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Published in: Rapid Communications in Mass Spectrometry

DOI: 10.1002/(SICI)1097-0231(199608)10:11<1400::AID-RCM656>3.0.CO;2-3

Citation for published version (APA):

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Gas-phase Reactions of Isomeric Carbene and Distonic Radical Anions Derived from Methylthioacetonitrile with Dimethyl Disulfide

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The gas-phase ion/molecule reactions of the CH$_{3}$SCDCN, CH$_{3}$SCCN and 'CH$_{3}$SCDCN ions formed in the reaction of the O$^{-}$ ion with CH$_{3}$SCD$_{2}$CN have been studied with the use of Fourier-transform ion cyclotron resonance (FTICR). In the reaction of the CH$_{3}$SCDCN carbocation with the model substrate, dimethyl disulfide, a CH$_{3}$SD molecule is expelled from the collision complex with the indicated formation of a (CH$_{3}$S)$_{2}$CCN ion. In the reactions of the carbene radical anion, CH$_{3}$SCCN, loss of a CH$_{3}S$ radical occurs and the formation of an ion with a (CH$_{3}$S)$_{2}$CCN structure is again indicated. A distinct reactivity is observed for the distonic radical anion, 'CH$_{3}$SCDCN, which reacts with dimethyl disulfide by the competing losses of CH$_{3}$SH and CH$_{3}$S from the collision complex. It is proposed that the loss of CH$_{3}$SH yields a CH$_{3}$SCHSICN or CH$_{3}$SCHSICN radical anion, whereas the loss of CH$_{3}$S is proposed to lead to a CH$_{3}$SCHSCDCN carbanion. The formation of these species in the reactions of the 'CH$_{3}$SCDCN ion is discussed as involving an initial radical or nucleophile attack on one of the sulfur atoms in dimethyl disulfide followed by cleavage of the sulfur–sulfur bond prior to the loss of a CH$_{3}$SH molecule and/or a CH$_{3}$S radical.

The structure, stability and unimolecular dissociations of distonic ions have been studied extensively, whereas insight into the gas-phase bimolecular chemistry of such ions is somewhat more limited. The interest in the bimolecular chemistry of distonic ions, however, may be considered to be of general significance, since the formal separation of the radical and charge sites offers the possibility of examining reactions which involve primarily only one of these centers. With respect to distonic radical cations, a number of studies indicate that these species can react differently from the isomeric conventional radical cations and/or the related cations. Notably, a distonic radical cation may react by hydrogen atom abstraction or a formal transfer of a functional group originating from the substrate, whereas the conventional radical cations often prefer to react by charge exchange if this process is exothermic. For example, the distonic radical cation, 'CH$_{3}$CH$_{2}$CH$_{2}$CO reacts with CH$_{3}$SSCH$_{3}$ by a CH$_{3}$S radical abstraction, whereas a related conventional radical cation, i.e. ionized cyclopentanone, reacts by electron transfer. A similar reactivity difference has been reported for the sulfur-containing distonic ion, (CH$_{3}$)$_{2}$SCH$_{2}$ and the isomeric molecular ion of ethyl sulfide. Dime-thyl disulfide has also been used as a substrate to prove the reactivity of some of the few distonic radical anions that have been generated as stable species in the gas phase. In particular, the 'CH$_{3}$CO$_{2}$ ion is reported to be able to react by CH$_{3}$S abstraction with the suggested formation of a CH$_{3}$SCHC$_{2}$CO$_{2}$ ion, whereas a preliminary study indicated that a simple CH$_{3}$S' transfer does not occur in the reactions of the distonic radical anion of tetramethylethene with dimethyl disulfide.

