Enantioconvergent Cross-Couplings of Racemic Alkylmetal Reagents with Unactivated Secondary Alkyl Electrophiles: Catalytic Asymmetric Negishi #-Alkylations of N-Boc-Pyrrolidine

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Enantioconvergent Cross-Couplings of Racemic Alkylmetal Reagents with Unactivated Secondary Alkyl Electrophiles: Catalytic Asymmetric Negishi α-Alkylations of *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine

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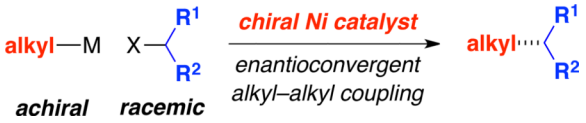
Abstract

Although enantioconvergent alkyl-alkyl couplings of racemic electrophiles have been developed, there have been no reports of the corresponding reactions of racemic nucleophiles. Herein, we describe Negishi cross-couplings of racemic α-zincated *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine with unactivated secondary halides, thus providing a one-pot, catalytic asymmetric method for the synthesis of a range of 2-alkylpyrrolidines (an important family of target molecules) from *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine, a commercially available precursor. Preliminary mechanistic studies indicate that two of the most straightforward mechanisms for enantioconvergence (a dynamic kinetic resolution of the organometallic coupling partner and a simple β-hydride elimination/β-migratory insertion pathway) are unlikely to be operative.

Recently, we have been pursuing the development of an array of metal-catalyzed alkyl-alkyl cross-coupling processes.[1,2,3] As part of this program, we have described several nickel-catalyzed methods for the enantioconvergent coupling of achiral alkylmetal reagents with racemic secondary alkyl electrophiles (eq 1).[4,5]



(1)

The reversed-polarity process, wherein a racemic alkyl *nu-cleophile* is coupled with an alkyl electrophile, has remained an unsolved challenge (eq 2). However, Kumada has described a nickel-catalyzed enantioconvergent coupling of a racemic benzylic Grignard reagent (PhCHMeMgCl) with an alkenyl halide (bromoethylene) to generate an enantioenriched allylbenzene.[6,7]

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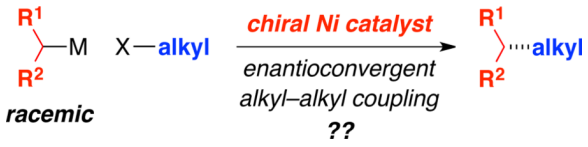
ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

Experimental procedures and compound characterization data. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at http://pubs.acs.org.

Notes

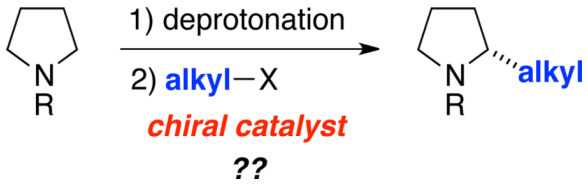
The authors declare no competing financial interest.



(2)

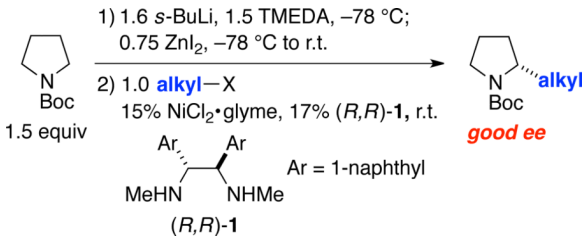
Pyrrolidines that bear an alkyl substituent in the 2 position are important across many areas of chemistry and biology. For example, they are present as subunits in bioactive natural[8] and non-natural[9] products, function as versatile intermediates in the synthesis of other useful classes of compounds,[10] and serve as effective chiral organocatalysts and ligands in asymmetric catalysis.[11] Because of this wide-ranging significance, the development of efficient methods for the enantioselective synthesis of 2-alkylpyrrolidines has been the target of substantial effort, and a broad array of approaches have been described, ranging from chiral-pool strategies to asymmetric synthesis.[12,13]

