

GaN BUFFER DESIGN: ELECTRICAL CHARACTERIZATION AND PREDICTION OF THE EFFECT OF DEEP LEVEL CENTERS IN GaN/ALGAN HEMTs

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Abstract

GaN buffer deep level centers are studied coupling measurements and device physics simulations. The impact of Fe- and C-doped samples on low frequency device transconductance and noise is presented. The Fe-level found at 0.7eV below the GaN conduction band results in low frequency generation-recombination noise and transconductance dispersion. The agreement with the model shows that the buffer can now be reliably simulated and used to investigate the impact of other deep level traps, such as carbon, that cannot be easily measured due to their deep position in the GaN bandgap.

I. Introduction

The quality of GaN material and GaN-based high Electron Mobility Transistor (HEMT) technology has increased remarkably during the last few years. A significant number of markets such as automotive, satellite communications, and high-power signal management are heavily investing in the development of GaN technology due to the promising delivered performance [1]. To achieve such results though, detailed understanding of all the limiting issues that still pose restrictions on this technology must be gained. Although the engineering of the gate shape has strongly reduced current collapse [2], the impact of deep centers on the device switching performance is not fully understood and modeled. Furthermore, the use of deep levels to suppress short channel effects in GaN HEMTs, reducing the conductivity of the grown GaN buffers, is essential [3]. Relying on intrinsic growth defect centers is a widely used solution, but the capability to control extrinsic defects during growth and achieve a finely controlled insulated buffer is becoming more attractive and a more detailed understanding of the deep levels of GaN is fundamental. Iron and carbon are the most commonly used impurities. They lead to two different deep acceptor centers, one in the upper and one in the

lower half part of the GaN band gap, respectively, contributing to a different extent to current collapse [4].

In this work, we take advantage of the dynamic transconductance technique, low frequency noise measurements, and ATLAS device simulations on iron and carbon doped AlGaIn/GaN HEMTs. The presented approach enables one to predict the behavior of buffer traps and their influence on small signal device performance.

II. Devices and setup

Fe-doped AlGaIn/GaN HEMTs grown by MOVPE on SiC substrates with 4 μ m source-drain gap, 0.25 μ m channel length, and 26nm AlGaIn layer thickness were studied. Three different residual channel Fe-doping concentrations were considered: low $\sim 7 \times 10^{15} \text{ cm}^{-3}$, medium $\sim 3.6 \times 10^{16} \text{ cm}^{-3}$, and high $\sim 1.5 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ [7]. C-doped 0.5- μ m devices with 22-nm thick AlGaIn layer on top of 150nm of undoped and 500nm of $\sim 2 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ C-doped GaN layers were also studied. The devices were measured in the ohmic regime, with a drain bias of 50mV. The drain current was measured with a low noise current to voltage converter. The dynamic

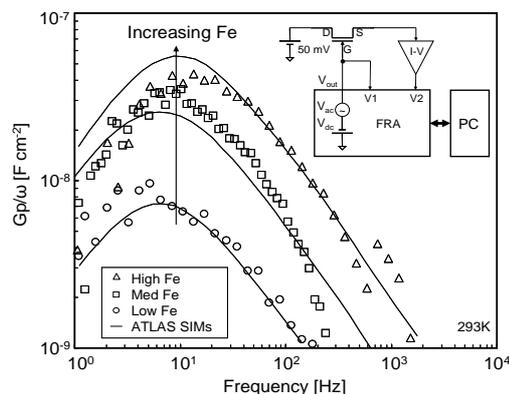


Figure 1: Measured (symbols) and simulated (solid lines) trap conductance vs. frequency at 293K for three representative 0.25 μ m AlGaIn/GaN HEMTs with different iron doping concentrations. In the inset the experimental setup is reported.

