Mild and Selective Carbon Dioxide Hydroboration to Methoxyboranes Catalyzed by Mn(I) PNP Pincer Complexes

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Well-defined Mn(I)-PNP pincer-type complexes were tested as non-precious transition metal catalysts for the selective reduction of CO₂ to boryl-protected MeOH in the presence of hydroboranes (HBpin, 9-BBN) and borates as Lewis acids (LA) additives. The best performance was obtained under mild reaction conditions (1 bar CO₂, 60 °C) in the presence of the hydridocarbonyl complex [MnH(PNP)₃–iPr(CO)]₃ and B(OPh)₃ as co-catalyst. Preliminary mechanistic studies suggest that the initial activation step may occur by cationization of the metal center by the strong LA, and that both metal-catalyzed and metal-free steps are present in the overall catalytic system.

Introduction

In recent years, the increasing concentration of anthropogenic greenhouse gases in the atmosphere[1,2] and the need for more sustainable, fossil-free routes to chemicals and fuels, fostered a new momentum in the use of CO₂ as a building block for chemical synthesis. Indeed, the transformation and utilization of CO₂ is now considered as a desirable alternative to its storage, at least for small scale, targeted applications.[3-5] Successful examples of CO₂ utilization include: a) transition metal, acid and/or base catalyzed addition of CO₂ to reactive substrates such as epoxides, alcohols, amines and alkynes to form new C–O, C–N, and C–C bonds,[6] and b) CO₂ chemical, electrochemical, or photochemical reduction to formic acid, formaldehyde, methanol, methane and CO.[7] Among the possible products that can be obtained from CO₂ reduction, methanol (MeOH), with more than 95 million metric tons annually produced worldwide,[8] is a highly desired target molecule. It can find use as fuel additive, bulk chemical, solvent and energy carrier, the latter by either reforming or catalytic dehydrogenation to produce hydrogen on demand. The principle advantages of MeOH as potential fuel for mobile engines are the compatibility with the existing distribution infrastructure and the high energy density of 22.7 MJ kg⁻¹ at ambient conditions. In the last two decades various authors, and in particular Olah, Prakash and co-workers, put forward a strong case for the use of MeOH as an alternative for hydrogen as the new global fuel for a clean future.[9] This technology, based on CO₂ hydrogenation, found production scale applications in the CRI plant in Grindavik (Iceland), producing MeOH from recycled CO₂ with an expected capacity of about 5 million litres per year.[10] The success is also linked to the low cost of electricity in Iceland, coming from geothermal sources, allowing for the cost-effective production of renewable hydrogen from water electrolysis.

The major hurdles for the efficient, widespread use of CO₂ as C1 synthon are the thermodynamic stability and kinetic inertness, in turn requiring forcing reaction conditions to obtain the desired 6-electron reduction to MeOH. The current technology requires high temperatures (190–270 °C) and pressures (> 90 bar) to synthesize MeOH from syngas (CO/H₂) in the presence of heterogeneous catalysts of type Cu/ZnO/Al₂O₃. As a general drawback, heterogeneous catalysts have often the tendency to decrease their selectivity and activity over time by metal leaching and/or surface passivation. The development of efficient, cost-effective, highly selective homogeneous catalysts for the synthesis of MeOH from CO₂ under mild conditions is therefore of high interest for the chemistry community worldwide, both at academic and industrial level.[11-14]

Examples of organometallic catalysts able to bring about CO₂ hydrogenation to MeOH under homogeneous conditions have been described, involving the use of both noble (Ru, Ir) and earth-abundant (Co, Fe, Mn) transition metals.[15,16] The majority of the reported systems work under basic conditions, for example in the presence of amines, and involve a preliminary 2-electron reduction step of CO₂ to formic acid or formate, followed by hydrogenation of formamide intermediate to MeOH, as shown by Milstein,[10] Sanford,[11] Olah[12,13,14] and Wassa,[15] Martins and Pomeirão,[16] Hazari and Bernskötter[17] and respective co-workers. CO₂ hydrogenation under acidic conditions was also demonstrated, for example by Huff and Sanford in a presence of a three-catalysts cascade system based on Ru and Sc,[18] by Himeda, Laurenzcy and co-workers using an Ir(III) catalyst in H₂/O/H₂SO₄,[19] and by Klankermayer, Leitner and co-workers using a Ru(triphos) complex (triphos = 1,1,1-tris(diphenylphosphinomethyl)ethane) in the presence of HNTf₂ (HNTf₂ = bis(trifluoromethane)sulfon-
mide) at 140 °C, 20 bar CO₂ and 60 bar H₂, obtaining MeOH with high TONs and with the possibility to reuse the catalyst for consecutive pressurization cycles. Among first-row transition metals, cobalt-catalyzed CO₂ hydrogenation to MeOH under acidic conditions was demonstrated by de Bruin and co-workers via intermediate ester hydrogenation, and by Beller and co-workers in the presence of triphos and Co(acac)₃ with HNTf₂ in THF/ethanol, reaching a TON of 50. Further optimization was then carried out, and in the presence of modified triphos ligands and Co(NTf₂)₂ as metal precursor, TON was increased up to 125.

