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To cite this version:
Gérard Audran, Elena Bagryanskaya, Paul Brémond, Mariya Edeleva, Marque S.R.A., et al.. Trityl-based alkoxyamines as NMP controllers and spin-labels. Polymer Chemistry, 2016, 7 (42), pp.6490-6499. 10.1039/c6py01303a. hal-01408195

HAL Id: hal-01408195
https://amu.hal.science/hal-01408195
Submitted on 28 Mar 2017

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Trityl-based alkoxyamines as NMP controllers and spin-labels†

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Recently, new applications of trityl-nitroxide biradicals were proposed. In the present study, attachment of a trityl radical to alkoxyamines was performed for the first time. The rate constants $k_d$ of C–ON bond homolysis in these alkoxyamines were measured and found to be similar to those for alkoxyamines without a trityl moiety. The electron paramagnetic resonance (EPR) spectra of the products of alkoxyamine homolysis (trityl-TEMPO and trityl-SG1 biradicals) were recorded, and the corresponding exchange interactions were estimated. The decomposition of trityl-alkoxyamines showed more than an 80% yield of biradicals, meaning that the C–ON bond homolysis is the main reaction. The suitability of these labelled initiators/controllers for polymerisation was exemplified by means of a successful nitroxide-mediated polymerisation (NMP) of styrene. Thus, this is the first report of a spin-labelled alkoxyamine suitable for NMP.

Introduction

Although persistent trityl radicals $\text{Ar}_3\text{C}^\cdot$ were discovered by Gomberg in 1900,§ only many decades later did these radicals arouse keen interest in the scientific community because of their appealing applications as probes.2–4 They are currently used as spin probes for oxymetry,7 as pH probes,5 and as spin labels for distance measurements in biomolecules.5 Very recently, the preparation of nitroxide-trityl radical dual probes was reported2 and aroused keen interest, and attracted a lot of attention as probes based on the modulation of the exchange interaction between the two spins8 and as polarizing agents for Dynamic Nuclear Polarisation-enhanced Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (DNP-NMR).9 In the same period, there was increasing interest in the practical applications of biradicals such as binitroxides because of their uses as an initiator/controller agent in Nitroxide Mediated Polymerisation10–12 (NMP) and as a polarizing agent in DNP-NMR.13

In the last decade, Electron Paramagnetic Resonance (EPR) techniques experienced a tremendous development towards EPR imaging2–14 with the help of new technologies and the preparation of new spin probes such as those mentioned above leading to in vivo imaging,15 and imaging in materials.16 Moreover, in the last three decades, the chemistry of alkoxyamines $\text{R}_1\text{R}_2\text{NOR}_3$ has been developed for their application to NMP as a controllers/initiators.17,18 Lately, new applications of these compounds emerged in materials sciences – as key moieties in self-healing polymers,19,20 as fluorescent switches,21,22 and as a coding system23,24 – as well as in biology as a new type of theranostic agent.25 Taking into account the valuable features of the trityl-TEMPO and trityl-SG1 biradicals. Among the family of trityl polymers, the Finnland-type radical 17 was selected because of the simplicity of its EPR signal (i.e. one peak), the suppression of the reactivity at the para position by its functionalisation,‡5,26 and due to its carbonylic function suitable for many types of coupling reactions.§

§In ref. 26, the Finland trityl radical 16 is used as a model. Its reactivity with small radicals such as methyl radical $\text{Me}^\cdot$ has been reported as extremely low. Consequently, it was assumed unreactive toward the styryl radical due to its size.

‡ Other positions were unreactive due to the substitution by sulphur atoms.

† DOI: 10.1039/c6py01303a

Cite this: Polym. Chem., 2016, 7, 6490
radical was found to have no significant effect on $k_d$, meaning that these alkoxyamines retained all their kinetic properties for use as controllers/initiators in NMP, as a switch in optotronics, and as theranostic agents. Moreover, the ability of TA to control NMP was confirmed by the polymerisation of styrene with 1.

