Crystallized Ohmic Contact Effect in AlGaN/GaN High Electron Mobility Transistor

This content has been downloaded from IOPscience. Please scroll down to see the full text.
2013 Jpn. J. Appl. Phys. 52 081001
(http://iopscience.iop.org/1347-4065/52/8R/081001)

View the table of contents for this issue, or go to the journal homepage for more

Download details:

IP Address: 140.113.38.11
This content was downloaded on 25/04/2014 at 09:16

Please note that terms and conditions apply.
1. Introduction

The AlGaN/GaN high-electron mobility transistor (HEMT) has been widely investigated for microwave power devices and circuits owing to its wider band gap, larger breakdown voltage, and higher saturation velocity than GaAs.1–7) To obtain good high-frequency characteristics, the gate length scaling, channel carrier density, and interface traps should be taken into consideration.8–12) Furthermore, the crystallization effect of the ohmic contact is important to lower the contact resistance and improve the device reliability for RF applications. The ohmic contact of Ti/Al/Ni/Au is one of the commonly used schemes for AlGaN/GaN HEMT devices. However, the use of a Ni barrier with poor thermal stability also brings issues regarding device uniformity and reliability. The Mo barrier has a high melting point; therefore, a stacked Ti/Al/Mo/Au was proposed. According to previous studies,13,14) Ti/Al/Mo/Au metallization with small surface roughness and low contact resistance has been realized,15–18) but the adhesive properties and corresponding device characteristics have been less discussed. In this study, we investigate the crystallization effect in an AlGaN/GaN HEMT device with stacked metals of Ti/Al/Ni/Au and Ti/Al/Mo/Au to provide a comprehensive study from the local crystallization effect to the output transistor characteristics. An apparent correlation was found between crystallization size and device performance on the basis of different ohmic contact schemes. This study can offer in-depth understanding of the ohmic contact process including the effects of contact schemes. This study can offer in-depth understanding of the ohmic contact process including the effects of contact schemes. This study can offer in-depth understanding of the ohmic contact process including the effects of contact schemes. This study can offer in-depth understanding of the ohmic contact process including the effects of contact schemes.

2. Experimental Procedure

First, AlGaN/GaN heterostructures were grown on sapphire substrates by metal organic chemical vapor deposition (MOCVD). The epitaxial structure consists of a 2-μm-thick unintentionally doped GaN buffer layer and a 20-nm-thick Al0.25Ga0.75N barrier layer. The electron sheet charge density and hall mobility of the HEMT structure were greater than 1 \times 10^{13} \text{cm}^{-2} and 1900 \text{cm}^2 \text{V}^{-1} \text{s}^{-1}, respectively. After mesa etching for isolation, ohmic contact metals were formed using the evaporated Ti/Al/Ni/Au and Ti/Al/Mo/Au stacks and followed by an 850 °C annealing for 30 s in N2 ambient. After ohmic contact formation, the 1-μm mushroom-shaped gate of Ni metal was defined. Low-cost Ni featuring a high work function of 5.1 eV and good thermal stability has been used in dynamic random access memory (DRAM) devices.19–22) Finally, the passivation layer was covered to reduce the amount of surface defects on the AlGaN barrier layer. The adhesion properties of ohmic contact metals were analyzed using a nanoscratch measurement system.23–25)

