Anomalous behaviour of buried strained-Si channel heterojunction FETs at low temperatures

V.Gaspari1, K. Febelets1, J.E. Velaquez-Perez2, T. Hack Barth1, and U. König2

1Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Imperial College London, SW7 2BT London, UK
2Departamento de Física Aplicada, Universidad de Salamanca, 37008 Salamanca, Spain
3Daimler Chrysler Research Centre, 89081 Ulm, Germany

Low temperature behavior of strained-Si MOSFETs [1] and HFETs [2] generate an invaluable source of information on the physical processes, in particular confinement and scattering, in these devices. It has been shown for both Si MOSFETs [3] and strained-Si FETs [1,2] that reduced temperature increases the performance parameters, mainly due to increased carrier mobility. In this abstract we present the reduced temperature performance of strained-Si buried channel HFETs and discuss the physical principles behind the anomalous behavior.

Fig.1 give the layer structure of the Schottky gated HFET. The gate lengths of the devices are $L_G = 100$, 150, 250 and 500 nm. The total source-drain distance is fixed at $L_{DS} = 2 \mu$m. The gate width is $W = 15 \mu$m for all.

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An Agilent 4155B Semiconductor Parameter Analyzer and a CTI-Cryogenics closed-cycle He cryostat (10 – 300K) is used for the measurements.

Fig.1: Cross-section of Schottky gated HFET.

The room temperature maximum low-field transconductance, $g_{mnax}$ increases up to 61% at $T = 10$ K. A record value of 440mS/dac is reached at 0.35V $V_{DS}$ at only 0.35V $V_{DS}$ is reached at 10K for the 100nm HFET. The sub-threshold slopes of all studied devices decrease to 14..19 mV/decade at $T = 10$ K, but remains higher than the theoretical curve. This is a feature apparent in all studied $n$-channel strained-Si FETs [1,2].

At $T<40K$ the $I_{DS}$-$V_{DS}$ characteristics in the triode region become highly non-linear. Since the ohmic contact implantations are degenerate, but the annealing temperature kept low, a small Schottky barrier exists at the source and drain contact, that is completely negligible in comparison with $kTq$ at room temperature, but becomes important at low $T$. This increases the switch-on voltage and decreases the switching speed, but since $g_{mnax}$ lies at higher $V_{DS}$ in the triode region) where no Schottky behavior occurs, low power analogue performance is not impeded.

The substrate current is virtually independent of $V_{DS}$ and $I_{G}$. Its temperature dependence is accurately described by

$$I_{DS} = I_{DS} \exp \left( \frac{-E_s(0.72Vbar)}{2kT} \right),$$

in qualitative agreement with the bandgap of SiGe.

Low temperature operation of the HFETs has already shown double peaked $g_n$ curves as a function of gate voltage [2]Fig.2, associated to parallel conductance.

![Fig.2: Anomalous behaviour of the HFET at low T, low $V_{DS}$ and here demonstrated at $V_{DS}=1V$. ($\Delta T=60K$)](image)

Although simulations confirm this anomaly to first approximation, they cannot predict the relative sharpness of the peaks. We have found that the origin of the anomalous peak is due to self-biasing effects of the HFETs at reduced temperatures.

When measuring the HFET at low $V_{DS}$ and low $T$, a kink effect in the current is observed as given in fig.3.

![Fig.3: The kink effect measured in the $I_{DSS}$-$V_{DS}$ curves at 10K, $L_G=0.5\mu$m, $V_{GS}=-0.45V$ – 0.3V, step: 0.01V.

The kink effect is explained by the fact that the high resistivity substrate becomes insulating, and becomes effectively self-biased. Impact ionization near the drain creates an excess current of electrons (to drain) and holes, which go partly to the substrate. This hole current biases the substrate at a positive voltage with respect to the source and causes a shift in threshold voltage, such that the device switches on [5]. Calculating $g_n$ across the abrupt current steps, generates sharp peaks as those occurring in fig.2 at low $V_{DS}$: The higher lying $g_n$ peak in fig.2 is the traditional one found in HEMT structures.

In conclusion, we have found dramatically improved low voltage behavior in HFETs at low temperatures. We have demonstrated that the double peaked transconductance curves of these devices at low temperature are a result of substrate self-biasing effects at low temperatures.

References:

[1] V. Gaspari et al., to be submitted to the EMC 2004