### Experimental section

#### Kinetic experiments

Homolysis rate constants $k_d$ were measured by EPR, as previously reported, and given by eqn (1) (Fig. S1†). Air was used as an alkyl radical scavenger for EPR experiments, respectively. Activation energies $E_a$ were estimated using eqn (2) and the averaged frequency factor $A = 2.4 \times 10^{14} \text{ s}^{-1}$. The values of $k_d$ and $E_a$ are listed in Table 1.

$$\ln \frac{[\text{nitroxide}]_{\text{eq}} - [\text{nitroxide}]_t}{[\text{nitroxide}]_{\text{eq}}} = -k_d t \quad (1)$$

$$E_a = 8.314 T \ln \frac{2.4 \times 10^{14}}{k_d} \quad (2)$$
Table 1  Experimental homolysis rate constants \(k_{\text{d,exp}}\) the corresponding activation energy \(E_a\) and the re-estimated rate constant \(k_d\) at 120 °C

| TA     | Solvent   | \(T\) (°C) | \(k_{\text{d,exp}}\) \((10^{-4} \text{ s}^{-1})\) | \(E_a\) \((\text{kJ mol}^{-1})\) | \(k_d\) \((10^{-4} \text{ s}^{-1})\) |
|--------|-----------|------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1      | t-BuPh    | 125        | 3.6                             | 135.8           | 2.1             |
| 2      | Toluene   | 80         | 2.1                             | 122.0           | 146.0           |
| 3      | Toluene   | 100        | 3.0\(^a\)                      | 127.8\(^a\)     | 24.7            |
| 4      | Toluene   | 100        | 6.0\(^d\)                      | 125.7\(^c\)     | 47.0            |
| 5      | Toluene   | 100        | 6.7\(^d\)                      | 125.3\(^c\)     | 52.4            |

\(^a\) The error on \(k_{\text{d,exp}}\) is 5%. \(^b\) Given by eqn (2), with \(k_d\) values reported in the 4th column. \(^c\) Re-estimated \(k_d\) values at 120 °C using adapted eqn (2) and \(E_a\) values reported in the 5th column. \(^d\) A diastereoisomeric mixture.

EPR experiments

The EPR measurements were carried out in CW mode using a Bruker EMX X-band spectrometer equipped with a BVT-2000 temperature control system.\(^\dagger\) The samples were degassed by 3 cycles of a freeze–pump–thaw procedure (\(P = 0.1\) mb). The EasySpin software toolbox was used for simulation of the EPR spectra.\(^29\) To take into account the presence of various conformers of nitroxide-trityl biradicals showing slightly different spin–spin interaction exchange values, it was assumed that exchange interaction values are prone to a normal distribution with the mean value \(f\) and standard deviation \(\Delta f\) (eqn (3) and Table S1\(\dagger\)).

\[
f(x) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi} \Delta f} e^{-\frac{(x-f)^2}{2\Delta f^2}}
\]  

\(3\)

Polymerization experiments

A weighed amount of 1 (6.5 mg) was dissolved in 3 mL of styrene (distilled prior to the experiment). The reaction mixture was placed in a round-bottom two-neck flask equipped with a magnetic stirrer and a condenser, degassed by Ar bubbling and heated at 130 °C in an oil bath under an inert atmosphere. Sampling was performed by means of a syringe at various time intervals to monitor the evolution of the monomer conversion, molecular weight and PDI of the polymer prepared. The probes were quenched in an ice bath and stored at 4 °C prior to analysis. Monomer conversion was analysed by \(^1\)H NMR. The polymer molecular weight and distribution were analysed by gel permeation chromatography on an Agilent LC 1200 set-up equipped with an isocratic pump, a PL-mixed C GPC column, and UV and refractive index detectors. THF was used as an eluent at a flow rate of 1 ml min\(^{-1}\) and the column temperature was set at 35 °C. The column was calibrated by using narrow PDI polystyrene standards (Agilent).