3. Results and Discussion

Figures 1(a) and 1(b) show the drain current-to-drain voltage (\(I_d-V_d\)) and drain current-to-gate voltage (\(I_d-V_g\)) characteristics, respectively, of AlGaN/GaN HEMT devices fabricated using different contact metals of Ti/Al/Ni/Au and Ti/Al/Mo/Au. Similar drive currents of 80 mA/mm are obtained in both devices with different contact metals. However, the AlGaN/GaN device with the Ti/Al/Mo/Au contact exhibits a lower off-state current than that with the Ti/Al/Ni/Au contact. The large off-state current of >0.1 mA/mm and small on–off ratio of <10 suggest that those of the Ti/Al/Mo/Au contact. Since the source and drain activation is critical to decreasing the contact resistance, the transistor characteristics are influenced by surface morphology and metal alloyed diffusion after high temperature annealing. Figure 2(a) shows the X-ray diffraction (XRD) analysis of annealed Ti/Al/Ni/Au and Ti/Al/Mo/Au contacts. The TiAl peak gives evidence of a reactor with AlGaN and the large peak of the AlNi alloy indicates the consumption of a large number of Ni atoms. The consumption of the Ni barrier would result in the poor blocking effect owing to interdiffusion of uncontaminated metal alloys in Ti/Al/Ni/Au. Furthermore, the Ni−Al alloy aggregation in some local areas may form bulges resulting in a higher surface roughness.26) On the other hand, the peaks of GaMo alloys detected in Ti/Al/Mo/Au are attributed to the low solubility of Mo-rich particles in Al and Au.15) The formation of alloyed screw dislocations via GaMo results in conductive paths to the 2DEG that can effectively lower the contact resistance. In Fig. 2(b), the atomic force microscope (AFM) toposcan with a 5 \times 5 μm2 scan of the contact metal surface shows...
different surface roughness for both annealed contact metals. We can observe that the root-mean-square (rms) of 54.6 nm on the Ti/Al/Ni/Au surface is much larger than that on the Ti/Al/Mo/Au surface. The rough surface can result in unwanted gate leakage due to the formation of surface traps near the Schottky gate. As shown in Fig. 2(c) measured from the transmission line pattern (TLM), the extracted specific contact resistances for Ti/Al/Ni/Au and Ti/Al/Mo/Au contacts are $8 \times 10^{-5}$ and $1.5 \times 10^{-6} \Omega \text{cm}^2$, respectively. The above results reveal that the contact resistances are also affected by surface morphology and metal crystallization. Thus, the Ti/Al/Mo/Au metal contact shows the advantages of the low contact resistance, small grain size, and smooth surface morphology that are also beneficial for improving the gate leakage and on–off current ratio.

To study this issue, we conduct a scratch test on annealed contact metals, as shown in Figs. 3(a) and 3(b). We observe that the contact loadings are different for these metal contacts, which can affect the contact resistance and surface morphology. The critical load and stress have been extracted, as shown in the following tables for comparison.

**Fig. 1.** (Color online) (a) $I_d$–$V_d$ and (b) $I_d$–$V_g$ characteristics of AlGaN/HEMT devices with Ti/Al/Ni/Au and Ti/Al/Mo/Au ohmic contacts.

**Fig. 2.** (Color online) (a) XRD spectra, (b) AFM images, and (c) specific contact resistances of AlGaN/HEMT devices with Ti/Al/Ni/Au and Ti/Al/Mo/Au ohmic contacts.

**Fig. 3.** (Color online) Load–indentation depth curves of Ti/Al/Ni/Au and Ti/Al/Mo/Au ohmic contacts. The critical load and stress have been extracted, as shown in the following tables for comparison.
Mo/Au ohmic contacts.

The large friction coefficient obtained for the Ti/Al/Mo/Au and Ti/Al/Ni/Au contact, the applied loading process is in situ monitored using an AFM tool with an Al–Ni alloy grains. Subsequently, the accumulated scratch test, especially for multi layer metals, we extract the sub-threshold swing (SS) characteristic of HEMT devices, as shown in Fig. 4(a). The SS is linked to trap densities near the interface or channel.28–30 We can find that the SS (355 mV/decade) of Ti/Al/Ni/Au is much higher than that (206 mV/decade) of Ti/Al/Mo/Au. The increase in the SS property or threshold voltage could be attributed to the large off-state current, implying an increase in power consumption. In Fig. 4(b), the degraded SS is also supported by the low transconductance ($G_m$), suggesting that the transistor switching behavior is related to the charge density near the channel. Therefore, the 12% degraded $G_m$ is believed to be attributable to carrier trapping via grain boundaries or strain relaxation of the 2DEG channel [Fig. 4(c)]. The large grains with high grain boundary defects allow the occurrence of electron trapping and in turn affect the carrier transport in the 2DEG channel under an on-state current. In other words, the grains of the metal contact with a multi alloy not only result in bonding issues such as poor adhesion and a large bonding wire inductance, but also affect the SS and $G_m$ of transistor switching characteristics.

4. Conclusions

In this study, we investigate the grain size effect of HEMT devices with ohmic contact metals of stacked Ti/Al/Ni/Au and Ti/Al/Mo/Au. After high-temperature activation, the multi alloy contact with a large grain size in Ti/Al/Ni/Au not only leads to bonding issues such as poor adhesion and a large bonding wire inductance, but also seriously affects the gate swing and transconductance of transistor switching characteristics.