Although H₂ is the most atom-efficient, economical and sustainable reductant when produced from non-fossil, renewable feedstocks, some concerns are still present, due to safety risks connected with the use of flammable, pressurized gas. For this reason, chemists have looked for alternative reductants to bring about CO₂ reduction to MeOH. Hydroisilanes and hydroboranes have been successfully applied to replace H₂ under mild reaction conditions, due to the fact that E–H bonds (E = Si, B) are weaker than the H–H bond, and that the formation of stronger E–O bonds constitutes a driving force for the reaction. Although atom-efficiency is lower than using hydrogen, these reagents are in general liquid at room temperature, hence easier and safer to handle and store.

Boron-based compounds are generally Lewis acidic and oxophilic enough to enable activation of the C–O bond of carbon dioxide. Essentially, CO₂ can be reduced stepwise by a hydroborane (Scheme 1) to give formoxyborane (A), bis(boryl) acetal (B), methoxyborane (C) and bis(boryl)ether (D).

The first step in CO₂ hydroboration is generally a hydride transfer to the CO₂ carbon atom, and this may occur with a catalyst that can be either a metal hydride complex, an ambiphilic compound, a strong Lewis base or a hydroborate compound. Examples of transition metal hydride catalysts for the selective CO₂ hydroboration to methoxyboranes have been previously described (Figure 1). Guan and co-workers described in 2010 the first Ni hydrido complex supported by a POCOP pincer-type ligand (POCOP = 2,6-[(Bu)PO]₃C₆H₃), that was able to catalyze CO₂ hydroboration with catechoborane (1,3,2-benzodioxaborole, HBcat), obtaining CH₃OBcat ([CH₃OBcat = methoxycatechoborane]) with a TON of 495, carrying out the reaction in benzene at room temperature for 1 h, using 0.2 mol% of catalyst and 1 bar CO₂. In 2012, Sgro and Stephan reported the use of a frustrated-Lewis pair (FLP) Ru hydrido complex of ligand N(CH₃)₂NHPiPr₂(CH₃)₂NPiPr₂ (CH₃NHPiPr₂) as catalyst for this reaction using pinacolborane (4,4,5,5-tetramethyl-1,3,2-dioxaborolane, HBpin), yielding CH₃OBpin [CH₃OBpin = methoxypinacolborane] and OB(pin). A moderate TON of 9 was obtained with 100 equiv. of HBpin, in CD₂Cl₂ at 50 °C after 96 h. In the same year, Bontemps, Sabo-Etienne and co-workers disclosed the use of [Ru(H)(H)(PCy₃)], as catalyst (10 mol%) using HBpin in C₆D₆, obtaining CH₃OBpin in 39% yield after either 22 days at room temperature or 5 h at 70 °C. Another Ru-based system was reported in 2016 by Song and co-workers, namely complex [Ru(CO)H(daf)(PPh₃)], (daf = 4,5-diazafluorenyl) as catalyst for CO₂ hydroboration at 100 °C. Rather unusually, the first step of the catalytic cycle was found to be the C–H borylation of the ligand, releasing hydrogen, followed by CO₂ insertion into the C–B bond rather than into the Ru–H bond. The resulting boryl derivative was then further reduced to different products including OCH(O)OBpin ([OCH(O)OBpin = formoxypinacolborane] and CH₃OBpin (maximum yield = 54% after 45 h at 100 °C in C₆D₆). Alkali metal complexes were also described as active catalysts for CO₂ hydroboration to the methoxy level. Hill and co-workers showed that Mg and Ca hydride β-diketiminate compounds gave complete and selective conversion of HBpin to CH₃OBpin using 10 mol% of catalyst, 1 bar CO₂ at 60 °C in THF, after 6 or 4 days, respectively. Among early transition metals, Trovitch and co-workers described the use of bis(imino)pyridine-type molybdenum catalyst [(η⁵-P,N,N,N,P,(η⁵-P,N,N,C,P,η⁵-PDI)Mo)CH₃OBpin with HBpin, with 97% borane utilization using 0.1 mol% of catalyst, after 8 h at 90 °C in C₆D₆ and CH₃OBpin formation with turnover frequency (TOF) of ca. 40 h⁻¹.