General

Solvents and reactants were used as received. (1-Bromoethyl) benzene (97%), trifluoromethanesulfonate copper(II) (Cu(OTF)_2) (98%) and 4-tert-butyl-2-(4-tert-butylpyridin-2-yl)pyridine (dTbpy) (98%) were purchased from Aldrich. tert-Butyl 2-bromo-2-methylpropanoate was purchased from Fluka. Alkoxamines 6,\(^{30}\) 8,\(^{31}\) and 9\(^,^{32}\) were prepared according to the literature.\(^33,^{34}\) 2-Bromoacetyl bromide was obtained by a known literature method.\(^30\)

Routine reaction monitoring was performed using silica gel 60 F\(_{254}\) TLC plates; spots were visualised by exposure to UV light and a phosphomolybdic acid solution in ETOH, followed by heating. Purification procedures were performed on chromatography columns with silica gel grade 60 (230–400 mesh). The \(^1\)H, \(^13\)C, and \(^31\)P NMR spectra were recorded with a Bruker AV-400 (\(^1\)H: 400.13 MHz, \(^13\)C\(^{(1)}\)H): 100.61 MHz) and Bruker AV-300 (\(^1\)H: 300.13 MHz, \(^13\)C\(^{(1)}\)H): 75.476 MHz) spectrometer. Deuterochloroform (CDCl\(_3\)) was used as the solvent, with residual CHCl\(_3\) (\(\delta = 7.25\) ppm) or CDCl\(_3\) (\(\delta = 77.0\) ppm) being employed as an internal standard. In recording \(^31\)P-NMR spectra, 85\% H\(_3\)PO\(_4\) was used as an internal standard (\(\delta = 0\) ppm). The precise masses of molecular ions were determined by HRMS on a DFS Thermo scientific instrument (EI, 70 eV). The melting point was determined on an FP 900 Thermosystem microscope melting point apparatus (Mettler-Toledo International Inc., Zürich, Switzerland). Elemental analysis was performed on a Euro EA-3000 CHNS analyzer. IR spectra were recorded with a Bruker Tensor 27 FTIR spectrometer, and KBr pellets were used. Wavenumber values are given in cm\(^{-1}\). Electrospray ionization mass spectra ESI/MS were recorded using a hybrid quadrupole/time-of-flight Bruker microOTOF-Q spectrometer with methanol or dichloromethane (DCM) used as a solvent and scanning the spectra in the \(m/z\) range 100–3000 in positive and negative ionization modes. Nitrogen was used as a drying gas at 220 °C and at a flow rate of 4 L min\(^{-1}\). The nebulizer pressure was set at 1.0 bar. The capillary voltage was set at \(-4.0\) kV. Sample solutions were infused into the ESI source by using an LC Agilent 1200 in FIA mode (Flow Injection Analysis, 2–3 \(\mu\)L at a flow rate of the solvent 0.1 mL min\(^{-1}\)).

General procedure for the preparation of 11–15

To a stirred solution of alkoxamine (6–10, 0.1 mmol) and pyridine (0.12 mmol) in dry dichloromethane (DCM) (0.25 mL) was added a solution of 2-bromoacetyl bromide (0.13 mmol) in dichloromethane (0.30 mL). The thick caseous solid was immediately obtained, but it disappeared while the mixture was stirred under an argon atmosphere overnight at room
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General procedure for the preparation of 1–5
To an alkoxyamine (11–15) were added finely powdered potassium carbonate (10 mg, 0.070 mmol), trityl 17 (50.0 mg, 0.050 mmol), dry acetone (0.300 mL) and anhydrous dimethylaniline (0.15 mL). The heterogeneous mixture was stirred at 40 °C for 24 h under an argon atmosphere, and then diluted with DCM (10 mL) and water (3 mL). The deep-green organic phase was separated, filtered through a short cotton plug and concentrated in vacuo to yield a black film. Column chromatography on a silica gel (DCM, then DCM/methanol with a gradient increase in the solvent ratio from 1:0.05 to 1:0.2 v/v) yielded TA 1–5, respectively.

