Oxygen-Adsorption-Induced Anomalous Capacitance Degradation in Amorphous Indium-Gallium-Zinc-Oxide Thin-Film-Transistors under Hot-Carrier Stress

Wan-Fang Chung,a,* Ting-Chang Chang,b,c,z Chia-Sheng Lin,d Kuan-Jen Tu,e Hung-Wei Li,f Tsueing-Yuen Tseng,a Ying-Chung Chen,d and Ya-Hsiang Tai,g

*aDepartment of Electronics Engineering & Institute of Electronics, bDepartment of Photonics & Institute of Electro-Optical Engineering, and cDepartment of Photonics & Display Institute, National Chiao Tung University, Hsinchua 300, Taiwan
bDepartment of Physics, cCenter for Nanoscience & Nanotechnology, and dDepartment of Electrical Engineering, National Sun Yat-Sen University, Kaohsiung 804, Taiwan
cDepartment of Electrical Engineering & Institute of Electronic Engineering, National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchua 300, Taiwan

This paper investigates anomalous capacitance-voltage (C-V) degradation in amorphous indium-gallium-zinc-oxide (α-IGZO) thin-film-transistors (TFTs) under hot carrier stress. In vacuum hot carrier stress, both the gate-to-drain capacitance (C_{GD}) and the gate-to-source capacitance (C_{GS}) curves exhibited positive shifts due to electron trapping in the gate dielectric. In addition, an observed increase in capacitance value at a lower gate voltage in the C_{GD} measurement only can be ascribed to interface state creation. However, when the hot carrier stress was performed in an oxygen-rich environment, the C_{GD}-V_{G} curve showed a significantly positive shift due to the electric-field-induced oxygen adsorption near the drain terminal. The degradation in the C_{GS}-V_{G} curve is due not only to the positive shift, but also the anomalous two step turn-on behavior. This phenomenon can be ascribed to the electron trapping in the gate dielectric and electric-field-induced oxygen adsorption on the channel layer, especially in the area adjacent to the drain terminal. The electron trapping increased the source energy barrier, with the electric-field-induced oxygen adsorption further raising the energy-band near the drain, resulting in a two-step turn-on behavior in the C_{GS}-V_{G} curve.

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Manuscript submitted August 10, 2011; revised manuscript received November 14, 2011. Published January 10, 2012.

Amorphous indium-gallium-zinc-oxide (α-IGZO) thin-film-transistors (TFTs) have attracted much attention for use in active matrix liquid crystal displays (AMLCD) and active matrix organic light emitting diode (AMOLED) applications due to their high mobility, high transparency, and capability to realize integrated circuits over a large area on the same glass as the display.1–5 Compared to conventional α-Si TFTs, α-IGZO TFTs have better device performance with the same advantages of a low manufacturing cost and a process flow compatible with conventional α-Si TFTs.6–7

Device stability is an important issue in real applications. It is reported that the stability of α-IGZO TFTs suffers from several factors, such as the adsorption of water/oxygen molecules,8–10 the temperature effect,11 the illumination effect, and the influence of operating bias.12–13 During the normal working mode, one of the degradation mechanisms of α-IGZO TFTs is hot carrier stress. Previous research has reported that the hot carrier effect, resulting from the electrons near the drain region under the high electric field, causes the deterioration of drain current and field effect mobility.13,14 Further, the environment surrounding the α-IGZO TFT also has a great impact on the electrical stability.15–17 However, most studies have focused on the current-voltage (I-V) transfer characteristics to investigate the degradation mechanism after stress.11,12 Because current transfer behaviors respond to the entire degradation region in the channels, the detailed region of deterioration in the channel after stress is somewhat difficult to examine. In this work, the effects of hot carrier stress are examined with I-V and capacitance voltage (C-V) measurements, which can further verify the damaged location and study the mechanism of hot carrier stress in α-IGZO TFTs. The depicted energy-band diagram of the α-IGZO TFTs along the channel length helps to identify the degradation location and mechanism.