More recently, the potential of Ir, Pd and Ni pincer complexes was examined in detail, focusing on the effects of type of ligands and hydroboranes in determining the selectivity of the reaction. In 2018, Rendón, Suarez and co-workers showed that Ir carbonyl pincer complexes stabilized by a deprotonated lutidine-derived CNP⁺ ligand selectively catalyzed the hydroboration of CO₂ under 1–2 bar, 30 °C either to methoxyborane using HBcat (TOF = 56 h⁻¹, maximum yield = 28%, TON = 84) or to formoxyborane with the more stericly demanding HBpin (TOF = 1245 h⁻¹) in either THF/H₂O or THF, respectively. One year later, Hazari and co-workers examined the correlations
between catalytic CO\textsubscript{2} reduction using Pd and Ni complexes, supported by PSiP and PCP pincer ligands, varying systematically their steric and electronic properties (Figure 1).\textsuperscript{38} Results showed that a complex network of effects is active upon varying, together with the catalyst and the borane, the reaction conditions (CO\textsubscript{2} pressure, reaction time, catalyst concentration), ruling the activity and selectivity of the catalytic system. Remarkably, it was shown that, using HBpin, the product selectivity could be switched from formoxy- to methoxyborane by adding a Lewis acid (LA) such as B(OPh)\textsubscript{3}. A maximum yield of 72\% in CH\textsubscript{3}OBpin was obtained with [(\textsuperscript{18}B)PCP]PdH\textsubscript{2} in C\textsubscript{6}D\textsubscript{6} at room temperature under the following conditions: [catalyst] = 0.0007 M, [HBpin] = 0.07 M, [B(OPh)\textsubscript{3}] = 0.007 M, 1 atm of CO\textsubscript{2}, 2 days. By using the less sterically demanding (but more expensive) HBcat, without any addition of borate, almost quantitative formation of CH\textsubscript{3}OBcat was observed with [(\textsuperscript{18}B)PCP]PdH\textsubscript{2} under the conditions: [catalyst] = 0.0007 M, [HBcat] = 0.07 M, 1 atm of CO\textsubscript{2}, room temperature, C\textsubscript{6}D\textsubscript{6}, 16 h.

In recent years, the cost effectiveness of chemical processes has become an important issue, thus the possibility to replace expensive platinum group metals with first-row, earth abundant counterparts in catalysis has grown in interest. Excellent results for CO\textsubscript{2} hydroboration catalysed by [Fe(H\textsubscript{2})(dmppe)] (dmppe = 1,2-bis(dimethylphosphino)ethane),\textsuperscript{39a} and by iron and copper complexes\textsuperscript{39b} of triphosphine and triphosphinite triiodal ligands PhSi{CH\textsubscript{2}PPh\textsubscript{3}}\textsubscript{2} and PhSi{OPPh\textsubscript{3}}\textsubscript{2} were reported. Among first-row metals, manganese complexes have recently found new applications, paving the way for a more extensive use of such metal in catalytic reactions, including CO\textsubscript{2} reduction.\textsuperscript{11c,40}

We recently disclosed the first examples of successful use of the Mn(l) hydridocarbonyl complexes [MnH\{PNP\textsuperscript{Me\textsubscript{2}}\textsubscript{2}Pr\}(CO\textsubscript{3})\textsubscript{2}] (1) and [MnH\{PNP\textsuperscript{Me\textsubscript{2}}\textsubscript{2}Pr\}(CO\textsubscript{3})\textsubscript{2}] (2), supported by PNP pincer-type ligands based on a bis(aminophosphines)pyridyl scaffold (R = H, 1; R = Me, 2) for CO\textsubscript{2} hydrogenation to formate\textsuperscript{41} and CO\textsubscript{2} hydrosilylation to methoxysilanes\textsuperscript{42} under mild conditions, reaching high productivities and selectivities to the desired products. In 2018, Leitner and co-workers showed the first example of Mn(l)-catalyzed CO\textsubscript{2} hydrogenation to methoxyborane. The Mn(l) complex [MnBr\{Ph\textsubscript{2}PCH\textsubscript{2}SiMe\textsubscript{3}\}\textsubscript{2}N\textsubscript{2}H(CO\textsubscript{3})\textsubscript{2}] was able to bring about the selective CO\textsubscript{2} hydroboration to CH\textsubscript{3}OBpin under solventless conditions, using HBpin (2.76 mmol), 0.036 mol % of catalyst, NaO\textsubscript{2}Bu (0.1 mol %) at 100 °C for 14 h, reaching a TON of 883.\textsuperscript{43} Having the use of manganese in CO\textsubscript{2} hydroboration been established, we thought of interest to apply our Mn(l) complexes as catalysts for this reaction, varying systematically the main reaction parameters to study the effects on the reaction selectivity and activity, and the results are hereby reported.