Bis[8-(methoxycarbonyl)-2,2,6,6-tetramethylbenzo[1,2-d:4,5-d']bis[1,3]dithiol-4-yl][8-(2-(1-phenylethoxy)-3,3,5,5-tetramethyl-4-azacyclohexyloxyl)-2-oxo-ethyl]carbonyl]bis[1,3]dithiol-4-yl)methyl radical 1. 0.052 g (78%), greenish-black powder, m.p. > 125 °C (decomposition). HRMS (ESI): calcd for C_{64}H_{80}N_{2}O_{12}PS_{12} [M + H+] 1483.2223, found 1483.212; calcd for C_{65}H_{82}N_{2}O_{11}PS_{12} [M + Na+] 1506.2202, found 1504.218. IR (KBr): \nu = 2968 (m), 2922 (m), 2856 (w), 1740 (m), 1707 (vs), 1674 (m), 1609 (m), 1452 (m), 1345 (m), 1274 (m), 1234 (vs), 1169 (m), 1134 (m), 1111 (m), 1053 (m), 1026 (m), 955 (m). ESR for 0.5 mM deoxygenated solution in DCM: multiplet, a_H = 9.4 \mu T, linewidth (Gauss) 8.7 \mu T, g = 2.00280.

Preparation of tert-butyl 2-[(4-hydroxy-2,2,6,6-tetramethylpiperidin-1-yl)oxy]-2-methylpropanoate 7. 0.70 mL (3.7 mmol) of tert-butyl 2-bromo-2-methylpropanoate was added to a Schlenk flask with 0.76 g (4.4 mmol) of 4-hydroxy-TEMPO, 0.24 g (3.9 mmol) of copper powder, 0.013 g (0.037 mmol) of Cu(OtBu)_{2}, and 0.040 g (0.15 mmol) of dTBpy. Benzene, 5 mL, was then added as a solvent, and the solution was degassed by three freeze–pump–thaw cycles. The solution was heated to 75 °C with stirring. After 5 h, all the copper powder was consumed and a beige precipitate was formed. The solution was filtered and concentrated under vacuum. The crude product was purified by column chromatography eluting with hexane/ethyl acetate (95/5 gradually increasing to 5/5). The alkoxyamine was eluted before 4-hydroxy-TEMPO and collected as a colorless fraction. After evaporation of the solvent, the dry residue was recrystallized from hexane to give 0.97 g (83%) of compound 7 as white crystals, mp 83.8 °C (decomposition). 1H NMR (400.13 MHz, CDCl_{3}) \delta: 4.00–3.90 (m, 1H), 1.82 (dm, 2H, \_J_{d} = 12.2 Hz), 1.46 (s, 10H), 1.41 (s, 7H), 1.20 (s, 7H), 1.07 (s, 6H). 13C{1H} NMR (100 MHz, CDCl_{3}) \delta: 173.9, 80.2, 79.3, 61.6, 58.8, 47.8, 32.3, 26.7, 23.3, 20.1. IR (neat): 2941 m, 2856 w, 2376 m, 2335 m, 2262 s, 1840 m, 1609 m, 1450 m, 1282 m, 1235 m, 1171 m, 1111 m, 1055 m, 1026 m, 957 m, 875 m, 743 m, 687 m. ESR for 0.5 mM of 5 in DCM: multiplet (splitting on 8 protons in groups of 3H, 3H, 2H), a_{HH} = 9.0 \mu T, a_{H} = 9.5 \mu T, a_{H} = 9.8 \mu T (respectively), linewidth (Gauss) 8.6 \mu T, g = 2.00281.
Homolysis of the C—ON bond of alkoxyamines