Experimental

A schematic cross-section of the coplanar-type bottom-gate α-IGZO TFT examined here is depicted in Figure 1a. The patterned Ti/AI/Ti (50/200/50 nm) tri-layer structures were deposited by DC-sputtering as the gate electrode and then capped with 300-nm-thick plasma-enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD)-derived silicon-oxide (SiO2) gate dielectric. The source/drain electrodes were formed with DC-sputtered Ti/AI/Ti (50/200/50 nm) and then patterned in channel width/length dimensions (W/L) = 100/11 μm. An active layer of 30-nm-thick α-IGZO film was deposited by a DC magnetron sputtering system at room temperature, using a target of In:Ga:Zn = 1:1:1 in atomic ratio. Finally, the devices were annealed in air at 330°C for two hours in an oven.

DC voltages were applied to the devices to study electrical reliability. In order to execute hot carrier stress in α-IGZO TFTs, the applied gate bias must be larger than the threshold voltage and the drain bias must be high.15 The stress condition was set at V_{G} = 30 V and V_{D} = V_{G} + 10 V while source terminal was grounded for 1000 sec. The applied biases of the drain, gate, and source terminals are illustrated in Figure 1. Variations in the electrical characteristics were monitored from the drain current-gate voltage (I_{DS}-V_{G}) and the capacitance-voltage (C-V) transfer characteristics. The electrical characteristics were measured in vacuum and in 760 torr oxygen ambience, respectively. The I-V curves and C-V curves were measured by an Agilent B1500 semiconductor parameter analyzer. Here, the normalized drain current (I_{DS}/I_{DS}) is defined as drain current/width/length, i.e., I_{DS}/(W/L). In the C-V measurements, the gate-to-source capacitance (C_{GS}) and the gate-to-drain capacitance (C_{GD}) were measured at a frequency of 100 K Hz. For the C_{GS}-V_{G} measurement, capacitance-measurement-high (CMH) was applied to the gate electrode and capacitance-measurement-low (CML) was connected to source electrode with a floated drain. In contrast, the C_{GD}-V_{G} was measured with a floated source.

Results and Discussion

Figure 2 shows the normalized I_{DS}-V_{G} transfer characteristic curves of an α-IGZO TFT with 1 V drain voltage at initial and after 1000 sec of hot carrier stress in a vacuum environment. It can be seen that the device exhibits a slight degradation under hot carrier stress, where V_{T} increases with the evolution of stress time. The positive shift of
Figure 1. Schematic cross section of an a-IGZO TFT under hot carrier stress conditions.

Figure 2. Normalized $I_D$-$V_G$ transfer characteristics curves of a-IGZO TFTs with 1 V drain voltage under initial and after hot carrier stress in vacuum ambient.

The transfer characteristics may be ascribed to the electron trapping at the interface between the channel and gate dielectric or the defect creation within the a-IGZO channel material. The negligible variance of the subthreshold swing before and after hot carrier stress ($SS_{before} = 0.396$ V/dec, $SS_{after} = 0.401$ V/dec) indicates that the negative charge trapping at the channel/gate dielectric interface is the major origin of the positive threshold voltage shift.

To further understand this phenomenon, the $C_{GD}$-$V_G$ and the $C_{GS}$-$V_G$ transfer characteristics before and after 1000 sec of hot carrier stress in a vacuum environment were measured in Figures 3a and 3b. Compared to that before hot carrier stress, the stressed $C_{GD}$-$V_G$ curve exhibited two main changes; namely, the parallel shift in the positive direction and an increase in the capacitance value for the gate voltage just below the flatband voltage ($V_{FB}$). A previous study reported that the increase in the $C_{GD}$ value during the lower gate voltage comes from the interface states near the drain region, suggesting that a large drain voltage accelerates the electrons to move from the source terminal to the drain terminal and produce numerous traps in the a-IGZO film adjacent to the drain electrode by impact ionization. It can be observed from Figure 3b that the $C_{GS}$-$V_G$ curve parallel shifts in the positive direction after hot carrier stress in vacuum ambient, which is consistent with the $I_{DS}$-$V_G$ result in Figure 2. Hence, the creation of interface traps near the drain terminal and the electron trapping in the gate dielectric appeared after the hot carrier stress was conducted in the vacuum environment.

