We synthesized uniform CuO coated Cu nanoparticles from the thermal decomposition of copper acetylacetonate followed by air oxidation and used these nanoparticles as catalysts for Ullmann-type amination coupling reactions of aryl chlorides.

The development of uniform nanometre sized particles has been intensively pursued because of their many technological and fundamental scientific interests. Many colloidal transition metal nanoparticles have been synthesized and applied as catalysts for organic reactions because they have a characteristic high surface area available for catalysis. Ullmann-type amination is one of the most popular reactions not only in the laboratory but also in industry because the reaction products are very useful for the production of many important pharmaceuticals.

Recently, the synthesis of aryl imidazole derivatives has been intensively conducted because of the importance of N-heterocyclic carbene chemistry. Although considerable advances in the Ullmann-type amination reactions using copper catalysts have been achieved, generally the coupling partners of amines were confined to aryl iodides or aryl bromides. There are only a few reports on the coupling reaction using aryl chlorides as coupling partners. In this communication, we report on the synthesis of CuO coated Cu nanoparticles and their catalytic application to Ullmann-type coupling of aryl chlorides and imidazole.

The current synthetic procedure is a modified version of the method developed by our group for the synthesis of various nanoparticles of metals and oxides, which employs the thermal decomposition of metal–surfactant complexes in hot surfactant solution. Recently, several groups reported the synthesis of copper nanoparticles. For example, Fischer and coworkers synthesized monodisperse copper nanoparticles from the thermal decomposition of Cu(OCH(Me)CH2NMe2)2. We synthesized Cu nanoparticles from the thermal decomposition of commercially available copper acetylacetonate in oleylamine (Scheme 1).

The detailed synthetic procedure is as follows. A solution containing 0.1 g of Cu(acac)2 and 10 mL of oleylamine was slowly heated to 230 °C. Then, the solution was kept at this temperature for 6 hours, producing a red-colored colloidal solution. A transmission electron microscopic (TEM) image showed that uniform 15 nm sized copper nanoparticles were produced and the HRTEM image showed the polycrystalline nature of the Cu nanoparticle (Fig. 1(a) and 1(b)). When 0.5 g of precursor was used in the synthesis, smaller 12 nm sized copper nanoparticles were synthesized. When the synthesized Cu nanoparticles were exposed to air, the color of the nanoparticle solution changed to blue, which shows that copper oxide, CuO, was formed (Fig. 1c). The TEM image revealed that the size and shape of the nanoparticles are kept nearly unchanged after the air oxidation. The X-ray diffraction pattern, shown in Fig. 1d, revealed that Cu2O shell was formed from sacrificing the copper core.

We investigated the catalytic performance of the CuO coated copper nanoparticles for Ullmann coupling reactions. When coupling reactions using aryl bromides such as 2-bromopyridine and 4-bromoacetophenone were conducted in DMSO at 150 °C, the reactions proceed to completion. Even though coupling reactions using copper-based catalysts have been intensively studied and applied in many industrial processes for more than 100 years, most of the reported coupling reactions using copper-based catalysts, however, have used expensive aryl iodides and aryl bromides as reactants. Recently, in coupling reactions using palladium-based catalysts, employing cheap aryl chlorides instead of expensive aryl bromides or aryl iodides became a very important issue. As previously described, there are only few reports on the Ullmann coupling reaction using aryl chloride as coupling partners. Recently, Buchwald reported on the Ullmann type amination of aryl chlorides using Cul and 1,2-diaminocyclohexane derivatives. In the case of nanoparticles, Gedanken reported on the Ullmann coupling reaction of iodobenzene using 50–70 nm sized Cu nanoparticles. As previously described, the Cu nanoparticles are...
very air-sensitive and easily oxidized to Cu₂O. We used the Cu₂O coated Cu nanoparticles as catalysts. Surprisingly enough, when we conducted Ullmann-type amination reactions of imidazole with various aryl chlorides having electron withdrawing groups using the Cu₂O coated copper nanoparticles as catalysts, the reactions proceeded very well (entries 1–8 in Table 1). This high catalytic activity of the Cu₂O coated Cu nanoparticles seems to result from the high surface area derived from the nanoparticles. In addition, the coordination of oleylamine on the nanoparticles might affect the catalytic activity. The enhancement of the catalytic activity of copper by coordination of a suitable amine ligand was very recently prepared Cu nanoparticles also showed good activity for this Ullmann type amination (95% isolated yield for 4-chlorofluorobenzene).

Next, we screened various amines to obtain the coupled products with 4-chloroacetoephone (Table 2). In the case of benzimidazole, pyrazole and pyrrole, the yield of product is good to moderate. But when indole was used as substrate, a complex mixture was obtained.

In conclusion, we synthesized uniform Cu₂O coated Cu nanoparticles and successfully used them for the catalyst for Ullmann type amination coupling reactions of aryl chlorides.

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Notes and references


8 See Electronic supplementary information.