The catalytic enantioselective 2-alkylation of pyrrolidine (or a readily available protected derivative) via deprotonation/electrophile-trapping represents an attractive, direct approach to the asymmetric synthesis of 2-alkylpyrrolidines (eq 3); to the best of our knowledge, such a process has not yet been reported. On the other hand, pioneering studies by Beak have established that deprotonation of *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine in the presence of a stoichiometric quantity of (−)-sparteine,[14] followed by trapping with any of a wide range of electrophiles (e.g., *n*-Bu_3SnCl, Me_3SiCl, benzophenone, and carbon dioxide), can furnish 2-substituted pyrrolidines with high enantioselectivity; among unactivated alkyl electrophiles, only dimethyl sulfate and methyl iodide have been shown to serve as suitable coupling partners.[15] O'Brien built upon these key observations and developed a method that employs a substoichiometric quantity (20 mol%) of a chiral amine, providing 2-functionalized (although not 2-alkyl) *N*-Boc-pyrrolidines in up to 88% ee.[16]



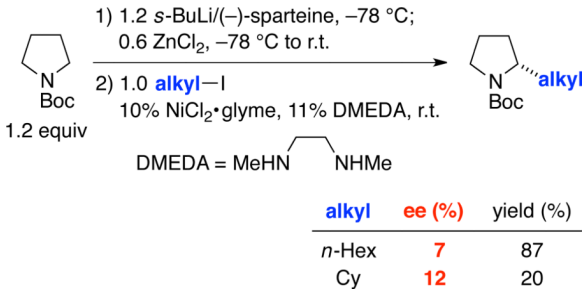
(3)

In view of the potential utility of the transformation outlined in eq 3, we have pursued the development of the first enantioconvergent alkyl-alkyl cross-coupling wherein a racemic alkyl nucleophile is employed as a reaction partner. In particular, we have determined that, in the presence of a chiral nickel catalyst, racemic α-zincated *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine (prepared in situ from commercially available *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine) can be coupled with unactivated alkyl electrophiles to generate 2-alkylpyrrolidines in good ee (eq 4).[17]



(4)

Initially, in view of recent reports by Campos of stoichiometric asymmetric α-lithiation/transmetalation/palladium-catalyzed Negishi arylation of *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine,[18] we examined the cross-coupling of enantioenriched α-zincated *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine (>90% ee)[19] with *n*-hexyl iodide and cyclohexyl iodide in the presence of an achiral nickel/1,2-diamine catalyst (eq 5). In both cases, the alkyl-alkyl coupling product formed in low ee (<15% ee).[20] Because the organozinc reagent is configurationally stable at room temperature, these observations suggest that stereochemical scrambling occurs during the nickel-catalyzed cross-coupling process.



alkyl	ee (%)	yield (%)
n-Hex	7	87
Cy	12	20

(5)

Given that the use of an achiral catalyst for the cross-coupling of a highly enantioenriched nucleophile had provided almost racemic product, we decided to examine a stereochemically converse transformation: the use of a chiral catalyst for the cross-coupling of a racemic nucleophile to generate enantioenriched product. In view of the paucity of asymmetric metal-catalyzed alkyl-alkyl couplings of secondary nucleophiles with secondary electrophiles,[21] we chose to employ cyclohexyl iodide as the electrophilic coupling partner.

Upon investigating a range of parameters, we determined that the desired enantioconvergent coupling of racemic α-zincated *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine with cyclohexyl iodide can be achieved by a combination of $NiCl_2$ glyme and chiral 1,2-diamine ligand **1**[22] in high ee and in good yield at room temperature (93% ee, 86% yield; entry 1 of Table 1). In the absence of either $NiCl_2$-glyme or ligand **1**, essentially no alkyl-alkyl cross-coupling product was observed (entries 2 and 3); similarly, α-lithiated *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine was not a suitable coupling partner (entry 4). Under the same conditions, related C_2-symmetric 1,2-diamines furnished somewhat lower enantioselectivity and yield (entries 5 and 6). Use of less catalyst (entry 7) or of other nickel sources (entries 8 and 9) led to comparable ee but reduced yield. *Our observation that 2-cyclohexyl-N-Boc-pyrrolidine formed in 90% ee and 74% yield in the presence of 0.5 equivalents of the diorganozinc reagent provides strong evidence that the cross-coupling is an enantioconvergent process, not a simple kinetic resolution (entry 10).*

The catalytic asymmetric synthesis of an array of 2-alkylpyrrolidines can be achieved via the coupling of a single precursor (*N*-Boc-pyrrolidine) with a variety of readily available, unactivated alkyl iodides (Table 2).[23] Thus, three parent cycloalkyl iodides undergo enantioconvergent alkyl-alkyl cross-coupling with racemic α-zincated *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine with good enantioselectivity (entries 1–3); the process can be conducted on a gram scale with comparable efficiency (when entry 1 was carried out on a 6.0 mmol scale: 94% ee and 74% yield; 1.12 g of product). Heterocyclic electrophiles couple in high ee (entries 4–6), as does an acyclic secondary alkyl iodide (entry 7). In contrast, moderate ee is observed for the asymmetric Negishi reaction of a primary alkyl iodide (entry 8).