Figure 3. (a) $C_{GD}$-$V_G$ and (b) $C_{GS}$-$V_G$ transfer characteristics under initial and after hot carrier stress in vacuum ambient. The insets show their respective measurement methods.

Early investigations have shown that the adsorption/desorption reaction of ambient oxygen molecules on the amorphous oxide surface has a great impact on the electrical characteristics of amorphous metal oxide TFTs, where the excess electron accumulation in the conducting channel region will be captured by the oxygen species from the ambient atmosphere, which then generates the negatively charged species ($O_2^-$) in the back-channel of amorphous oxide TFTs. In order to further understand the influence of oxygen on electrical characteristics of a-IGZO TFTs, the hot carrier stress was also performed in a 760 torr oxygen-rich ambient environment.

Figure 4 shows the $I_{DS}$-$V_G$ transfer characteristics of an a-IGZO TFT with 1 V drain voltage before and after stress for 1000 sec in an oxygen-rich environment. As can be clearly seen, the device exhibits pronounced degradation after the same hot carrier stress condition, where $V_T$ shifts to the positive direction and on-current is seriously degraded. It is well known that the oxygen molecules in the surrounding atmosphere will adsorb on the a-IGZO film by capturing electrons from the conduction band and exist in the form of $O_2^-$ (ad). Due to the charge transfer between the oxygen molecules and a-IGZO film, a reduction of the free carriers occurs, which results in the
The increase of $V_T$. The interaction between the back-channel and surrounding atmosphere can be described as the following chemical reaction:

$$O_2(g) + e^- \rightarrow O_2^{(ad)}, \quad K = [O_2]_{(ad)}/P_{O_2}[n]$$

where $K$, $[O_2]_{(ad)}$, $P_{O_2}$, and $[n]$ represent the chemical equilibrium constant, the concentration of the adsorbed oxygen molecules on $a$-IGZO film, the oxygen partial pressure, and the density of the electrons in the channel, respectively. Previous research identified the phenomenon of electric-field-induced oxygen adsorption on the $a$-IGZO surface under positive gate bias, where an increase in the density of generated free electrons $[n]$ resulted in a positive $V_T$ shift in the electrical characteristics of $a$-IGZO TFTs since the chemical equilibrium constant $K$ does not vary at a fixed temperature. In addition, as positive bias is applied to the drain electrode, the adjacent active area of the drain terminal may attract more oxygen molecules absorbing on the $a$-IGZO surface, causing a significant reduction in the on-current. Therefore, the severe deterioration of electrical characteristics for $a$-IGZO TFTs after 1000 sec of hot carrier stress conducted in an oxygen-rich environment may be ascribed to the electric-field-induced oxygen adsorption on the back-channel and the adjacent channel area of the drain electrode, which leads to a positive threshold voltage shift and a noticeable reduction of on-current.

To further confirm the degradation mechanism, the $C_{GD-V_G}$ and $C_{GS-V_G}$ transfer characteristics under initial and after hot carrier stress in oxygen environment were measured, and are shown in Figures 5a and 5b, respectively. Figure 5a clearly shows a significant positive shift of about 20 V in the $C_{GD-V_G}$ curve, while the increase in the capacitance value with the gate voltage below the $V_{FB}$ is eliminated, which may be suppressed by the oxygen passivation from the surrounding oxygen atmosphere. The oxygen adsorption in the surrounding atmosphere affects the characteristics via the charge transfer between the $a$-IGZO film and the oxygen molecules. The absorbing oxygen molecules on the back-channel lead to the reduction of free carriers in the active layer of the $a$-IGZO TFT. When hot carrier stress is performed, the generated electrons near the drain terminal become influenced by a large positive electric field, causing the electrons to transport from the pinch-off region to the drain terminal, as depicted in Figure 6a. These electrons move in possibly random directions due to the drain-side energy-band lowering and are further captured by the surrounding oxygen molecules, resulting in a greater electric-field-induced oxygen adsorption on the $a$-IGZO film near the drain terminal. Hence, the origin of the positive shift of the $C_{GD-V_G}$ curve is the oxygen adsorption which captures the electrons and reduces the electron concentration. Nevertheless, the shift value of the threshold voltage obtained from the $I_{DS-V_G}$ result does not correspond to the result acquired from the $C_{GD-V_G}$ curve. Furthermore, the $C_{GS-V_G}$ exhibited the anomalous behavior of a two-step turn-on after hot carrier stress, as shown in Figure 5b. The flatband voltage of the first-step of the $C_{GS-V_G}$ curve is consistent with the threshold voltage of the $I_{DS-V_G}$ curve, while the second-step behavior is similar to the $C_{GD-V_G}$ curve. Therefore, the main reasons for the two-step turn-on behavior might be the contributions of electron trapping and oxygen adsorption near the source and drain terminals, respectively.