Results and Discussion

The catalytic tests were carried out on NMR tube scale, using 1 bar of CO\textsubscript{2} and monitoring the increase of the yields of C1-products over time by H\textsuperscript{1} NMR spectroscopy (see Experimental Section). Additional \textsuperscript{13}C\textsuperscript{1}(H) and \textsuperscript{11}B\textsuperscript{1}(H) NMR spectra were collected to obtain more details. In particular, \textsuperscript{11}B NMR gave qualitative information on the presence of other B-containing products such as bis(boryl)ethers and allowed the identification of unknown species formed by unproductive side reactions (\textit{vide infra}). Initially, very mild conditions were applied (25 °C, 1 bar CO\textsubscript{2}), in the presence of HBpin (0.224 mmol) and complex 1 (1.0 mol % with respect to HBpin), choosing [D\textsubscript{6}dmso] as solvent. This solvent was chosen as it was previously demonstrated that it can assist CO\textsubscript{2} activation, for example in hydrosilylation reactions.\textsuperscript{42,44} Under these conditions and using this solvent, the reaction gave (OC(H)O)Bpin, identified by the H\textsuperscript{1} NMR signal at 8.18 ppm and the \textsuperscript{11}B NMR broad signal at 21.21 ppm, as the only C1-product in ca. 56.5 % maximum yield already after 5 h, without further increase at 24 h. Under the same reaction conditions, by changing solvent from [D\textsubscript{6}dmso] to either [D\textsubscript{6}]THF or [C\textsubscript{6}]D\textsubscript{6}, no C1-products were formed. The effect of temperature on the reaction was then investigated, repeating the previous tests at 60 °C, in the three different solvents mentioned above. The results obtained at 60 °C are summarized in Table 1.

It was observed that also at 60 °C, in both [D\textsubscript{6}]dmso and [C\textsubscript{6}]D\textsubscript{6}, (OC(H)O)Bpin was formed as the only C1-product, albeit in moderate yields or with sluggish reactivity. Interestingly, in [D\textsubscript{6}] THF a small amount of CH\textsubscript{3}OBpin (5.0 %) formed after ca. 5 h of reaction, reaching a maximum 5.5 % yield after 24 h. In all cases, incomplete HBpin conversion, responsible for the low yields, was qualitatively assessed from the persistence of the characteristic signals at 27.3 ppm and 28.7 ppm in the corresponding final \textsuperscript{11}B NMR spectra.

The use of Lewis acids (LA) as co-catalysts in CO\textsubscript{2} hydroboration was demonstrated by Hazari and co-workers as a powerful tool to drive the reaction selectivity to the desired methoxyborane species.\textsuperscript{11c} Accordingly, we repeated the tests adding B(OPh)\textsubscript{3}, to the reaction mixture (10 mol % respect to HBpin). Whereas the addition of LA had the effect to increase the yield of (OC(H)O)Bpin in [D\textsubscript{6}]dmso, that was confirmed as the only C1-product obtained in this solvent, the selective formation of the desired CH\textsubscript{3}OBpin was detected in C\textsubscript{6}D\textsubscript{6} and [D\textsubscript{6}]THF. The formation of O(Bpin), (product D in Scheme 1, R = Bpin) was observed in the corresponding \textsuperscript{11}B NMR spectra. Product CH\textsubscript{3}OBpin was characterized in [D\textsubscript{6}]THF by \textsuperscript{1}H NMR signals at 3.50 ppm and \textsuperscript{11}B NMR signals at 20.93 ppm, whereas O(Bpin), gave a broad signal at 21.90 ppm in the \textsuperscript{11}B NMR spectra (Figures S11 and S12, Supporting Information). The

| Table 1. Solvent effect for CO\textsubscript{2} hydroboration in the presence of 1.\textsuperscript{26} |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| t [h] | [D\textsubscript{6}]dmso\textsuperscript{[a]} | C\textsubscript{6}D\textsubscript{6}\textsuperscript{[a]} | [D\textsubscript{6}]THF |
| 1 | 37.7 | 0.0 | 18.1\textsuperscript{[b]} |
| 3 | 37.7 | 7.6 | 26.9\textsuperscript{[b]} |
| 5 | 37.7 | 9.9 | 38.5\textsuperscript{[b]} |
| 24 | 37.7 | 13.3 | 42.2\textsuperscript{[b]} |
| 36 | 37.7 | 16.6 | 5.5\textsuperscript{[b]} |

