a) for the nucleophilic attack of the anion (b), giving the formation of the metal-alkoxo intermediate that undergoes the CO_2 insertion (c), followed by the back-biting (d) with formation of the cyclic carbonate. Usually, the most common nucleophiles used in the binary systems are those based on quaternary ammonium or phosphonium salts, or ionic liquids bearing nucleophilic counter anions.[2] It should be noted that while it is common to denote the Lewis-acidic metal as the “catalyst” and the nucleophile as the “cocatalyst”, the latter promotes the cycloaddition reaction even in the absence of the metal complex, albeit with lower activity.[6] On the contrary, only few metal complexes give good conversion of the epoxides to the cyclic carbonates without the addition of an excess of the suited nucleophile.[7] These cases are usually based on dinuclear metal complexes, or a bimetallic reaction mechanism is invoked in which one metal centre furnishes the nucleophile and another one activates the epoxide. However, a picture considering a possible interaction of the nucleophile with the metal centre is usually not taken into account.



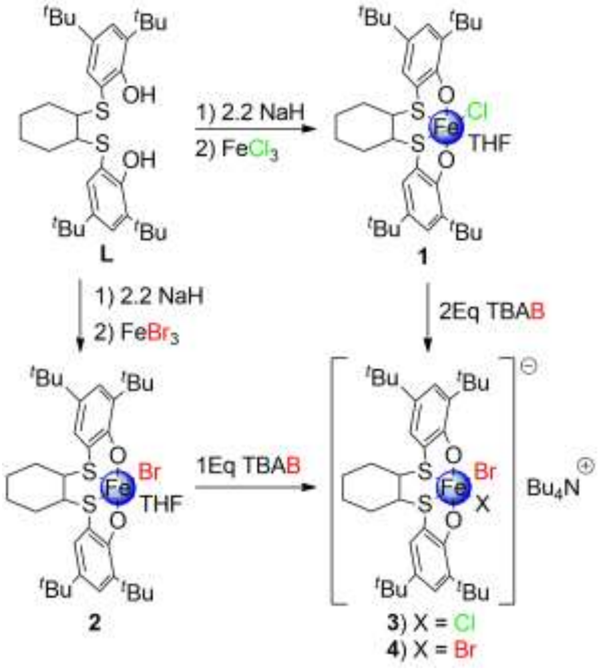
Scheme 1. General mechanism for the cycloaddition of CO_2 to the epoxides.

Lately, we reported the use of a new class of [OSSO]-type Fe(III) complexes, activated by tetrabutylammonium bromide (TBAB), for the synthesis of cyclic organic carbonates (COCs) under very mild reaction conditions.[8] We demonstrated that, despite the mononuclear nature of these complexes, the reaction mechanism proceeds through a bimetallic pathway and, supported by UV-vis measurements and DFT calculations, we proposed that the Fe-complexes react with the cocatalyst, leading to the formation of a metallate species which is the real catalytic active species (Scheme 2).



Scheme 2. Proposed in situ formation of [OSSO]-Fe(III) metallate complexes.

Here we report on the synthesis, isolation and characterization of this metallate species, and its use as single component catalyst for the synthesis of COCs from CO_2 and epoxides. The putative real catalyst was prepared independently from the previously studied chloride complex **1** and the new bromide complex **2** (Scheme 3). The complex **2** was prepared with the same procedure used for the complex **1**,[8] and fully characterized (see Supporting Information). At first, the reaction of **1** with 2 equivalents of TBAB was performed in dichloromethane (DCM). Under these conditions, the release of tetrabutylammonium chloride (TBAC) occurs, so the complex **3** was recovered by extraction with a toluene/hexane mixture to obtain the pure product.



Scheme 3. Synthesis of [OSSO]-Fe(III) complexes **1-4**.