In a previous study we reported that a stable sulfur-containing distonic radical anion, 'CH$_{3}$SCDCN, is formed in the reactions of the O$^{-}$ ion with deuterium-labelled methylthioacetonitrile, CH$_{3}$SCD$_{2}$CN. This ion was structurally distinguished from the isomeric carbene radical anion, CH$_{3}$SCCN, on the basis of high-kinetic-energy collision-induced charge-reversal experiments. The distinct structure of these two radical anions, in combination with reports which indicate that dimethyl disulfide is a suitable substrate for probing the reactivity of distonic ions in the gas phase, prompted us to examine the ion-molecule chemistry of the 'CH$_{3}$SCDCN and CH$_{3}$SCCN species with this disulfide.

**EXPERIMENTAL**

The results were obtained using a single cell Fourier-transform ion cyclotron resonance (FTICR) mass spectrometer designed and constructed at the University of Amsterdam. The experimental operating procedure for this instrument has been described previously. The O$^{-}$ ions were generated from N$_{2}$O by dissociative capture of electrons with an energy of 1.0–1.5 eV. Unwanted ions were ejected from the FTICR cell by applying appropriate radio-frequency (RF) pulses to the excitation plates of the cell. The experiments were performed by first examining the reactions of a selected ion with the parent compound, methylthioacetonitrile, and then studying the formation of the product ions formed with CH$_{3}$SSCH$_{3}$, also admitted to the cell. These two series of experiments were performed directly after each other, in order to maintain similar experimental conditions. The occurrence of subsequent reactions of certain product ions with the neutral species present in the cell was prevented by continuous ejection of these product ions (see also Results). This was achieved by applying an appropriate low-amplitude RF pulse to the excitation plates of the cell during the entire reaction period. Attachment of low-energy electrons to the neutral species present in the cell during the reaction time was avoided by ejection of these electrons from the FTICR cell following a procedure described previously.

The total pressure of N$_{2}$O, methylthioacetonitrile and dimethyl disulfide was (8–10)$\times$10$^{-3}$ Pa as measured with an uncalibrated ionization gauge placed in a side arm of the main pumping line. The ratio between the partial pressures of the compounds in all experiments was 1:1:1.
temperature of the trapping plate situated opposite the filament was measured to be ≈330 K, whereas the inlet systems, the leak valves, and the vacuum vessel of the instrument were all at room temperature.

All samples were commercially available with the exception of CH₃SCD₂CN (≥95% d), which was prepared from the unlabelled compound as described previously.¹³

RESULTS

Gas-phase ion/molecule reactions are currently being studied by a number of different instrumental methods including high pressure techniques, such as flowing afterglow (FA)²⁰ or selected-ion flow tube (SIFT),²⁰ as well as the low pressure FTICR method.²⁰ The latter method has proven to be very useful in mechanistic studies of ion/molecule reactions in the gas phase,²⁷⁻²⁹ owing, in part, to its versatility for the determination of the relationships between reactant and product ions by appropriate ion-ejection procedures.²⁸,³⁰ This feature of the FTICR method is, in particular, useful if a single cell instrument is used, since the neutral precursors of the various ions are inevitably present in the cell together with the selected substrate. With respect to the present study, it should be emphasized that the (radical) anions of interest are formed in the reactions of 0⁺ with CH₃SCD₂CN as indicated in Reactions (1)−(3) and described in a previous report.¹⁵ In other words, in the experiments concerned with the reactivity of the (radical) anions towards dimethyl disulfide, the other neutral compounds N₂O and CH₃SCD₂CN, are also present in the cell of the single cell FTICR instrument used (see experimental). Thus, it proved necessary to perform two series of independent experiments. The first series of experiments is concerned with the reactivity of a selected ion with the parent species while the second series of experiments investigates the reactions of the same ion with dimethyl disulfide added to the cell. In the second series of experiments, the origin of the product ions was confirmed by continuous ejection, from the cell, of one of the product ions of the reactions with the parent compound (vide infra).