[a] Reaction conditions: 1 (2.24 × 10\textsuperscript{−3} mmol), HBpin (0.224 mmol), CO\textsubscript{2} (1 bar), 60 °C, solvent (0.4 mL). C1-product yields (%) obtained by H\textsuperscript{1} NMR signals integration against a mesitylene internal standard (0.056 mmol). [b] Yield (%) of (OC(H)O)Bpin. [c] Yield (%) of CH\textsubscript{3}OBpin.
yields (%) of C1-products, monitored during the course of the tests in the different solvents, are reported in Table 2. From the data summarized in Table 2, it can be observed that the best yields of CH3OBpin were obtained in [D3]THF, that was therefore chosen as preferred solvent for the rest of the study.

A closer inspection of the 11B NMR spectrum showed, together with the signals due to CH3OBpin and O(Bpin)2, the presence of a signal at 21.80 ppm that, to the best of our knowledge, was not previously reported in other studies on CO2 hydroboration. The corresponding 13C{1H} NMR spectrum showed the presence of three signals due to O(Bpin) (82.74 ppm), CH3OBpin (82.74 ppm) and a signal at 83.61 ppm. Based on literature data, it was possible to assign the new signals to 4,4,5,5-tetramethyl-2-phenoxo-1,3,2-dioxaborolane (PhOBpin), formed in a side reaction between HBpin and B(OPh)3 (Scheme 2).

An additional confirmation of the observed uncatalyzed side reactivity was obtained in a separate NMR test, monitoring the stoichiometric reaction (1:1) of HBpin and B(OPh)3 in [D3]THF at 60 °C, in the absence of CO2 and catalyst. After 4 h, signals due to PhOBpin and BH3 (q, −0.79 ppm) were observed in the corresponding 11B NMR spectrum (Figure S37, Supporting Information), as expected according to the reaction shown in Scheme 2. Finally, in order to confirm that CO2 was exclusively converted into methoxyborane, the catalytic test run in [D3]THF was repeated using 13CO2 under otherwise identical conditions. The reaction was monitored by 1H and 13C{1H} NMR. The latter spectra initially showed as expected a signal at 124.2 ppm due to 13CO2, that gradually decreased in intensity in favor of a growing signal at 52.5 ppm due to 13CH3OBpin (Figures S15 and S16, Supporting Information). The main reaction parameters were then systematically varied to obtain process optimization and understand the effect of each component of the reaction. The effects of nature and acidity of LA additives were screened by repeating the catalytic tests with 1 in [D3]THF at 60 °C, using an inorganic salt (LiOTf), a boron trihalide (BCl3) and two other borates of different Lewis acidity, such as B(OCH3)3 and B(OCH2CF3)3 [B(OCH2CF3)3 = tris(2,2,2-trifluoroethoxy)borate], and comparing the results with those obtained with B(OPh)3. The use of LiOTf did not favor the reaction, and only 3.41% of CH3OBpin was observed after 24 h. Similarly, BCl3 acted rather as an inhibitor than as a promoter, as no C1-products were obtained after the same reaction time. On the other hand, a difference in reactivity was observed using the three selected borates (Table 3). Whereas the addition of B(OCH3)3 gave CH3OBpin in ca. 48% yield after 24 h, tris(2,2,2-trifluoroethoxy)borate gave the highest promoting effect after 5 h, giving CH3OBpin in 53.6% against 44.3% yield, observed in the presence of B(OPh)3. It was however observed that this effect levelled off on the 24 h reaction time, and a lower final yield in the desired product (68.5 vs. 78.3% with B(OPh)3) was obtained. Thus, B(OPh)3 was confirmed as the best choice as additive for CO2 hydroboration under our reaction conditions.

A control (blank) experiment showed that after 24 h in [D3]THF at 60 °C, ca. 8% of CH3OBpin was obtained even in the absence of catalyst (Figure S18, Supporting Information). Next, the effect of catalyst amount was examined, using HBpin, 1 (0.25, 0.5, 1.0, 2.0 mol% with respect to HBpin), B(OPh)3 (10 mol%) in [D3]THF at 60 °C for 24 h (Table 4). At all chosen catalyst to substrate ratios, CO2 hydroboration proceeded selectively to the formation of CH3OBpin as the only C1-product, with final yields varying in the range of ca. 61 to 78%, showing that the effect of catalyst concentration on the reaction is minor. Catalyst concentration of 1.0 mol% was confirmed as the most suitable to obtain the highest yield in CH3OBpin.