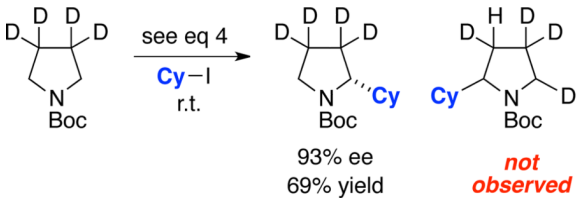
This method thus complements other catalytic enantiose-lective approaches to the synthesis of 2-alkylpyrrolidines, which are typically only effective for the incorporation of a primary alkyl group.[24] Pyrrolidines that bear a secondary alkyl substituent in the 2 position are found in a wide variety of compounds, including an array of pyrrolizidine (simplest example: heliotridane), indolizidine (simple example: ta-shiromine; also: grandisine A[25]), and crambescidin[26] alkaloids.

Not only alkyl iodides, but also alkyl bromides, can be employed as electrophiles in these nickel-catalyzed enantioconvergent cross-couplings of a racemic nucleophile (Table 3).[27] Under the same conditions as for iodides (except for the temperature, in a few cases), alkyl-alkyl bond formation between α-zincated *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine and a range of cyclic and acyclic unactivated secondary alkyl bromides proceeds in good ee, although generally modest yield (entries 1–4). As in the case of a primary alkyl iodide, a primary bromide cross-couples with lower enantioselectivity (entry 5).

We next focused our attention on gaining insight into the origin of the stereoconvergence in these asymmetric Negishi eactions of α-zincated *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine.[28] In Kumadas earlier study of the enantioselective cross-coupling of racemic PhCHMeMgCl with bromoethylene to form an allylbenzene, it was postulated that stereoconvergence arose from a dynamic kinetic resolution of a rapidly racemizing benzylic nucleophile y the cbhiral nickel catalyst.[6] In contrast, our nucleophile,α-zincated *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine, is configurationally stable under our reaction conditions in the absence of nickel. Thus, enantioenriched organozinc reagent was prepared from the corresponding stannane through Sn-Li exchange followed by transmetalation to zinc (Figure 1).[29] When this nucleophile was cross-coupled with bromobenzene under the Campos conditions,[18] (*R*)-2-phenyl-*N*-Boc-pyrrolidine was generated in 90% ee and 95% yield, thereby establishing the stereochemical integrity of the organozinc reagent. When this enantioenriched nucleophile was reacted with cyclohexyl iodide under our standard conditions using either *(R,R)* or *(S,S)* 1,2-diamine ligand **1**, the stereochemistry of the cross-coupling product was dependent primarily on the stereochemistry of the ligand, rather than of the organozinc nucleophile.

One of the possible mechanisms for enantioconvergence in the nickel-catalyzed asymmetric Negishi reactions described herein is a series of β-hydride eliminations/β-migratory insertions of an organonickel intermediate, without dissociation of the olefin from nickel (Figure 2). We have in fact observed such an isomerization process in an enantioselective Negishi cross-coupling of a racemic electrophile with an achiral cyclopentylzinc reagent.[21]

To assess the viability of the pathway outlined in Figure 2, we investigated the Negishi reaction of a deuteriumlabeled *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine (eq 6). Essentially no (<5%) deuterium incorporation is observed α to nitrogen in the cross-coupling product, which indicates that the β-hydride elimination/β-migratory insertion pathway for stereomutation that is depicted in Figure 2 is not the mechanism by which stereoconvergence is achieved.[30]



(6)