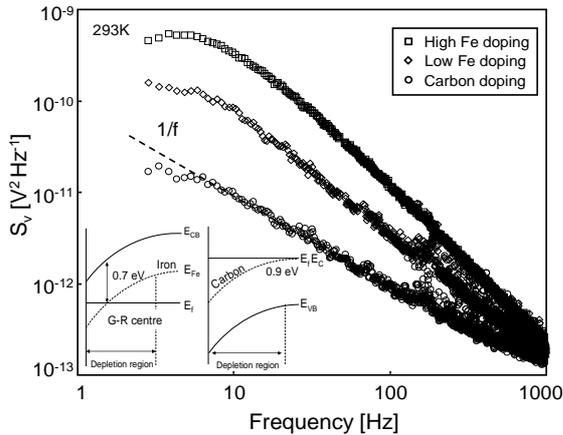


Figure 2: Low frequency noise spectra in iron- and carbon-doped AlGaIn/GaN HEMTs at room temperature.

transconductance dispersion measurement was performed in the range 1Hz–10kHz (see inset of Fig. 1). More details on the technique can be found in [5] and [6]. Low frequency noise was measured in the 1Hz–1kHz range with a fast signal acquisition board. Simulations were performed with the Silvaco ATLAS code using the approach described in [4] and [6]. The buffer deep level doping was varied in accordance with the measured devices, and a low density (10^{15}cm^{-3}) of shallow compensating donors was included in all cases.

II. Results and discussion

Fig. 1 reports the measured trap conductance extracted from the dynamic transconductance measurements as a function of frequency at 293K for three representative 0.25- μm gate length AlGaIn/GaN HEMTs with different iron doping concentrations in the buffer. The higher the iron concentration the higher the trap conductance. A lower limit for the detectable channel doping around 10^{15}cm^{-3} was determined for this measurement approach. From the conductance temperature sweeps (not shown in detail) we extracted an activation energy E_{Fe} of 0.7eV and a capture cross section in the 10^{-13} - 10^{-14}cm^2 range at 293K. These values were used as input for ATLAS simulations together with the iron doping distributions in the devices described in Ref. [7]. No other fitting parameters were used in the simulations. From the simulated frequency analysis all the transistor Y-parameters were extracted and used to calculate the trap conductance according to [5]. As shown in Fig. 1, the simulations captured very well the experimental behavior. Once the activation energy, capture cross section, and trap concentration are known it is possible to model the behavior of the traps, complementing and guiding the experimental detection as well as predicting, with good accuracy, the effect on small

signal performance, as shown in Fig. 1. In contrast to the Fe-doped devices, C-doped ones did not show any measurable dispersion up to 80°C. This is because the Fermi level sits near the C-level that has been reported around 0.9eV above the GaN valence band [9] with a predicted frequency response in the μHz range that is outside our measurement window. In order to gain complementary insight into the C-trap level, low frequency noise measurements, depicted in Fig. 2, were performed. Fe-doped samples display a distinct generation-recombination (G-R) centre around 10Hz due to active traps where the Fermi level crosses the Fe level and the G-R mechanism is efficient (see inset of Fig. 2). This is in agreement with the transconductance peak frequency shown in Fig. 1 illustrating that both techniques can be used in parallel; the noise peak scales in magnitude with the iron doping concentration as expected. In contrast, the C-doped devices show only 1/f noise behavior because the Fermi level is pinned at the C-level, well below the mid gap, with a predicted response time in the μHz range.

IV. Conclusions

In conclusion we demonstrated through coupled experiments and simulations that the Fe deep-acceptor center with a concentration above 10^{15}cm^{-3} can be electrically characterized through quasi-static electrical techniques due to its position in the upper part of the GaN band gap. Device simulations give remarkably accurate predictions of the observed dispersion behavior confirming the physics implementation, and demonstrating its usefulness for studying the device impact of trap levels that cannot be directly probed. This approach can be generalized to different semiconductor devices being technology independent.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the UK-EPSC through grant EP/I033165/1; IMEC, QinetiQ Ltd and the UK MoD for providing the devices.

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