Rate constants $k_d$ were measured by EPR because the generated nitroxides are stable under our conditions (Table 1). As discussed in the later section, a spin–spin exchange interaction is observed between the odd electrons localised on the trityl and nitroxy radical moieties. Nevertheless, the occurrence of this interaction does not impede the determination of $k_d$ by EPR. Gomberg’s radical and some other trityl radicals are known to react slowly in a reversible manner with oxygen as displayed in Scheme 3. Because of its functionalisation at the para position, the occurrence of the reactivity displayed in Scheme 3 is expected to be very low in the Finland-type trityl radical $17$.**

The homolysis rate constants $k_d$ for the C—ON bond in alkoxyamines are easily estimated using robust linear free energy relationships developed for nitroxyl (eqn (4))$^{37}$ and

[1] Hydrolysis of 25 is not selective and the dicarboxylic acid 27 and the tricarboxylic acid 24 are generated. Both are re-methylated to yield 25, and are again smoothly hydrolysed. After three cycles, triarylmethanol 26 was obtained in 71% yield.

**In this case, the main coupling reaction is expected to occur at the carbonyl centre, which is severely sterically hindered, and consequently, shows negligible reactivity.

Results and discussion

Preparation of 1–5

Quantitative methylation of 24$^{35}$ yielded 25 which was smoothly hydrolysed under controlled conditions[ into monocarboxylic acid 26. The latter, in the presence of a strong acid, afforded its cation derivative which was reduced to trityl 17 in the presence of tin chloride (Scheme 1).$^{36}$ The trityl radical 17 was used for this purpose because the H-couplings of the odd electron are efficiently suppressed via the substitution of the ortho, meta and para hydrogen atoms by sulphur-centred and carbon centred substituents.

Thus, trityl-alkoxyamines 1–5 were prepared in two steps starting from the initial alkoxyamines 6–10, respectively, and using bromo acetyl bromide as an acetylating agent and a precursor of a spacer, and trityl radical 17 as a monofunctional nucelophile (Scheme 2). Alkoxyamine-trityl radicals 1, 3–5 were prepared from the diastereoisomeric mixtures of 6, and 8–10, respectively. Trityl-alkoxyamines 1–5 were identified by EPR, IR, and HRMS.

Scheme 1 Synthesis of trityl 17. (a) Methyl iodide (6 equiv.), triethylamine (4 equiv.), 40 °C, 36 h; (b) LiOH (1.55 equiv.) in THF/water, room temperature, 48 h; (c) C6F5SO2H (5 equiv.) in anhydrous DCM and treated with SnCl2 (1 equiv.).

Scheme 2 Preparation of 1–5. (a) Pyridine (1.2 equiv.) in DCM, room temperature, 24 h; (b) K2CO3 in anhydrous acetone/dimethylformamide, 40 °C, 24 h, under an argon atmosphere; (c) pyridine (1.2 equiv.) in dichloromethane, room temperature, 24 h; (d) K2CO3 in anhydrous acetone/dimethylformamide, 40 °C, 24 h under argon; (e) pyridine (1.2 equiv.) in dichloromethane, room temperature, 24 h; (f) K2CO3 in anhydrous acetone/DMF, 40 °C, 24 h, under an argon atmosphere.
moiety are estimated using the steric constant attached to the nitroxyl moiety (ref. 37 and 40),

\[
E = -23 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1} - 7.8(\pm 0.4)s_{\text{C}-\text{C},\text{H}_4},
\]

The \(E\) and \(k_d\) values predicted by the simplified models 19–23 are in very good agreement with the experimental values reported in Table 1 for 1–5 highlighting both the validity of our assumptions and the robustness of the linear free energy relationship developed (eqn (4) and (5)), i.e. \(k_d\) values differ by less than 40\% and \(E\) less than 1.7 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}. Moreover, as reported for other bisnitrroxides,12,47,48 the spin–exchange interaction (vide supra) has no significant influence on the C–ON bond homolysis.