Since the presence of an equilibrium between chloride and bromide cannot be excluded a priori, the complex **4** was prepared starting from the bromide complex **2**, in order to avoid the presence of chloride anion in the reaction medium. The complex **4** was fully characterized by elemental analysis, NMR Evans method, high resolution MS, UV-vis and FT-IR spectroscopy and all the analysis confirmed the formation of the desired di-bromide substituted metallate species (see Supporting Information). The same analyses conducted on the complex **3** support the formation of a similar species, but some differences can be detected. For example, the FT-IR spectra of **3** and **4** are almost superimposable, except for some bands around 800 and 1050 cm^{-1} (Figure 1).

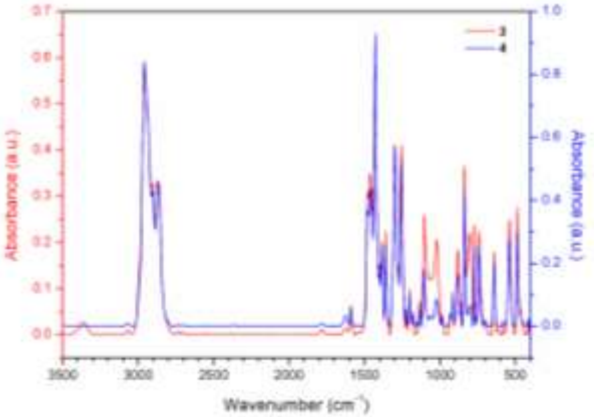


Figure 1. Comparison of the FT-IR spectra of the complex **3** (red line) and the complex **4** (blue line).

Such differences can be ascribed to the incomplete substitution of chloride with bromide in the complex **3**, with the formation of a mixed chloride/bromide species. The ESI FT-ICR MS analysis revealed the different composition of the complexes **3** and **4** (Figures S14 and S15). For comparison, the in situ formation of the metallate species was confirmed by the mass spectra of the complexes **1** and **2**, respectively in the presence of 2 and 1 equivalents of TBAB (Figure S12 and S13).

To elucidate the role of the halide in the cycloaddition reaction, the complexes **1-2** were tested under the same reaction conditions, varying the TBAB/Fe molar ratio from 0/1 to 5/1. The reaction of CO_2 with hexene oxide (**5a**) was selected as benchmark, and the results are listed in Table 1. Both the complexes **1** and **2** were found to be inactive in the absence of TBAB (entries 1 and 6, Table 1). The presence of 0.5 equivalents of TBAB activates the catalysts, obtaining comparable conversions in both cases (entries 2 and 7, Table 1). Increasing the TBAB loading to 1 or 2 equivalents with respect to the Fe(III) concentration, the complex **2** showed higher activity (entries 3-4 and 8-9, Table 1), reaching a conversion of 84 % with a TOF of 35 h^{-1}. Using an excess of TBAB, both the systems reached a conversion around 90 % (entries 5 and 10, Table 1).

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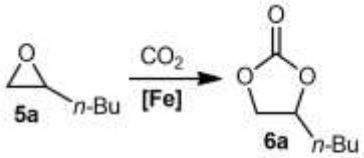
Table 1. **5a**/CO_2 coupling promoted by **1-4**.



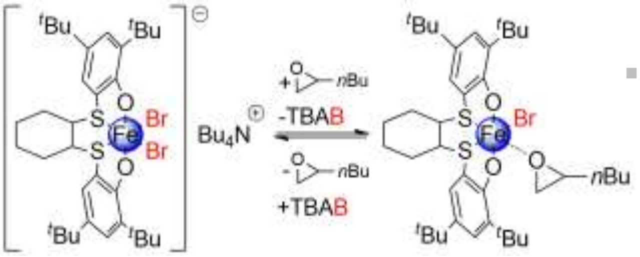
Entry	Complex[a) mol%	TBAB mol%	TBAB/Fe mol/mol	Conv[b) mol%	TOF[c) h^{-1}
1	**1** (0.1)	-	0/1	0	-
2	**1** (0.1)	0.05	0.5/1	11	4.5
3	**1** (0.1)	0.1	1/1	32	13.5
4	**1** (0.1)	0.2	2/1	58	24
5	**1** (0.1)	0.5	5/1	89	37.0
6	**2** (0.1)	-	0/1	0	-
7	**2** (0.1)	0.05	0.5/1	10	4.0
8	**2** (0.1)	0.1	1/1	53	22
9	**2** (0.1)	0.2	2/1	84	35
10	**2** (0.1)	0.5	5/1	92	38.5
11[d)	**1** (0.05) + **3** (0.05)	-	-	16	6.5
12[d)	**3** (0.1)	-	-	59	24.5
13[d)	**3** (0.1)	0.3	3/1	86	36
14[e)	**2** (0.05) + **4** (0.05)	-	-	24	10
15[e)	**4** (0.1)	-	-	61	25.5
16[e)	**4** (0.1)	0.3	3/1	92	38.5