In summary, we have developed the first enantioconvergent alkyl-alkyl cross-couplings of a racemic *nucleophile*, specifically, the asymmetric Negishi reaction of α-zincated *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine with unactivated secondary iodides and bromides, providing a one-pot route to an array of 2-alkylpyrrolidines from a single, readily available precursor (*N*-Boc-pyrrolidine). Because the highest enantioselectivity is obtained for the incorporation of secondary alkyl substituents, this method complements existing catalytic asymmetric approaches to the synthesis of 2-alkylpyrrolidines, which are generally most effective for primary alkyl groups. The pathway for stereoconvergence for the present method does not involve a dynamic kinetic resolution of the organometallic coupling partner, in contrast to a previous report of an enantioconvergent alkyl–*alkenyl* cross-coupling. Furthermore, a deuteriumlabeling study rules out stereomutation via a simple β-hydride elimination/β-migratory insertion pathway that we had observed in another nickel-catalyzed alkyl-alkyl coupling. Additional investigations are underway to continue to elucidate the mechanism of this unusual enantioconvergent cross-coupling, as well as to expand the range of racemic nucleophiles that can be employed in such alkyl-alkyl coupling processes.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgments

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19. A portion of the enantioenriched organozinc reagent (eq 5) was subjected to the Campos arylation procedure (coupling partner: bromobenzene), which afforded *N*-Boc-2-phenylpyrrolidine in 92% ee and 97% yield.
20. Our attempts to apply the Campos procedure (which employs a Pd/P(*t*-Bu)$_3$ catalyst) to cross-couplings of alkyl electrophiles were not successful.
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22. All previous reports of enantioselective alkyl-alkyl Negishi cross-couplings (which had employed racemic electrophiles rather than racemic nucleophiles) had utilized nickel in combination with a pyridine-oxazoline-type ligand, never with a chiral diamine ligand. However, when such pyridine-oxazolines were applied to the coupling of α-zincated *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine with cyclohexyl iodide, the desired product was generated in <10% yield. For leading references, see References 1a, 4b, and 21a.

23. Notes: (a) The ee of the product is essentially constant during the course of the reaction. (b) Under the standard cross-coupling conditions, 3-iodopentane and *t*-butyl iodide react very slowly (<20% yield after 2.5 days) and the use of $ZnCl_2$ rather than ZnI_2 leads to inferior results.

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27. Under the standard cross-coupling conditions, cyclohexyl chloride reacts very slowly (<10% yield after 2.5 days).

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30. In a preliminary study, when 2,2-d_2 *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine was subjected to the standard asymmetric cross-coupling conditions, no evidence of deuterium scrambling was observed.