### EPR analysis of 1

Before heating, the samples of 2 and 3 displayed only the signal of the pure trityl radical as expected (not shown). Upon heating at 100 °C for 5 hours, in toluene in the presence of oxygen as an alkyl radical scavenger, for both 2 and 3, the EPR signal that was recorded at room temperature was due to three species. Considering the experimental conditions, the presence of starting materials was discarded, and the EPR signals were simulated using three new species, namely biradical 1’ or 3’, free trityl radical and free nitrroxides TEMPO or SG1.

Although the trityl and nitroxyl radical moieties are separated by a linker of nine and eight single bonds for 1’ and 3’, respectively, spin–spin exchange interactions are expected to occur both in 1’ and 3’ due to the freedom of motion of the linker. Therefore, the value of the exchange interaction \(J\) was selected as one of the simulation parameters, i.e., \(J\) is 63 G and 170 G for 1’ and 3’, respectively. The accurate simulation of the EPR spectra implies the finding of all stable conformers of 1’ and 3’ with the corresponding \(J\) values and implements chemical exchange between all these conformers, but it is a rather complicated task. For simplicity, it is assumed that the values of spin–spin exchange interactions are subject to a normal (Gaussian) distribution with standard deviation \(\Delta J\). The temperature dependence of the signal (Fig. S2†) showed an increase in the spin–spin exchange interaction both for 1’ and 3’ with increasing temperature due to an increase in the mobility of 1’ and 3’. A very good agreement (Fig. 2a) was achieved and the EPR hyperfine coupling constants (\(J\) value between 50 and 100 G) of 1’ are in agreement with those reported in the literature and do not deserve more comments.39 On the other hand, as far as we know, the EPR signal of 3’ (Fig. 2b) is the first report of a biradical combining trityl and β-phosphorylated nitroxetine. The simulations allowed 14% TEMPO, 6% free trityl, and 80% 1’ for the decomposition of 2, and 8% SG1, 4% trityl, and 88% 3’ for the decomposition of 3. Even though more than 80% of released biradicals are observed, the detection of...
free nitroxides and free trityl points to the occurrence of side-reactions.†††

Under the experimental conditions (100 °C in toluene with non-reversible scavenging by O₂ of the generated alkyl radicals, \( k_1 \approx 10^9 \text{ M}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1} \)), the homolysis of the alkoxyamines (‘T-N-R’) is expected to produce only the signal of the biradicals (‘T-N’) 1’ and 3’ (Scheme 5). Accordingly, the presence of free trityl and free nitroxides denotes the occurrence of side-reactions although they occur to a low extent and do not impede the determination of \( k_d \). Furthermore, to take into account these side-reactions, a 10-reaction scheme is proposed with alkoxy and peroxyl radicals as reactive key intermediates (Scheme 5). Importantly, several species are expected to provide the same signal, that is the signal of the free nitroxide is due to \( \text{N}_1, \text{X}_1\text{N}', \text{X}_2\text{N}', \text{X}_3\text{N}', \text{X}_4\text{N}' \), and the signal of the free trityl radical is due to only T’ as the starting materials ‘TNR’ decomposed completely.

Although the para-positions on the aromatic rings of trityl radicals of type 17 are substituted by carboxylic acids or carboxylates, reaction with peroxyl radicals has been reported at the para position (Scheme 4), and is considered one of the main pathways of trityl radical decay.†† Consequently, the analogous reaction with trityl radicals carrying ester groups cannot be disregarded and might account for the decay of the trityl signal. It is noteworthy that in the case of the ‘TNR’ biradical and ‘TN’ biradical and ‘TNR’ alkoxyamine, the reaction with the alkoxy radical would afford a free nitroxide \( \text{X}_2\text{N}' \) (Scheme 5). For the sake of simplicity, it is assumed that the peroxyl radicals reacted in the same way and with the same rate constants with ‘TNR’ and ‘TN’, that is \( k_4 = k_5 \approx 10^8 \text{ M}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1} \). The dimerization of peroxyl radicals into tetroxides ROOOOR (\( k_2 \approx 10^3–10^6 \text{ M}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1} \)) which spontaneously and instantaneously collapse into alkyl radicals (\( k_1 > 10^8 \text{ s}^{-1} \)) is well known and may result in unexpected chemistry. Therefore, reactions (6) and (7) (Scheme 5) involving alkoxy radicals are included in the kinetic scheme to account for the generation of free trityl radicals. The reactivity is expected to take place in the linker via an H-abstraction reaction affording an alkyl radical which then decomposes into a free trityl radical and a nitroxide or alkoxyamine. For simplicity, it is assumed that the alkoxy radicals reacted in the same way and with the same