![Figure 1](image1.png)

**Figure 1.** Variation in the normalized ion abundances with time in the reaction of the CH₃CDCN carbene radical anion with CH₃SSCH₃. The pressure of the neutral species present in the FTICR cell were: p(N₂O)=3×10⁻³ Pa, p(CH₃SCD₂CN)=3×10⁻³ Pa and p(CH₃SSCH₃)=3×10⁻³ Pa (see text).

CH₃SCD₂CN+CH₃SSCH₃

\[
\text{m/z 87} \quad \text{CH}_3\text{S}^+\text{CD}+\text{CH}_3\text{S}^+\text{SSCH}_3
\]

**Carbene radical anion**

The carbene radical anion of methylthioacetonitrile is reactive towards N₂O whereas it reacts with the parent compound to afford the related CH₃SCDCN carbene. This reaction appears to be relatively facile since 45% of the carbene radical anions are seen to be converted into the carbene after a reaction time of 0.5 s. If dimethyl disulfide is admitted to the cell, an additional product ion with an m/z value of 132 is generated in a reaction which involves the loss of a CH₃S⁻ radical from the collision complex (see Reaction (5)). This process can be considered to be relatively slow, in keeping with the observation that the conversion into product ions is changed only from 45% to 65% at a reaction time of 0.5 s if dimethyl disulfide is added to the cell (Fig. 2).

![Figure 2](image2.png)

**Figure 2.** Variation in the normalized ion abundances with time in the reaction of the CH₃SCCN carbene radical anion with CH₃SSCH₃. The pressure of the neutral species present in the FTICR cell were: p(N₂O)=3×10⁻³ Pa, p(CH₃SCD₂CN)=3×10⁻³ Pa and p(CH₃SSCH₃)=3×10⁻³ Pa (see text).
To verify that the product ion with an m/z ratio of 132 is formed in the reaction of the carbene radical anion with dimethyl disulfide and not in a subsequent reaction of the CH$_3$SCD-CN carbanion generated in the reaction with the parent compound, an additional experiment was performed. In this experiment, the CH$_3$SCD-CN ion was ejected continuously from the cell during the entire reaction time (see experimental). However, the product ion with m/z 132 was generated persistently under these experimental conditions also, thus confirming that the carbene radical anion reacts with CH$_3$SSCH$_3$ as shown in (Reaction (5)).

### Distonic radical anion

The distonic radical anion too, does not display any observable reactivity towards N$_2$O but reacts with the parent compound with the formation of two product ions. Thus the carbanion, CH$_3$SCD-CN, and an ion of m/z 88 are generated. The latter species has been assigned a CH$_3$SCD-CN structure and it is suggested that it is formed by D' abstraction from the methylene group of neutral CH$_3$SCD-CN. The overall reaction of the distonic radical anion with the parent compound proceeds with a conversion into products of 25% after a reaction time of 0.5 s. In the presence of the substrate CH$_3$SSCH$_3$, the conversion into products is only slightly more than 25% after a reaction time of 0.5 s in line with the observation that the two additional product ions with m/z values of 132 and 133 are formed only in relatively low yields as shown in Fig. 3.

To complement the procedure described for the carbene radical anion, an experiment was performed in which the ions of m/z 87 were ejected continuously from the cell. This experiment revealed that the product ion with an m/z ratio of 132 is also formed in the direct reaction of the distonic radical anion with CH$_3$SSCH$_3$. In addition, a similar ion ejection experiment confirmed that the product ion of m/z 133 arises as a result of a direct reaction of the distonic radical anion and not, for example, in a possible subsequent reaction of the m/z 88 ion with dimethyl disulfide. In conclusion, the distonic radical anion is indicated to react with dimethyl disulfide as shown in Reactions (6) and (7).