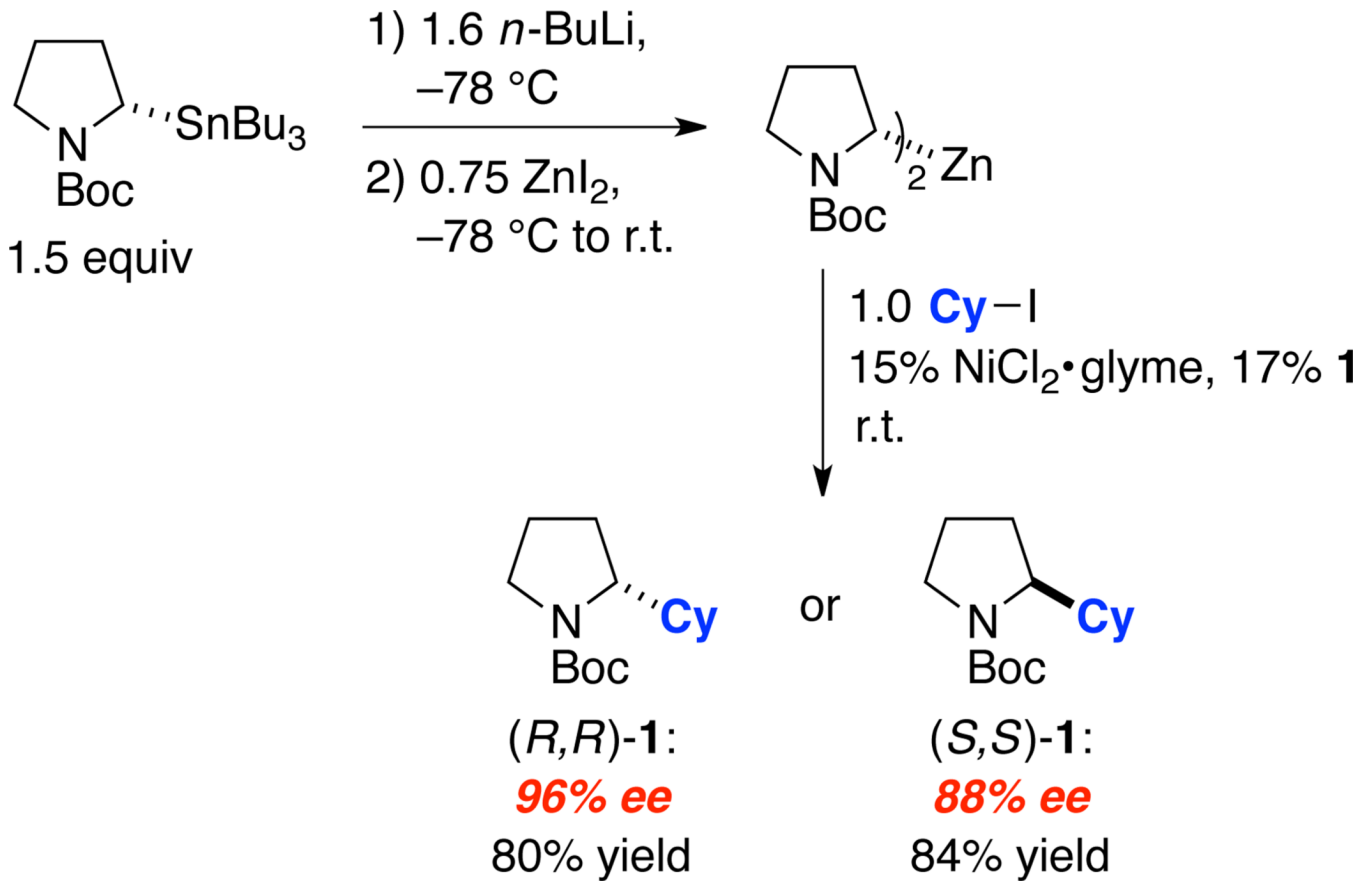


Figure 1.
The stereochemistry of the alkyl-alkyl cross-coupling product is controlled predominantly by the stereo chemistry of the chiral nickel catalyst, not of the nucleophile, in a Negishi reaction of α-zincated *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine.

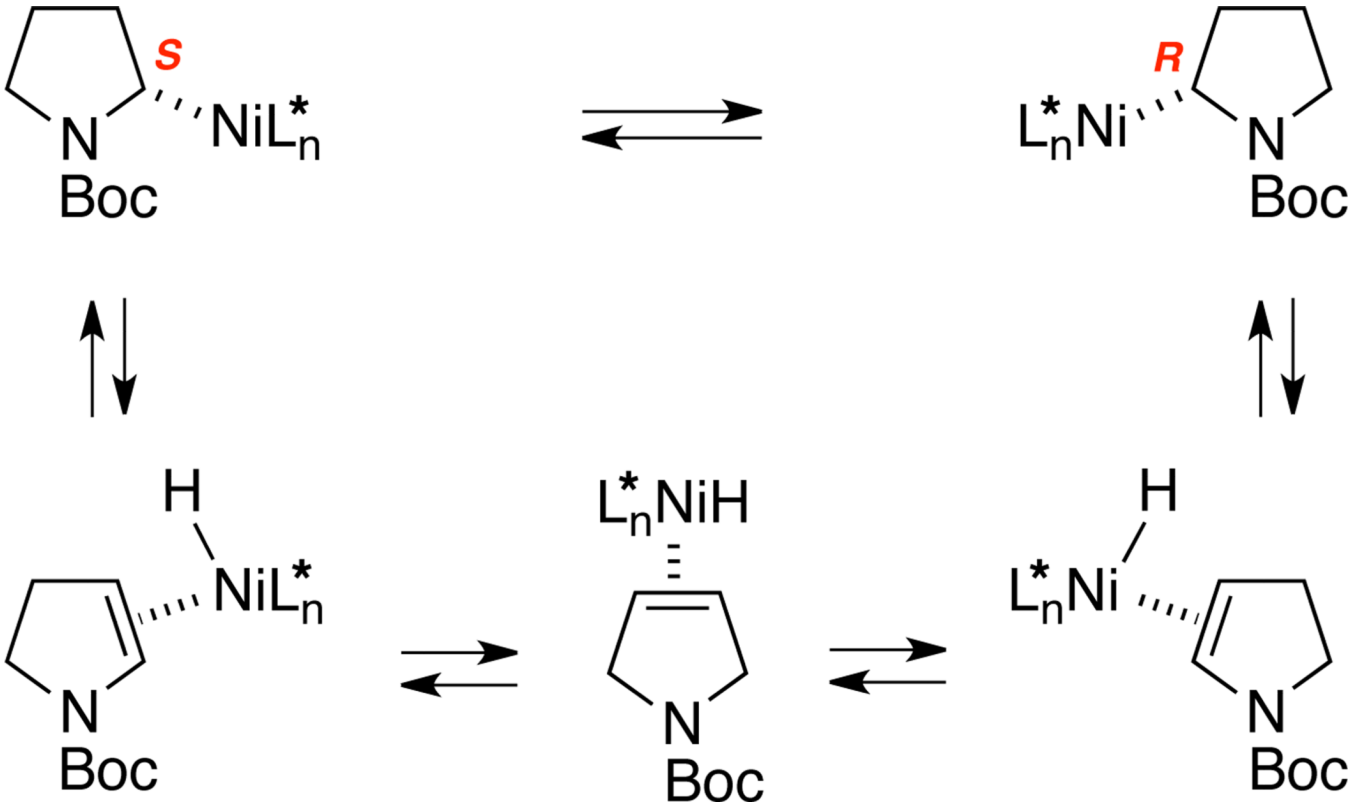
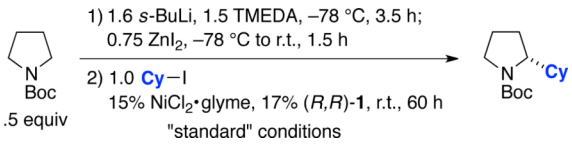