**Scheme 4** Conversion of trityl carboxylic acids to diamagnetic species in oxidative reactions with alkylperoxyl radicals.

**Scheme 5** The reaction scheme describing decomposition of alkoxyamines 1–5 in the presence of oxygen, and applied to account for the EPR signal reported in Fig. 2.
rate constants with "TNR" and "TN", that is \( k_6 = k_7 > 10^6 \) M\(^{-1}\) s\(^{-1}\).\(^{54,57}\) For simplicity, as the reaction with the trityl moiety and the linker takes place far from the C-ON bond, it is assumed that the new alkoxyamines generated \( X_1NR \) and \( X_2NR \) are homolysed at the same rate as the starting material "TNR". The same reactions with the peroxyl radicals are disregarded because the H-abstraction rate constants are expected to be low.\(^{55}\) Reactions (8) and (9) (Scheme 5) are expected to account for the decay of alkoxyl and peroxyl radicals in non-reactive by-products. These reactions describe a complicated scheme of decays involving several reactions. For the sake of simplicity, pseudo-first order decays and similar rate constants for the alkoxyl and peroxyl radicals, i.e., \( k_8 = k_9 = 1000\) s\(^{-1}\) (this rate was modulated to reach the best simulation) are assumed. Under these experimental conditions, nitroxides are known to be stable in the presence of oxygen, and thus we can assume that the nitroxyl moiety of the generated biradical doesn’t take part in any other reactions.

Using a reasonable set of rate constants for Scheme 5, it is possible to reach a good agreement, i.e., 14% TEMPO, 6% trityl, and 80% 1’ in radical species, with the ratios reported in Fig. 3a. Nevertheless, these side-reactions do not impede the use of 1–5 as initiators/controllers in NMP or the use of their corresponding biradicals (or trityl radical) as probes as long as TA is not overheated for a long period. At the same parameters (Fig. 3b) 10% SG1, 1% trityl, and 89% 1’ after 5 h are obtained, in good agreement with the EPR analysis (Fig. 2b).

**Polymerization of styrene initiated with 1**

The possible usefulness of 1–5 as initiators in nitroxide mediated polymerization is highlighted by the successful controlled bulk polymerization of styrene with 1 as an initiator/controller (Fig. 4) with styrene/1 ratios of 5000 : 1 and 1350 : 1, according to the linear increase in molecular weight with conversion upon polymerisation of styrene. The polydispersity index (PDI, Fig. 4) decreases with the conversion as expected and is close to 1.5, i.e., slightly larger for the high ratio (targeted \( M_n \) of 500 000 g mol\(^{-1}\)), due to the occurrence of self-initiation,\(^{58}\) and lower for the small ratio (targeted \( M_n \) of 135 000 g mol\(^{-1}\)).

To check the “living” character of the polymerization, end group analysis is performed. The polymer was precipitated.