The effect of B(OPh)3 concentration was then studied, and the results are shown in Table 5. The use of 5 mol% of LA showed to be detrimental to the reaction, as only 55% yield of

### Table 2. CO2 hydroboration in the presence of 1 and B(OPh)3 in different solvents.[a]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t [h]</th>
<th>[D3]dmso[b]</th>
<th>CH3OBpin[c]</th>
<th>[D3]THF[c]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>8.6</td>
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<td>73.6</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[a] Reaction conditions: 1 (2.24 × 10⁻³ mmol), HBpin (0.224 mmol), B(OPh)3 (2.24 × 10⁻² mmol), CO2 (1 bar), 60 °C, solvent (0.4 mL). C1-product yields (%) obtained by 'H NMR signals integration against a mesitylene internal standard (0.056 mmol). [b] Yield (%) of OCH3OBpin. [c] Full HBpin conversion observed from 11B NMR spectra.

### Scheme 2. Side reaction between HBpin and B(OPh)3 giving PhOBpin.

### Table 3. LA screening in CO2 hydroboration in the presence of 1.[a]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t [h]</th>
<th>B(OCH3)3[b]</th>
<th>B(OPh)3[b]</th>
<th>B(OCH2CF3)3[b]</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>45.4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>24.2</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[a] Reaction conditions: 1 (2.24 × 10⁻³ mmol), HBpin (0.224 mmol), LA (2.24 × 10⁻² mmol), CO2 (1 bar), 60 °C, [D3]THF (0.4 mL). [b] Yields (%) of CH3OBpin obtained by 'H NMR signal integration against a mesitylene internal standard (0.056 mmol). [c] Full HBpin conversion observed from 11B NMR spectra.

### Table 4. Catalyst 1 amount screening in CO2 hydroboration.[a]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t [h]</th>
<th>0.25 mol%[b]</th>
<th>0.5 mol%[b]</th>
<th>1.0 mol%[b]</th>
<th>2.0 mol%[b]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>32.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>58.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[a] Reaction conditions: 1 (0.56/1.12/2.24/4.48 × 10⁻³ mmol), HBpin (0.224 mmol), B(OPh)3 (2.24 × 10⁻² mmol), CO2 (1 bar), 60 °C, [D3]THF (0.4 mL). [b] Catalyst amount (% mol respect to HBpin). In the columns, yields (%) of CH3OBpin at different times, obtained by 'H NMR signal integration against a mesitylene internal standard (0.056 mmol). [c] Full HBpin conversion observed from 11B NMR spectra.
metal and ligands were then briefly investigated by testing other catalysts structurally related to 1 in CO₂ hydroboration with HBpin in the presence of B(OPh₃). It was previously reported that, in various catalytic reactions, slight changes in the PNP ligand backbone, i.e. replacing the N–H group with a N–CH₃ counterpart, may affect the substrate activation mechanisms, by either involving or suppressing metal-to-ligand cooperation (MLC), respectively. Complex [MnH(PNP³⁻−iPr)(CO)₂] (2) was thus tested under the optimized conditions described above. The need for a hydrido ligand was verified by testing the bromide analogue of 1, namely [MnBr(PNP³⁻−iPr)(CO)] (3). Finally, two Fe(II) complexes isoelectronic to 1 and bearing the PNP³⁻–iPr ligand, i.e. trans-[FeBr₂(PNP³⁻−iPr)(CO)] (4) and trans−-[FeBr₂(PNP³⁻−iPr)(CO)] (5), were also tested to compare the activity of iron vs. manganese complexes. The results are summarized in Table 6.

In the case of the Mn complexes, a very modest yield (8 %) was obtained after 24 h with 2, whereas a final yield of 31.3 % of CH₂OBpin was reached with 3, confirming that pincer ligands with N–H moieties in the backbone must be preferred. Reaction monitoring by ³¹P(¹H) NMR showed that 3 was slowly converted into 1 via bromide exchange with hydride during the reaction, as demonstrated by the decrease of the singlet at 135.86 ppm accompanied by the appearance of the singlet at 160.21 ppm due to 1. In the case of the Fe complexes, the highest yield of CH₂OBpin was obtained with 4 (42.1 % vs. 22.6 % for 5) after 24 h. Incomplete HBpin conversion was observed for these tests in the corresponding ¹⁸O NMR spectra. Complex 3 was also tested in a Schlenk tube scale reaction under the conditions described by Leitner and co-workers for their manganese bromide catalyst and in this case a very small amount of CH₂OBpin (6.5 %) was obtained after 24 h (Supporting Information).