### DISCUSSION

Relatively simple anions and also some radical anions are reported to react with dimethyl disulfide in the gas phase by an elimination reaction across a carbon–sulfur bond and/or a displacement process involving initial attack on a sulfur atom. The elimination pathway suggested involves an initial formation of an ion-molecule complex containing a CH$_3$=S molecule and a CH$_3$S$^-$ ion which either dissociates to give the observed CH$_3$S$^-$ ion or undergoes an addition reaction to form a stable CH$_3$SCH$_2$S$^-$ species. It was concluded that the elimination pathway dominates in the reactions of charge-localized anions, e.g. NH$_2^-$ and CH$_3$O$^-$, derived from molecules with a gas-phase acidity, $\Delta H_{\text{acid}}^0$ larger than or equal to 1592 kJ mol$^{-1}$. A different behaviour was reported for the charge-delocalized carbanions, such as CH$_3$COCH$_2^-$, CH$_3$CN and CH$_3$NO$_2$. It was concluded that these ions react mainly by attack on a sulfur atom followed by loss of CH$_3$SH from the collision complex as generalized Reaction in (8) for an HA$^-$ anion. In addition, it was reported that anions derived from molecules with a gas-phase acidity lower than 1470 kJ mol$^{-1}$ display no, or only a marginal, reactivity towards dimethyl disulfide in the gas phase.

\[
\text{HA}^- + \text{CH}_3\text{SSHCH}_3 \rightarrow \text{[CH}_3\text{SAH}-\text{SCH}_3]^+ + \text{CH}_3\text{SH}
\]

In line with these findings, the present charge-delocalized carbanion, CH$_3$SCD-CN, reacts relatively slowly with dimethyl disulfide by loss of CH$_3$SD from the collision complex (Fig. 1). The slow nature of the overall reaction may be considered to be in line with the gas-phase acidity of the methylene group in methylthioacetonitrile which is reported to be 1494土8 kJ mol$^{-1}$ and thus not very different from the apparently critical value of about 1470 kJ mol$^{-1}$. For the radical, CH$_3$SCD-CN the gas-phase acidity can be placed at a value of 1505±10 kJ mol$^{-1}$, thus revealing that the carbene radical anion, CH$_3$CCN, is only slightly more basic than the related carbanion. The relatively minor difference in gas-phase acidity between the radical and the parent compound could be considered to be in line with the observation that the carbene radical anion does not appear to react much more easily with dimethyl disulfide than does the carbanion (see results and Figs 1 and 2). It should be emphasized, however, that the carbene radical anion reacts with dimethyl disulfide by the loss of a CH$_3$S$^-$ radical from the collision complex (Reaction (5)) and that this process, in a formal sense, may involve either an initial radical attack or a nucleophilic attack on one of the sulfur atoms in dimethyl disulfide.

Initial radical or nucleophilic attack may also be thought to occur in the reactions of the distonic radical anion. This ion may be represented, in principle, not only by the CH$_3$SCD-CN formulation shown in Reactions (6) and (7) but also with the radical and charge centres interchanged; i.e. as CH$_3$SCDN. If the former representation is
considered to be the most adequate, the losses of CH$_3$S' and CH$_3$SH from the collision complex formed in the reaction with dimethyl disulfide may be visualized as in Scheme 1. In this Scheme, the initial step is proposed to be a radical attack on a sulfur atom leading to a complex composed of a CH$_3$S-CH$_2$S-CD-CN ion and a CH$_3$S' radical. This complex may dissociate by the loss of CH$_3$S' or react further by a hydrogen-atom abstraction from the methylene group of the CH$_3$S-CH$_2$S-CD-CN ion. The selective occurrence of this hydrogen-atom abstraction by the CH$_3$S' radical requires, of course, that the methylene C-H bond dissociation energy be considerably lower than the dissociation energy of the C-H bond of the CH$_3$ group or the C-D bond in the CH$_3$S-CH$_2$S-CD-CN ion.