---

**Fig. 3** Time dependence of the concentrations of 2 (a) and 3 (b), biradical 1’ (a) and 3’ (b), trityl and free nitroxides TEMPO (a) and SG1 (b) after the thermal decomposition of alkoxyamines as given in Scheme 5. Kinetics parameters: \( k_1 = 10^9\) M\(^{-1}\) s\(^{-1}\), \( k_2 = 10^6\) M\(^{-1}\) s\(^{-1}\), \( k_3 = 10^5\) s\(^{-1}\), \( k_4 = k_5 = 10^6\) M\(^{-1}\) s\(^{-1}\), \( k_8 = k_9 = 3 \times 10^6\) M\(^{-1}\) s\(^{-1}\), \( k_6 = k_7 = 1000\) s\(^{-1}\), and \([O_2]_0 = 8\) mM. (a) \([2]_0 = 10^{-4}\) M and \([4]_0 = 2 \times 10^{-3}\) s\(^{-1}\); (b) \([3]_0 = 10^{-4}\) M, \([2]_0 = 10^{-4}\) M, \([4]_0 = 10^{-3}\) s\(^{-1}\), \([6]_0 = 3 \times 10^{-4}\) s\(^{-1}\). A dashed red line for trityl-nitroxides, a black solid line for TA, a dotted green line for the free trityl radical, and a dashed/dotted blue line for free nitroxides.

**Fig. 4** Molecular weight (left axis, filled squares) and polydispersity index (right axis, open squares) evolution vs. conversion plot for bulk polymerization of styrene initiated with alkoxyamine 1 at 130 °C (top) and 125 °C (bottom) with styrene/1 ratios 5000 : 1 (top) and 1350 : 1 (bottom). A dotted line for the theoretical evolution of \( M_n \).
from the reaction mixture, washed and dried. After that the polymer was dissolved in toluene (10^{-4} M solution based on the molecular weight). EPR is recorded to determine the concentration of the spin labels. The signal of the trityl radical (9 × 10^{-5} M concentration) is observed as expected. The solution saturated with oxygen is heated at 120 °C for 5 hours. Subsequent EPR showed the formation of biradical 1' with the double integration of the signal twice the one of the starting materials 1 as expected, meaning the decomposition of polymeric alkoxyamines occurred and proving the presence of a nitroxyl end group in the polymer. The fraction of “living” chains is estimated as 90%. The EPR spectra of the polymer sample before and after heating are displayed in Fig. S11.†

Re-initiation of the radical polymerization of bulk styrene (Fig. 5) using a polystyrene macro-initiator based on 1 confirmed nicely the reported livingness.

Taking into account the data reported in the literature, as good as livingness and controlled polymerization are expected with TA 2–5.15,28,39,60

Conclusion

A convenient two-step preparation of the first trityl-alkoxyamines is reported. The observed homolysis rate constants, \( k_d \), for trityl-alkoxyamines are similar to those for the corresponding unlabelled alkoxyamines. It is clearly shown that the trityl radical moiety has no influence on \( k_d \) regardless of its position, i.e. in the alkyl fragment for 4 or in the nitroxyl fragment for 1–3 and 5 which can be externally activated on the pyridyl moiety. The preservation of the kinetic properties of the alkoxyamines opens up many opportunities for practical applications in polymer sciences, materials sciences, and in theranostics. For example, we can envision the use of trityl as an end-group to track the distribution of polymer drugs, or it may be used to dope the magnetic properties of some materials.

Acknowledgements

Alkoxyamine 10 was kindly provided by Dr J.-P. Joly. GA, PB, and SRAM thank Aix-Marseille Université, CNRS, ANR (ANR-14-CE16-0023-01) and the A*MIDEX project (ANR-11-IDEX-0001-02) funded by the “Investissements d’Avenir” French Government program, managed by the French National Research Agency (ANR), the Fondation ARC pour la recherche sur le cancer (PJA 20141201886). EGB, MVE, SRAM, DAP, EVT, VMT and SIZ are grateful to the Russian Science Foundation (15-13-20020) for financial support. The authors thank Andrey Kuzhelev for recording and simulation of the EPR spectra of compounds 1–5. NMR, high-resolution ESI/MS, and ESR experiments were carried out in the Chemical Service Center of the Siberian Branch of the RAS.

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