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Investigating electron depletion effect in amorphous indium–gallium–zinc-oxide thin-film transistor with a floating capping metal by technology computer-aided design simulation and leakage reduction

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The electron distribution in an amorphous indium–gallium–zinc-oxide (a-IGZO) thin-film transistor (TFT) with a floating metal–semiconductor (MS) back interface is analyzed using a technology computer-aided design (TCAD) model. The channel geometry (i.e., length and thickness) effect is carefully investigated. At a high work function (i.e., 5 eV) of the capping metal, electrons inside a-IGZO are mostly removed by the capping metal (electron depletion effect). The depletion of the IGZO film leads to an increase in threshold voltage in a-IGZO TFT. TCAD simulation reveals that increasing channel length and decreasing IGZO thickness significantly enhance such an electron depletion effect. Finally, the electron depletion effect is applied to a-IGZO TFT with a high-conductivity IGZO film to greatly suppress the leakage current by over 5 orders.

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1. Introduction

Recently, amorphous indium–gallium–zinc-oxide (a-IGZO) thin-film transistors (TFTs) have attracted considerable interest for applications in the active-matrix (AM) backplane of liquid-crystal displays (LCDs) and organic light-emitting diode (OLED) displays.\(^2\)–\(^4\) because of their excellent characteristics, such as high mobility and uniform amorphous structure.\(^5\)–\(^9\) Electron transport in a-IGZO is known to follow percolation transport.\(^10\)–\(^13\) Potential barriers generated owing to the random distribution of \(\text{Ga}^{3+}\) and \(\text{Zn}^{2+}\) ions in the network structure strongly limit the carrier transport. Increasing carrier concentration can reduce the potential barrier and hence improve carrier mobility.\(^8,14\)–\(^17\) A high electron concentration in the channel region, however, leads to either leakage between the source and drain electrodes or a negatively shift threshold voltage.\(^18\) To achieve a better control of leakage current, the electron concentration should be kept low in the channel region.\(^19\)–\(^21\) Even with an identical IGZO film property, capping different materials onto the back interface of a-IGZO may also affect the carrier concentration in the channel region.\(^22,23\) In our previous work, we investigated the threshold voltage shift in a-IGZO TFT by capping a floating metal onto the back interface of a-IGZO.\(^24\) Electron depletion or electron injection was proposed to explain the threshold voltage shift when the capping metal has a high work function (e.g., 5 eV) or a low work function (2.9 eV), respectively.\(^25\) Here, by Silvaco technology computer-aided design (TCAD) simulation, we further investigate the geometry effect of the electron depletion phenomenon.\(^26\)–\(^30\) Two-dimensional electron distribution reveals that capping floating metal with a high work function (e.g., 5 eV) reduces channel electron concentration from \(8 \times 10^{16}\) to \(1 \times 10^{15}\) \(\text{cm}^{-2}\). Reducing film thickness and increasing channel length enhances the electron depletion effect. Finally, we applied the electron depletion effect in our leakage control experiment. For a-IGZO TFT with a UV-treated conductive channel, capping a floating gold onto the central region of the back interface reduces the off-state current from \(3 \times 10^{-4}\) to \(5 \times 10^{-6}\) A.