[a)Reaction conditions: **5a** = 4.15×10^{-2} mol; T = 35 °C; $P(CO_2)$ = 1 bar; reaction time = 24 h, neat. [b)Determined by ^1H NMR using mesitylene as internal standard. The selectivity toward the formation of **6a** was always found to be >99%. [c)Turnover frequency ($mol_{\mathbf{5a}} \cdot mol_{Catalyst}^{-1} \cdot$ reaction $time^{-1}$). [d)Complex **3** obtained from complex **1**. [e)Complex **4** obtained from complex **2**.

Since the ring opening of the epoxide was identified as the rate determining step of the reaction promoted by the system **1**/TBAB,[8] the higher activity of the system **2**/TBAB can be ascribed to the higher nucleophilicity of the bromide with respect to the chloride. Indeed, since TBAC is formed by the reaction of **1** with TBAB, and the free chloride anion participates in the equilibrium between the neutral and anionic form of the complex, and excess of 5 equivalents of TBAB is required to obtain catalytic activity similar to that of complex **2** with only 2 equivalents of TBAB (compare entries 5 and 9, Table 1).

In order to confirm that the metallate complex is the real catalytic active species, the complexes **3** and **4** were then used in the same reaction (entries 11-16, Table 1). At first, two 1/1 mixtures of **3** or **4** with **1** or **2** respectively, were tested leaving the Fe total loading to 0.1 mol% (entries 11 and 14, Table 1). With our delight both the mixtures were active, leading to the selective formation of the hexene carbonate **6a**. The mixture of **2** and **4** was the most active, confirming that the presence of chloride slows down the progress of the reaction. When used alone, the two complexes gave almost the same conversion, with very close values of TOF (entries 12 and 15, Table 1).

To compare the activities of **3** and **4** with those of **1** and **2**, the reaction was repeated in the presence of 3 equivalents of TBAB with respect to the metallate (entries 13 and 16, Table 1). The presence of TBAB has a beneficial role on the reaction, reaching a TOF of 38.5 h^{-1} in the case of **4**, that is the same TOF obtained with the complex **2** in the presence of an excess of TBAB (entry 10, Table 1). The benign effect of TBAB on the catalytic activity can be explained taking into account that, after the dissolution of the catalyst in the neat epoxide, an equilibrium between the free metallate and the complex binding the substrate takes place (Scheme 4).