Finally, we decided to test ligand PNP³⁻−iPr as possible metal-free catalyst for CO₂ hydroboration. By replacing 1 with PNP³⁻−iPr (2.24×10⁻³ mmol), in the presence of HBpin (0.224 mmol), B(OPh₃) (2.24 ×10⁻³ mmol), CO₂ (1 bar), 60 °C, [D₉]THF (0.4 mL) CH₂OBpin was obtained after 24 h in ca. 33 % yield. This unexpected result suggests that the catalytic mechanism may include both metal-mediated and metal-free activation steps.

³¹P(¹H) NMR monitoring of the catalytic run in the presence of 1, HBpin and B(OPh₃) under the conditions reported in Table 2 showed (Figure S14, Supporting Information) that the initial singlet at 160.3 ppm due to 1 gradually disappeared in

### Table 5. B(OPh₃) amount screening in CO₂ hydroboration with 1[a]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t [h]</th>
<th>5 mol %[b]</th>
<th>10 mol %[b]</th>
<th>20 mol %[b]</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
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</table>

[a] Reaction conditions: 1 (2.24×10⁻³ mmol), HBpin (0.224 mmol), B(OPh₃) (1.12/2.24/4.48×10⁻³ mmol), CO₂ (1 bar), 60 °C, [D₉]THF (0.4 mL) [b] LA amount (% mol respect to HBpin).

CH₂OBpin was obtained after 24 h. When 20 mol % of B(OPh₃) were used, the major effect was mainly observed on the rate of the reaction, that was nearly completed already after 5 h, with a final yield in the desired product comparable to that obtained using 10 mol % of B(OPh₃).

By replacement of B(OPh₃) by NaOEt, under otherwise identical conditions described above in the presence of 1, after 24 h heating to 60 °C in [D₉]THF the reaction gave only traces of (OC(H)O)Bpin together with the formation of B₃Pin₃, identified by a ²³⁷NMR signal at 21.4 ppm and ¹³C(¹H) NMR signals at 81.22 and 79.50 ppm.[47]

Additional screening included testing the activity and selectivity of our catalytic protocol with another hydroborane, such as 9-borabicyclo[3.3.1]nonane (9-BBN). Under standard reaction conditions, slightly adapted to account for the different solubility of 9-BBN in [D₉]THF (see Experimental Section), the reaction gave 9-methoxy-9-borabicyclo[3.3.1]nonane (CH₂O-9-BBN), 9,9'-oxybis(9-borabicyclo[3.3.1]nonane) [(9-BBN)₂] and the side product 9-phenoxyl-9-borabicyclo[3.3.1]nonane (PhO-9-BBN) shown in Scheme 3.

The products were identified by ¹⁸O NMR signals at 61.3, 59.9 and 60.8 ppm, respectively, and by the ¹H NMR signal at 3.70 ppm for CH₂O-9-BBN. Full substrate conversion was observed in the ¹⁸O NMR spectrum after 5 h at 60 °C in [D₉]THF, with a yield of 74.4 % of CH₂O-9-BBN. The effects of the type of

Scheme 3. CO₂ hydroboration in the presence of 1 and 9-BBN.

![Scheme 3. CO₂ hydroboration in the presence of 1 and 9-BBN.](image)

Figure 2. Other PNP pincer-type Mn and Fe complexes tested as catalysts for CO₂ hydroboration.

![Figure 2. Other PNP pincer-type Mn and Fe complexes tested as catalysts for CO₂ hydroboration.](image)

### Table 6. Metal and ligand effects screening in CO₂ hydroboration[b]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t [h]</th>
<th>2 [b]</th>
<th>3 [b]</th>
<th>4 [b]</th>
<th>5 [b]</th>
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</table>

[a] Reaction conditions: catalyst (2.24×10⁻³ mmol), HBpin (0.224 mmol), B(OPh₃) (0.224 ×10⁻³ mmol), CO₂ (1 bar), 60 °C, [D₉]THF (0.4 mL) [b] Yields (% of CH₂OBpin at different times, obtained by 'H NMR signal integration against a mesitylene internal standard (0.056 mmol).
favor of a new singlet at 133.0 ppm (main species), already after 1 h at 60 °C. After 5 h, other signals were observed at 73.8 and 25.8 ppm, respectively, that were accompanied by another singlet at ca. 34.9 ppm after 24 h. The signal due to free ligand PNPPh2-Pr, expected at 45.4 ppm in [D$_6$]THF, was not observed.