2. Simulation setting

The insets of Figs. 1(a) and 1(b) show the schematic diagrams of a standard bottom gate a-IGZO TFT (STD device) and a floating-metal-capped (FMC) IGZO TFT. In this study, the source and drain electrodes are 10-nm-thick titanium (Ti). The gate insulator is a 100-nm-thick silicon nitride. The channel length is in the range from 200 to 2 \(\mu m\). The IGZO thickness is changed from 50 to 10 nm. For FMC IGZO TFT, a floating metal with a work function ranging from 5.5 to 4 eV is capped onto the central region of the back interface between the source and the drain electrodes. The length of the floating metal is fixed at one-half of the channel length. To examine electron distribution under thermal equilibrium, the drain-to-source voltage \((V_{DS})\) and gate-to-source voltage \((V_{GS})\) are both 0 V. The permittivity, electron affinity, and energy gap at 300 K of IGZO are 4 F/m, 3.8 eV, and 3 eV, respectively. The defects in the IGZO film including the tail state as well as deep level are considered in the device simulations.\(^30,31\) The parameters that determine the density of state (DOS) distribution of IGZO are given in Ref. 32. The electron and hole mobility are 10 and \(10^{-5}\) \(\text{cm}^2\text{V}^{-1}\text{s}^{-1}\), respectively. Different gate biases are applied only in Figs. 3(a) and 4(c) when we discuss the restoring of electron concentration.

3. Experimental methods

Heavily doped p-type Si(100) was used as a substrate and a gate electrode. A 100-nm-thick silicon nitride layer was deposited by low pressure chemical vapor deposition at 780 °C to serve as the gate dielectric. Then, a 35-nm-thick a-IGZO layer (3 in. circular target, In : Ga : Zn = 1 : 1 : 1 at%) was deposited through a shadow mask at room temperature using a radio-frequency sputtering system with a power of 100 W, a working pressure of 5 mTorr, and an Ar flow rate of 20 sccm. The width of the IGZO layer is used to define the channel width \((W)\) as 1000 \(\mu m\). Then, 100-nm-thick Ti pads were evaporated through a shadow mask to form the source and drain electrodes and to define the channel length \((L)\) as 400 \(\mu m\). UV treatment was carried out in nitrogen environ-
ment at a wavelength of 172 nm and a power density of 50 mW/cm² using a Xe excimer lamp. Finally, the gold pad (width 1000 µm; length 200 µm) was evaporated through a shadow mask to cap the central region of the back interface. All electrical characteristics were measured by using an Agilent 4156 current–voltage analyzer. The threshold voltage and mobility were extracted from the slope and the x-axis intercept of the $I_D - V_G$ curves in the saturation region ($V_D = 20 V$).

4. Simulation results

Firstly, we compare the two-dimensional electron distribution in a standard (STD) a-IGZO TFT and a FMC IGZO TFT, as shown in Figs. 1(a) and 1(b), respectively. In Figs. 1(a) and 1(b), the channel length is 200 µm and the IGZO thickness is 50 nm. The work function of the floating metal in (b) is 5 eV.

![Fig. 1](a)

![Fig. 1](b)

Fig. 1. (Color online) Two-dimensional electron concentration for (a) a standard (STD) a-IGZO TFT and (b) a FMC IGZO TFT. The work function of the floating metal in (b) is 5 eV.

The electron concentration along the Top Line when the floating metal exhibits different work functions is shown in Fig. 2(a). The ratio of channel length to capping metal length is kept at 2 : 1. The work function of the capping metal varies from 4 to 5.5 eV. As the work function of the capping metal increases, the electron concentration in the channel decreases. The IGZO body is almost depleted when the work function of the capping metal is 5.5 eV. This verifies that electrons in IGZO are removed by the capping metal when the work function of the capping metal is higher than that of IGZO.

When the work function of the capping metal is 4, the electron concentration is higher than that of the STD device, revealing the injection of electrons from the capping metal to the IGZO film.