Figure 2.
A hypothetical pathway for stereomutation of an α-metalated *N*-Boc-pyrrolidine: β-hydride elimination and β-migratory insertion without olefin dissociation.

Table 1

Enantioconvergent Cross-Coupling of a Racemic Nucleophile: Effect of Reaction Parameters[a]



entry	variation from the “standard” conditions	ee (%)	yield (%)[b]
1	none	**93**	**86**
2	no $NiCl_2$·glyme	–	<2
3	no **1**	–	2
4	no ZnI_2	–	<2
5	**2**, instead of **1**	82	80
6	**3**, instead of **1**	75	76
7	10% $NiCl_2$·glyme, 12% **1**	92	53
8	$Ni(cod)_2$, instead of $NiCl_2$·glyme	93	61
9	$NiBr_2$·glyme, instead of $NiCl_2$·glyme	92	38
10	0.5, instead of 0.75, ZnR_2 (R = *N*-Boc-pyrrolidinyl)	**90**	**74**

[a]All data are the average of two experiments.

[b]Yield determined by GC analysis versus a calibrated internal standard.

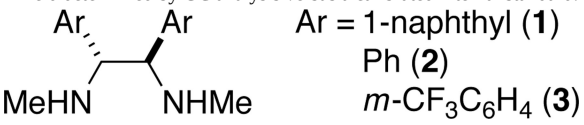
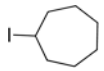
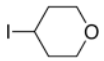
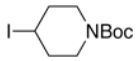
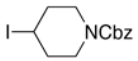
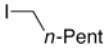


Table 2

Enantioconvergent Negishi Reactions of Racemicα-Zincated*N*Boc-pyrrolidine with Unactivated Alkyl Iodides (reaction conditions: eq 4)[a]

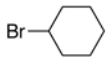
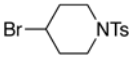
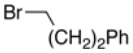
entry	electrophile	ee, yield (%)[b]	entry	electrophile	ee, yield (%)[b]
1		**93**, 80	5		**94**, 96
2		**82**, 91	6		**91**, 94
3		**84**, 50	7		**90**, 85
4		**92**, 96	8		**58**, 85

[a] All data are the average of two experiments.

[b] Yield of purified product (scale of the reaction: 1.0 mmol of the electrophile).

Table 3

Enantioconvergent Negishi Reactions of Racemic α-Zincated*N*Boc-pyrrolidine with Unactiva-ted Alkyl Bromides (reaction conditions: eq 4)[a]

entry	electrophile	ee(%)	yield (%)[b]
1[c]		**92**	41
2		**88**	80
3[c]		**88**	44
4[c]		**90**	51
5		**58**	61

[a]All data are the average of two experiments.

[b]Yield of purified product.

[c]Reaction temperature: 35 °C.