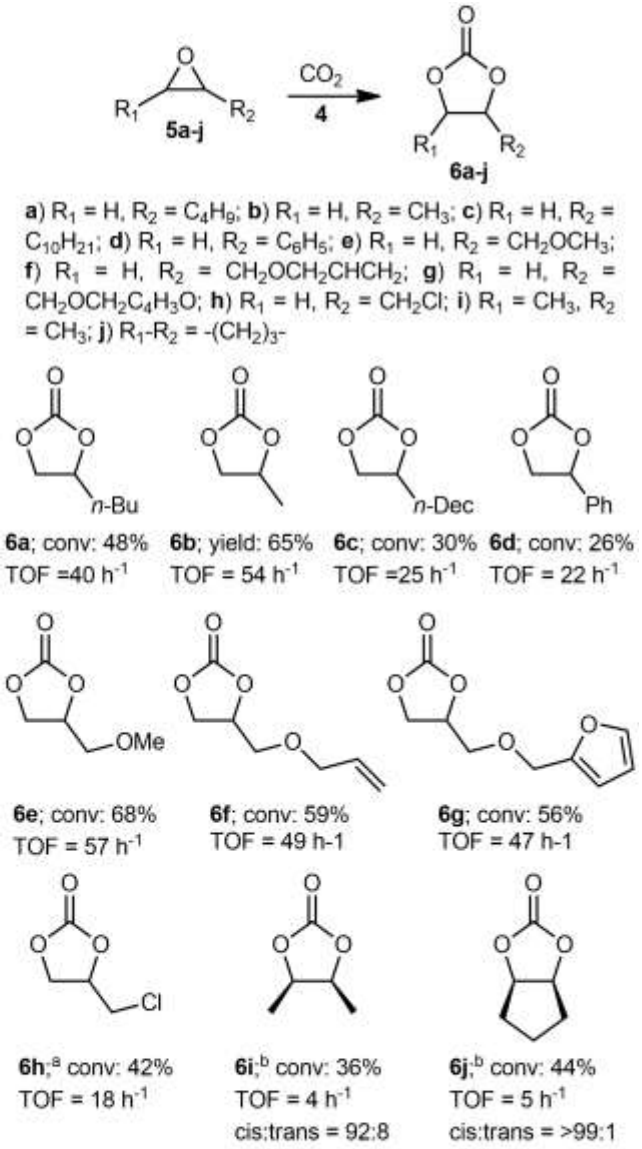


Scheme 4. Equilibrium involving the coordination of **5a** to the Fe centre of the metallate **4**.

Since the ring opening of the Fe-coordinated epoxide involves the Fe-mediated attack of a bromide anion, the presence of an excess of TBAB moves the equilibrium to the left, granting the proper amount of the metallate in the reaction medium.

The complex **4** was then tested as single component catalyst for the conversion of a group of variously substituted epoxides in the corresponding COCs, using a catalyst loading of 0.2 mol% in order to shorten the reaction time to 6 hours (Scheme 5). The reaction of the benchmark substrate **5a** proceeds well, with a TOF of 40 h^{-1}. The less encumbered epoxide **5b** reacts faster, with an initial TOF of 54 h^{-1}. Increasing the length of the alkyl chain in the case of epoxy-dodecane **5c**, results in an attenuation of the catalytic activity, probably because the polarity of the reaction medium affects the equilibrium showed in Figure 4. The reaction proceeds slower even in the case of styrene carbonate **5d**, this difference in reactivity can be reasonably ascribed to electronic effect of the phenyl ring.[9]

Compared to **5a**, the reactions of the glycidyl epoxides **5e-g** proceed faster, with a TOF as high as 57 h^{-1} in the case of methyl glycidyl ether. In the case of epichlorohydrin **5h** and disubstituted substrates **5i-j** a catalyst loading of 0.4 mol% was used, since the reaction of these epoxides was found to proceed slower under the mild reaction conditions used for the study,[8] and the formation of the corresponding carbonates **6h-j** was accomplished with good activities. In particular, **6i** and **6j** were obtained with a high degree of stereoretention with respect to the starting epoxide.



Scheme 5. Scope in epoxides. Reaction conditions: Epoxide = 4.15 · 10^{-2} mol; **4** = 0.2 mol% T = 35 °C; P(CO_2) = 1 bar; reaction time = 6 h, neat. Conversion determined by ^1H NMR using mesitylene as internal standard. The selectivity toward the formation of cyclic carbonate was always found to be >99%. Turnover frequency = $mol_{epoxide} \cdot mol_4^{-1} \cdot$ reaction time^{-1}). a) **4** = 0.4 mol%. b) **4** = 0.4 mol%; T = 50 °C; P(CO_2) = 10 bar; reaction time = 24 h

In conclusion, we isolated and characterized a new metallate [OSSO]-Fe(III) complex. This species was used as single component catalyst for the reaction of several epoxides under very mild reaction conditions (Fe = 0.2 mol%; 1 bar of CO_2 pressure, 35 °C). Apart to the good catalytic activity and selectivity of this system, the results described in this study shed more light on the role of the onium salts in the metal-mediated cycloaddition of CO_2 to the epoxides. We believe that these findings are crucial for a better understanding of the reaction mechanism, and can serve for the development of new high active catalysts.