The electron concentrations along the Bottom Line when the floating capping metal exhibits different work functions are shown in Fig. 2(b). When the work function of the capping metal is 4, 4.5, 5, or 5.5 eV, the electron concentration at the Bottom Line is significantly reduced, indicating that the electron depletion effect also affects the electron concent-
A more positive threshold voltage is required to induce sufficient electrons in front channel to turn on the transistor. For such electron-depleted devices, the influences of gate bias on electron concentration at the Bottom Line are investigated. As shown in Fig. 3(a), for the Au-capped device (i.e., for a work function of 5 eV), the electron concentration at central position increases from $1 \times 10^{11}$ to $9 \times 10^{15}$ cm$^{-3}$ when the gate bias is increased from 0 to 6 V. For the STD device, the front-channel electron concentration is $8.5 \times 10^{16}$ cm$^{-3}$. The results shown in Fig. 3(a) suggest that, by applying a suitable gate bias, the electron concentration at the Bottom Line of FMC IGZO TFT can be almost identical to that of STD IGZO TFT. The applied gate bias, which restores the electron concentration of FMC IGZO TFT, is about 6 V. Experimentally, as shown in Ref. 19 and reproduced in Fig. 3(b), a 6 V threshold voltage shift is also observed when the capping the floating gold metal onto the back interface of a-IGZO TFT. It is noted that the device geometry in experimental results [Fig. 3(b)] and that in simulated results [Fig. 3(a)] are the same. Here, we define that the gate bias applied to restore the Bottom-Line electron concentration is named $V_{G,\text{restore}}$.

We then further compare the Bottom-Line electron concentrations of Au-capped IGZO TFT with different channel lengths and different IGZO thicknesses in Figs. 4(a) and 4(b), respectively. When the channel length is reduced from 200 to 10, and 2 µm as shown in Fig. 4(a), the electron depletion effect is suppressed. With a fixed channel length as 10 µm, in Fig. 4(b), electron depletion effect becomes more significant when IGZO thickness decreases from 50 to 20 nm, as shown in Fig. 4(b). The geometry effect can be observed more clearly when comparing $V_{G,\text{restore}}$ of devices with different channel geometries and with different capping metals. In Fig. 4(c), $V_{G,\text{restore}}$ is plotted as the work function of the floating capping metal with different channel lengths and IGZO thicknesses.
Continuous measurements 7 times are shown. Annealed a-IGZO TFT and (b) UV-annealed a-IGZO TFT after Au capping. Good transistor performance can be obtained by utilizing the electron depletion due to gold metal onto the central region of the back interface, the floating metal with a high work function, electrons inside the IGZO film are obviously depleted. The electron depletion effect can also affect the electron concentration in the front channel region and hence lead to a shift of threshold voltage. Increasing channel length and reducing IGZO film thickness effectively enhance the electron depletion effect. Finally, experimentally, the electron depletion effect is used to reduce leakage current. For UV-treated a-IGZO TFT with an initially conductive channel, capping a floating gold metal onto the IGZO back interface effectively lowers the off-state current from $3 \times 10^{-4}$ to $5 \times 10^{-9}$ A.

### 5. Conclusions

In this study, the two-dimensional electron distribution of n-channel a-IGZO TFT with a floating metal–semiconductor (MS) back contact is demonstrated using a Silvaco TCAD simulator. The simulated results verify that capping metals with various work functions on the IGZO back interface significantly affects electron distribution. In particular, when capping a floating metal with a high work function, electrons inside the IGZO film are obviously depleted. The electron depletion effect can also affect the electron concentration in the front channel region and hence lead to a shift of threshold voltage. Increasing channel length and reducing IGZO film thickness effectively enhance the electron depletion effect. Finally, experimentally, the electron depletion effect is used to reduce leakage current. For UV-treated a-IGZO TFT with an initially conductive channel, capping a floating gold metal onto the IGZO back interface effectively lowers the off-state current from $3 \times 10^{-4}$ to $5 \times 10^{-9}$ A.

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32) The conduction band density and valence band density at 300 K are $5 \times 10^{18}$ and $5 \times 10^{18} \text{cm}^{-3}$, respectively. The density of tail states at the conduction band is $1.55 \times 10^{20} \text{cm}^{-3} \text{eV}^{-1}$, the density of tail states at the valence band is $1.55 \times 10^{20} \text{cm}^{-3} \text{eV}^{-1}$, the conduction-band-tail slope is $0.013 \text{eV}$, and the valence-band-tail slope is $0.12 \text{eV}$. 