With the assumption that the CH$_3$S'CD-CN ion reacts by nucleophilic attack on a sulfur atom, a complex of a CH$_3$SC(SCH$_3$)CN radical and a CH$_3$S' ion will be formed (see Scheme 1). This complex would be expected, however, to react further by deuteron abstraction with the formation of a CH$_3$S(SC)CN ion of m/z 131. Irrespective of the fact that a product ion with an m/z ratio of 131 is not formed in the reactions of the distonic radical anion (see Reactions (6) and (7)), a clear conclusion concerning the initial step in the reaction sequence can not be reached. This becomes even more apparent if the reactant distonic radical ion is formulated as CH$_3$S'CD-CN. Radical attack on a sulfur atom in dimethyl disulfide would lead, in this instance, to the primary carbocation shown in Reaction (9). The formation of such a product ion can not be excluded, of course, even though it may be considered unlikely since such a carbocation is anticipated to be less stable than, for example, the charge-delocalized CH$_3$S-CH$_2$S-CD-CN species shown in Scheme 1.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{CH}_3\text{S'CD-CN} + \text{CH}_3\text{SSCH}_3 & \rightarrow \text{CH}_3\text{S'CD-CN} + \text{CH}_3\text{S} \quad \text{m/z 133} \\
\end{align*}
\]

In addition, the CH$_3$S site in the CH$_3$SCDCN ion may attack a sulfur atom in dimethyl disulfide thus forming the complex [CH$_3$SCH$_2$S-CD-CN - SCH$_3$] shown in Scheme 2.

A possible subsequent reaction would then be deuteron abstraction by the CH$_3$S' ion with formation of an ion with an m/z ratio of 131 in contrast to the experimental observations (vide supra). The loss of CH$_3$SH from the complex involves, of course, a proton abstraction, whereas the loss of a CH$_3$S' radical more probably involves an electron transfer within the postulated [CH$_3$SCH$_2$S-CD-CN - SCH$_3$] complex (see Scheme 2).

The sole occurrence of proton abstraction in the [CH$_3$SCH$_2$S-CD-CN - SCH$_3$] complex would require that the -CD- position between the CN group and a sulfur atom is significantly less acidic than the methylene group in between the two sulfur atoms. This seems to be at odds with the fact that a CN group enhances the acidity of an adjacent radical position much more than a sulfur atom increases the acidity of an adjoining group, as shown by the finding that the CH$_3$CN radical is about 85 kJ mol$^{-1}$ more acidic than CH$_3$SCH$_3$ in the gas phase. In combination with the absence of a product ion corresponding to the loss of CH$_3$SD from the collision complex, these considerations suggest that the most likely mechanistic scheme involves the indicated initial radical attack on a sulfur atom by the distonic ion formulated as CH$_3$SCDCN (see Scheme 1). It should be mentioned, however, that an electronic coupling through the sulfur atom is possible in either representation of the distonic radical anion. As a result, the mechanistic considerations with respect to the occurrence of an initial radical or nucleophilic attack on a sulfur atom do not allow any real insight to be obtained into the radical and charge distributions in the reactant distonic ion.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The (radical) ions formed in the reactions of CH$_3$S' with methylthioacetonitrile react differently with dimethyl disulfide. The carbanion, CH$_3$SCDCN, and carbene radical anion, CH$_3$SC-CN, both react with the formation of (CH$_3$S)$_2$CCN ion, although via different pathways. The carbanion is likely to react by an initial nucleophilic attack on one of the sulfur atoms of dimethyl disulfide followed by deuteron transfer and loss of CH$_3$SD, whereas the reaction of the carbene radical anion can be formulated as a CH$_3$S' radical abstraction. Only the distonic radical anion, CH$_3$S'CD-CN, reacts with dimethyl disulfide by the...
competing losses of CH₃S⁺ and CH₃SH from the collision complex in a process which is likely to involve initial radical attack on one of the sulfur atoms. The occurrence of the loss of CH₃S⁺ as well as CH₃SH allows the distonic radical anion to be distinguished from the isomeric carbene radical anion species by its bimolecular chemistry with dimethyl disulfide.

Acknowledgement
The authors thank the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (SON/NWO) for financial support.

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