Experiemental Section

General considerations. All manipulation involving air- and/or moisture-sensitive compounds were performed under nitrogen atmosphere using standard Schlenk technique and a MBraun glovebox. Toluene (99.5%; Sigma-Aldrich), THF (99%; Sigma-Aldrich) and DCM (99.9%, Sigma-Aldrich) were used as received or refluxed for 48 h over sodium, sodium ketyls or $LiAlH_4$ and distilled before use for moisture- and oxygen-sensitive reactions. All other reagents were used as received (TCI or Sigma-Aldrich) or distilled under reduced pressure over calcium hydride. Deuterated solvents were purchased from Euriso-Top or Sigma-Aldrich and used as received. NMR spectra were collected on Bruker Avance spectrometers (400, 300 or 250 MHz for ^1H): the chemical shifts were referenced to tetramethylsilane (TMS) as external reference using the residual protio signal of the deuterated solvents. The ligand **L** and the complex **1** were prepared as reported in reference 8. Measurements of effective magnetic moments were performed on a Bruker Avance 400 MHz spectrometer in toluene-d_8 using a 5 mm Wilmad coaxial insert NMR tube. The effective magnetic moment (μ_{eff}) was calculated from $\mu_{eff} = 8\chi_g MwT$, where χ_g ($cm^3\ g^{-1}$) is the corrected molar susceptibility derived from $\chi_g = 3\Delta f/4\pi f_o CMw + \chi_o$. Δf is the shift in frequency (Hz) of the residual protio signal of the solvent in the presence of the complex from the value of the pure solvent, C and Mw are respectively the concentration (mol cm^{-3}) and the molecular weight of the complex (g mol^{-1}), f_0 is the operating frequency of the spectrometer (Hz), and χ_0 is the mass susceptibility of the pure solvent ($-0.6179 \times 10^{-6}\ cm^3\ g^{-1}$ for toluene-d_8). 4π/3 is the shape factor for a cylindrical sample in a superconducting magnet. Elemental analysis was performed on a CHNS Thermo Scientific Flash EA 1112 equipped with a thermal conductivity detector. High resolution Electrospray Ionization Fourier Transform Ion Cyclotron Resonance Mass Spectrometry (ESI FT-ICR MS) measurements of complexes were performed on a Bruker Solaris XR instrument. FT-IR measurements were carried out on a Bruker Vertex 70 spectrometer equipped with DTGS detector and a Ge/KBr beam splitter. The samples were analyzed in the solid state as KBr disks. UV-Vis spectra were collected on a PerkinElmer Lambda EZ 201 spectrophotometer.

Synthesis of the iron(III) complex 2. Pro-ligand **L** (2.000 g; 3.59 mmol) was dissolved in THF (100 mL). The solution was added to a suspension of sodium hydride (0.190 g; 7.92 mmol) in THF (45 mL) and the mixture stirred at room temperature overnight. The resulting suspension was filtered through celite and slowly added at room temperature to 1.0525 g of anhydrous iron(III) bromide (3.56 mmol) dissolved in 100 mL of THF. The rapid change of the color to the deep purple was observed and the reaction kept overnight. The mixture was then filtered through celite and the solvent removed under reduced pressure affording a deep purple crystalline solid. Yield: 2.58 g, 95.1 %. Elemental analysis calcd. for $C_{38}H_{58}BrFeO_3S_2$: C, 59.84; H, 7.66; S, 8.41; found: C, 59.79; H, 7.72; S, 8.49. μ_{eff} = 5.66 μ_B at 30 °C.

Synthesis of the iron(III) complex 3. Complex 1 (0.200 g; 0.28 mmol) and TBAB (0.180 g; 0.56 mmol) were dissolved in DCM (25 mL). The solution was stirred at room temperature overnight and the solvent was removed under reduced pressure. The residue was redissolved in a toluene/hexane mixture (40 mL, 1/1 vol/vol), filtered through celite and the solvent removed under reduced pressure, affording a deep purple powder. Yield: 0.21 g, 78 %. Elemental analysis calcd. for $C_{50}H_{86}ClBrFeNO_3S_2$: C, 62.00; H, 8.95; N,1.45; S, 6.62; found: C, 61.64; H, 8.85; N, 1.52; S, 6.58. μ_{eff} = 5.96 μ_B at 30 °C.

