Homogeneous Catalytic Reduction of Nitrous and Nitric Oxides to Dinitrogen by Carbon Monoxide

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Catalytic reductions of N₂O and NO by CO to N₂ can be achieved at 100 °C in solutions containing Rh₂(CO)₄Cl₂ and a base: the highest rate for the N₂O reduction of 25.2 turnovers per hour in dimethyl sulphoxide was obtained using KOH as the base.

The reductions of nitric and nitrous oxides by carbon monoxide (equations 1-3) have received continuous attention for some time owing to the relevance of these reactions to the control of air pollution.¹ While numerous reports on the heterogeneous catalysis of reactions 1-3 have appeared,¹ the analogous work on homogeneous systems has been limited to the reaction of NO with CO to give N_2O (equation 1).²⁻⁷ Further reduction of N₂O by CO mediated by a soluble catalyst has not been achieved despite the fact that the reaction is thermodynamically favourable (ΔG° -86.21 kcal; 1 kcal = 4.184 kJ). It is well known that N_2O is a rather inert gas and an extremely poor ligand.8-10 The latter property precludes the activation of N₂O by metal complexes through co-ordination. Nevertheless, the deoxygenation of N_2O by several transition-metal complexes has been revealed.^{8,9} In particular, a catalytic oxidation of PPh₃ to Ph₃PO by N₂O using [(Ph₃P)₃Co(H)N₂] has been reported.¹¹ The challenge

to find suitable homogeneous systems for the catalysis of reaction 2 prompted us to undertake the current study. We herein report for the first time several systems which are capable of catalysing the reduction of N_2O and NO to N_2 by CO, and which function at a much lower temperature than the corresponding heterogeneous process.¹

The strong reducing ability of rhodium carbonyl anions and the easy generation of these species from rhodium compounds under CO atmosphere in the presence of base¹²⁻¹⁵ led us to examine the efficacy of rhodium species in the catalysis of reactions 2 and 3. An effective catalyst system was prepared from Rh₂(CO)₄Cl₂ (0.154 mmol), base (2.2 mmol), H₂O (1.8 ml), and solvent (30 ml). The rhodium complex was placed with the solvent in a 335 ml vessel which was evacuated and then charged with CO and N₂O (or NO) to an initial partial pressure of 350 Torr. An approximate 40 Torr of CH₄ was also added as an internal standard for g.c. analysis. The solution

Table 1.	Results of	f the	catalytic rec	luction of	f N ₂ C) and	NO	by (CO.ª
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Entry		Base	Time (h)	Gas consumed, ΔP (Torr)			Gas produced, ΔP (Torr)		
	Solvente			СО	NO	N ₂ O	N ₂ O	CO ₂	N ₂
Iь	DMSO	KOHc	2	335		318		0	334
II	DMSO	Me₄N+OH-	7	369		351		315	352
III	DMF	Me₄N+OH-	7	276		258		178(262) ^d	296
IV	HMPA	Me₄N+OH-	7	214		227		Ì11 ´	210
v	EG	Me₄N+OH-	7	20		23		10	18
VI	DMF	Et ₃ N ^c	7	19		14		14	17
VII	DMF	(HOC ₂ H ₄) ₃ N ^c	7	17		15		10	14
VIII	DMF	Èt ₃ N	7	51		59		35	46
IX	DMF	MeCO ₂ K ^{c,f}	7	221		232		137(209) ^d	214
Xg	DMF	Me₄N+OH-	8	184	459		110	165	93
XI ^h	DMF	Me ₄ N+OH-	12	227		205		133	217