The solid line in Fig. 6b shows the energy-band diagram of the $a$-IGZO TFT along the channel length without oxygen adsorption on the $a$-IGZO surface under the flatband condition. As discussed above, the hot carrier stress causes the electron trapping in the whole oxide layer, further raising the source barrier. In addition, the oxygen adsorption on the $a$-IGZO surface, especially near the drain terminal, leads to a reduction of the electron concentration, also causing the Fermi-level to be lowered, indicating that the drain barrier is further raised. The dashed blue line in Figure 6b represents the modulated energy-band diagram after the lowering of Fermi-level induced by the electron trapping and the oxygen adsorption, especially adjacent to the

**Figure 5.** (a) $C_{GD-V_G}$ and (b) $C_{GS-V_G}$ transfer characteristics under initial and after hot carrier stress in oxygen environment.

**Figure 6.** (a) Schematic diagram of electron transport behavior and electron adsorbing reaction under hot carrier stress in oxygen environment for an $a$-IGZO TFT. (b) The energy-band diagram under initial (solid line) and after hot carrier stress (dashed blue line) in oxygen environment.
Conclusions

This work investigates the environment-dependent degradation of \( \alpha \)-IGZO TFTs under hot carrier stress using the \( I-V \) and \( C-V \) measurements, which can verify the degradation location in the \( \alpha \)-IGZO channel. When hot carrier stress was conducted in vacuum ambient, the current and capacitance transfer curves exhibited positive shifts due to electron trapping along the whole gate dielectric. An increase in capacitance value at lower gate voltage obtained from the \( C_{GD} \) measurement is due to the interface state creation. We also observed that after hot carrier stress, the threshold voltage shifts caused by electron trapping in the gate dielectric layer in an oxygen-rich environment were more serious than in a vacuum environment, regardless of the \( I-V \) and \( C-V \) results. In addition, an anomalous two-step turn-on behavior appeared in the \( C_{GS}-V_G \) curve, due to a large amount of oxygen adsorption at the drain terminal. A schematic energy-band diagram model was proposed to explain the anomalous \( C-V \) behavior, and proposed that the raising of the source/drain barrier originates from the electron trapping in the whole gate dielectric, with the oxygen adsorption further raising the energy-band, especially at the drain terminal. Accordingly, the carriers generated from the source terminal face two barriers, \( \Phi_{S,ETIB} \) and \( \Phi_{S,OAIB} \), resulting in a two-step turn-on behavior in the \( C_{GS}-V_G \) curve. Nevertheless, the electrons provided by drain terminal face only a larger barrier \( \Phi_{D,OAIB} \) such that the \( C_{GD}-V_G \) curve exhibits a one-step turn-on behavior and larger turn-on voltage. These findings provide important information for further studies in ambient environments and of electrical stability of \( \alpha \)-IGZO TFTs, where the electron trapping in the gate dielectric and drain electric-field-induced oxygen adsorption are the primary issues in the hot carrier stress operation.

Acknowledgments

This work was performed at National Science Council Core Facilities Laboratory for Nano-Science and Nano-Technology in Kaohsiung-Pingtung area and was supported by the National Science Council of the Republic of China under Contract Nos. NSC-100-2120-M-110-003 and NSC 97-2112-M-110-009-MY3.

References


Figure 7. Schematic diagram of estimated oxygen adsorbing length induced by large drain voltage after the hot carrier stress in oxygen environment.