Synthesis of the iron(III) complex 4. Complex 2 (1.500 g; 1.97 mmol) and TBAB (0.6348 g; 1.97 mmol) were dissolved in DCM (150 mL). The solution was stirred at room temperature overnight and the solvent was removed under reduced pressure, affording a deep purple powder. Yield: 1.5519 g, 77.8 %. Elemental analysis calcd. for $C_{50}H_{86}Br_2FeNO_2S_2$: C, 59.28; H, 8.56; N, 1.38; S, 6.33; found: C, 59.34 H, 8.60; N, 1.50; S, 6.38. μ_{eff} = 5.76 μ_B at 30 °C.

Typical procedure for CO_2/5a coupling (referred to entry 16, Table 1). A 60 mL stainless steel pressure reactor equipped with a magnetic stirring bar was charged, under CO_2 atmosphere, with 42.0 mg of catalyst **4** ($4.15 \cdot 10^{-5}$ mol) and 40.1 mg of TBAB (1.25 · 10−4 mol) dissolved in 5.0 mL of **5a** ($4.15 \cdot 10^{-2}$ mol). The reaction mixture was pressurized with CO_2 at 1 bar and stirred at 35 °C for 24 h. The reactor was cooled with ice, the CO_2 released, 0.58 mL of mesitylene ($4.15 \cdot 10^{-3}$ mol) was added as an internal standard and the mixture was analyzed by ^{1}H NMR spectroscopy using $CDCl_3$ as solvent (Figure S23). Conversion = 92.0 %.

Typical procedure for CO_2/epoxide coupling promoted by 4 (referred to Scheme 5). A 60 mL stainless steel pressure reactor equipped with a magnetic stirring bar was charged, under CO_2 atmosphere, with 84.0 mg of catalyst **4** ($8.3 \cdot 10^{-5}$ mol) dissolved in 5.0 mL of **5a** ($4.15 \cdot 10^{-2}$ mol). The reaction mixture was pressurized with CO_2 at 1 bar and stirred at 35 °C for 6 h. The reactor was cooled with ice, the CO_2 released, 0.58 mL of mesitylene ($4.15 \cdot 10^{-3}$ mol) was added as an internal standard and the mixture was analyzed by ^{1}H NMR spectroscopy using $CDCl_3$ as solvent (Figure S24). Conversion = 48.0 %.

Only for propylene carbonate **6b**, the isolated yield was determined because of the volatile nature of the epoxide **5b**: the volatiles were removed under vacuum, the sample treated with pentane to precipitate the catalyst, filtered over silica and the solvent removed by rotary evaporation; yield = 2.75 g (65%).

Acknowledgements

Ministero dell'Istruzione dell'Università e della Ricerca (MIUR, Roma, Italy) and Università degli Studi di Salerno (FARB 2016-ORSA165551) are acknowledged for funding. The authors acknowledge Dr. Patrizia Oliva, Dr. Patrizia Iannece, Dr. Mariagrazia Napoli, and Dr. Ivano Immediata from University of Salerno for technical assistance.

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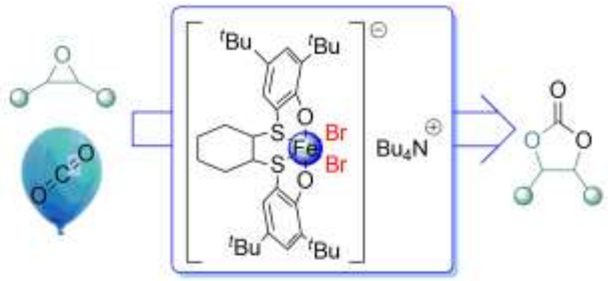
[OSSO]-Type Fe(III) Metallate as Single-Component Catalyst for the CO_2 Cycloaddition to Epoxides



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