In a separate NMR experiment, 1 was mixed in 1:1 ratio with B(OPh)$_3$ in [D$_6$]THF and, after leaving the sample standing for several hours at room temperature, a singlet at 133.0 ppm was observed in the $^3$P{H} NMR spectrum, while the signal due to 1 disappeared. The corresponding $^1$B NMR spectra showed the disappearance of the broad singlet at 16.10 ppm due to initial B(OPh)$_3$ replaced by a new signal at 2.28 ppm, a chemical shift value in the range compatible for [HB(OPh)$_3$]$.^3$[40] We assign these signals to the formation of the cationic complex [Mn (PNPPh$_2$-Pr)(CO)$_3$](HB(OPh)$_3$) (1$^+$) that is likely obtained by hydride abstraction from 1 by B(OPh)$_3$. As further confirmation, complex 3 was reacted in an NMR tube scale reaction with a small excess of Ag$_2$SO$_4$ as bromide scavenger, obtaining [Mn (PNPPh$_2$-Pr)(CO)$_3$]$_2$SO$_4$, characterized by a $^3$P{H} NMR singlet at 133.0 ppm. Attempts to assign the other $^3$P{H} NMR signals observed during the catalytic test were inconclusive. At the current stage, partial ligand release by de-coordination and following interaction with HBpin and/or B(OPh)$_3$ cannot be ruled out.

A tentative mechanistic proposal may involve the initial activation of CO$_2$ by the highly electrophilic species 1$^+$, allowing for the first kinetically sluggish reaction with HBpin to give for Exxonmethyborane. This is then sequentially converted to the final methoxyborane product by metal-free steps in the presence of HBpin and a Lewis acid, that may in turn assist the activation of the B–H bond. A similar mechanism has been recently proposed for CO$_2$ hydroxylolation in the presence of B(C$_6$F$_5$)$_3$.$^{50}$ DFT calculations to describe the full catalytic cycle and pinpoint the role of the N–H moiety will be carried out and reported in due time.

Conclusions
In summary, the presented study showed that Mn(l) complexes supported by PNP pincer-type ligands bearing N–H moieties in the backbone were able to bring about the efficient and selective hydroboration of CO$_2$ to methoxyboranes, as an example of CO$_2$ utilization as C1 building block for chemical synthesis catalyzed by earth-abundant transition metals. In particular, high yields of the desired product were obtained using as low as 0.5 mol% of catalyst under mild reaction conditions (1 bar CO$_2$, 60 °C) within 24 h. In addition, the role of Lewis acids in promoting the catalytic activity was described, together with the identification of previously unobserved side reactions and products.

Experimental Section

Typical procedure for CO$_2$ hydroboration tests. A stock solution containing the catalyst (0.56 to 4.48×10$^{-2}$ mmol), HBpin (0.224 mmol) and mesitylene as internal standard (0.056 mmol) in the desired solvent (0.4 mL) was added in glove-box under nitrogen to a 1.12 × 10$^{-2}$ mmol, 9–BBN (0.112 mmol), B(OPh)$_3$ (1.12 × 10$^{-2}$ mmol) and mesitylene as internal standard (0.028 mmol) in [D$_6$]THF (0.4 mL). Once prepared, the sample was degassed via three freeze-pump-thaw cycles and then CO$_2$ (1 bar) was added using a Schlenk line. The NMR tube was then placed in an oil bath kept at the desired temperature (25 or 60 °C) for the set reaction time. The formation of C1-products was monitored throughout the duration of the experiment using $^1$H NMR spectroscopy and quantified by signals integration versus the methoxyborane product by metal-free steps in the presence of HBpin and a Lewis acid, that may in turn assist the activation of the B–H bond. A similar mechanism has been recently proposed for CO$_2$ hydroxylolation in the presence of B(C$_6$F$_5$)$_3$.$^{50}$ DFT calculations to describe the full catalytic cycle and pinpoint the role of the N–H moiety will be carried out and reported in due time.

Acknowledgements
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Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Keywords: carbon dioxide hydroboration · manganese · pincer complexes · methanol · homogeneous catalysis

[1] In January 2020, the level of CO$_2$ in the atmosphere reached 413.40 ppm. Data from https://www.co2.earth/.

https://www.methanol.org/methanol-price-supply-demand.