^a Unless otherwise stated, each catalyst solution was prepared according to the procedure described in the text. Runs I–IX and XI were conducted at 100 \pm 1 °C under an initial partial pressure of *ca.* 350 Torr at 32 °C for N₂O and CO. ^b [Rh(CO)₄](Ph₃P)₂N, 0.106 mmol; KOH (ground), 1.50 g. ^c No water was added. ^d The amount of CO₂ produced after neutralization with H₂SO₄. ^c DMSO = dimethyl sulphoxide, DMF = dimethylformamide, HMPA = hexamethylphosphoramide, EG = ethylene glycol. ^f One equivalent of 18-crown-6 was added. ^g Initial partial pressure: NO, 459; CO, 275 Torr at 32 °C. ^h RuCl₃ · 3H₂O, 0.382 mmol.

was stirred at room temperature for 5 min and the specified amount of base and H_2O were added to the solution through a septum. The system was heated with stirring at 100 °C for *ca*. 7 h. While quantitative analysis (g.c.) of each gas component was performed according to previous methods,^{5,16} the identities of the products were verified from the g.c.-mass spectroscopic data of these components. Table 1 presents the quantitative data of reaction runs under different conditions.

$$2NO + CO \rightarrow N_2O + CO_2 \tag{1}$$

$$N_2O + CO \rightarrow N_2 + CO_2 \tag{2}$$

$$2NO + 2CO \rightarrow N_2 + 2CO_2 \tag{3}$$

The results of runs I-IX clearly demonstrate that the N₂O and CO consumed is equal to the N_2 formed within experimental error as the stoicheiometry of equation 2 predicts. The discrepancy in CO₂ produced in most runs is a consequence of the absorption of CO_2 by base as shown by the release of a substantial amount of the gas on addition of acid to the catalytic solution at the end of the reaction (runs III and IX). Direct evidence showing that the N_2 formed is from N_2O comes from the use of ¹⁵NNO yielding ¹⁵NN having the same abundance (99.2%) of ¹⁵N label as ¹⁵NNO (99.8%). As indicated by the data in Table 1, the catalytic activity is affected dramatically by the solvent and base employed. The highest activity is observed in DMSO using KOH as the base with a rate of 25.2 turnovers per hour based on N_2 produced. In protic solvent or in amine solution, the activity decreases to less than 1/10 of that in DMSO using Me₄N+OH⁻ as the base. In the absence of base, the catalyst does not reduce N_2O to N_2 with or without CO present. Under similar conditions, the catalyst systems also catalyse the reduction of NO to N_2 (run X). Monitoring of the gas components by g.c. reveals that NO is first reduced to N_2O and then to N_2 . It is noteworthy that ruthenium complexes also catalyse the reduction of N_2O to N_2 (equation 2) under similar conditions albeit with lower activities (run XI).

The rhodium carbonyls observed during the catalysis of reaction 2 in the most active solution, I, were $Rh(CO)_4^-$ and $Rh_4(CO)_{11}^{2-}$.† If the gas mixture was removed and replaced

by 1 atm of CO, $Rh_4(CO)_{11}^{2-}$ was converted into $Rh(CO)_4^{-}$ in 10 min. The reaction of $[Rh(CO)_4](Ph_3P)_2N$ in DMF with N_2O at ambient temperature, produced 3.74 mol of N_2 and 1.81 mol of CO₂ and consumed 3.92 mol of N_2O per mol of $Rh(CO)_4^{-}$ in 30 min. In addition, the use of $[Rh(CO)_4](Ph_3P)_2N$ alone in DMSO for the catalysis of reaction 2 resulted in a very high activity of 51.1 turnovers per hour in the first 10 min at 100 °C. These observations indicate that $Rh(CO)_4^{-}$ is most likely the species responsible for N_2O reduction to N_2 during the catalysis.

It appears that the reactivity of N_2O toward $Rh(CO)_4^-$, coupled with the ready reduction of rhodium carbonyl clusters to $Rh(CO)_4^-$ by CO in basic solution makes possible the catalysis of reaction 2 by these clusters.

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[†] The i.r. data for $Rh(CO)_4^{-1}$: 1900 cm⁻¹; for $Rh_4(CO)_{11}^{2-1}$: 1940, 1810 cm⁻¹. These values are in agreement with the data reported previously (ref. 15, 17, and 13).