High breakdown voltage InGaAs/InP double heterojunction bipolar transistors with $f_{\text{max}} = 256$ GHz and $BV_{CEO} = 8.3$ V

Cheng Wei(程伟), Zhao Yan(赵岩), Gao Hanchao(高汉超), Chen Chen(陈辰), and Yang Naibin(杨乃彬)

Science and Technology on Monolithic Integrated Circuits and Modules Laboratory, Nanjing Electronic Devices Institute, Nanjing 210016, China

Abstract: An InGaAs/InP DHBT with an InGaAsP composite collector is designed and fabricated using triple mesa structural and planarization technology. All processes are on 3-inch wafers. The DHBT with an emitter area of $1 \times 15 \mu m^2$ exhibits a current cutoff frequency $f_t = 170$ GHz and a maximum oscillation frequency $f_{\text{max}} = 256$ GHz. The breakdown voltage is 8.3 V, which is to our knowledge the highest $BV_{CEO}$ ever reported for InGaAs/InP DHBTs in China with comparable high frequency performances. The high speed InGaAs/InP DHBTs with high breakdown voltage are promising for voltage-controlled oscillator and mixer applications at W band or even higher frequencies.

Key words: InP; double heterojunction bipolar transistor; planarization

DOI: 10.1088/1674-4926/33/1/014004  EEACC: 2560J

1. Introduction

Although InP SHBTs have demonstrated good microwave characteristics, the low breakdown voltage and high thermal resistance of the InGaAs collector have limited their applications in millimeter or sub-millimeter wave monolithic ICs and wide dynamic mixed signal circuits. The collector of the InGaAs/InP DHBT is InP, which has a wide gap and high thermal conductivity, these characteristics lead to the much higher breakdown voltage and lower thermal resistance of InP DHBT as compared with InP SHBT. However, there is a conduction band spike between the base and collector for the type I InGaAs/InP DHBT, the spike must be removed otherwise the device performance will be severely degraded\cite{1}. Various composite collector structures have been proposed to overcome this problem\cite{2-4}.

In this work, a composite collector with an InGaAs spacer and an InGaAsP quaternary layer was used to eliminate the conduction band spike between the base and the collector. The InGaAs/InP DHBTs were fabricated with a triple mesa process and a benzocyclobutene (BCB) planarization technique. The DHBTs in this process have an emitter area of $1 \times 15 \mu m^2$ and show cutoff frequencies $f_t$ of 170 GHz and $f_{\text{max}}$ of 256 GHz, while maintaining a high breakdown voltage of more than 8 V.

2. Growth and fabrication

The layer structure of the InGaAs/InP DHBTs was grown by molecular-beam epitaxy on a 3-inch semi-insulating InP substrate. The layer sequence is shown in Fig. 1. The DHBT structure includes an InGaAs cap layer (200 nm, $3 \times 10^{19}$ cm$^{-3}$), an InP emitter (200 nm, $2 \times 10^{17}$ cm$^{-3}$), a carbon-doped InGaAs base (50 nm, $3 \times 10^{19}$ cm$^{-3}$) and a compositionally step-graded InGaAs/InGaAsP/InP collector (200 nm, $1 \times 10^{16}$ cm$^{-3}$). A composite collector with an InGaAs spacer and an InGaAsP quaternary layer was used to eliminate the conduction band spike at the B-C interface and thus the collector current blocking effect was minimized\cite{5}.

In contrast to most recent reports in China\cite{5,6}, the InP DHBTs in this work were fabricated using standard manufacturing techniques such as i-line stepper lithography and selective dry/wet etching, etc. All InP DHBT processes were on 3-inch wafers. The InP DHBTs were fabricated with conventional wet etching and metal deposition with a triple mesa design. Non-alloyed ohmic Ti/Pt/Au was used as the n-type ohmic contacts and Pt/Ti/Pt/Au was used as a p-type contact. After device isolation, BCB was used for device passivation and planarization. Subsequently, an RIE etch-back step was performed to expose the tops of the device contacts and then the first-level metal was deposited to form the probe pads.

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† Corresponding author. Email: dspbuilder@yahoo.com.cn
Received 16 June 2011, revised manuscript received 23 July 2011

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3. Measurements and results

The InP DHBTs were measured on-wafer at room temperature. The DC characteristics of the InP DHBTs were measured by an Agilent 1500A semiconductor parameter analyzer. The common-emitter $I–V$ characteristics of the DHBT with an emitter area of $1 \times 15 \mu m^2$ are shown in Fig. 2. The offset voltage is 0.15 V and the knee voltage is about 0.5 V. The small knee voltage and sharp rising current indicate that the current blocking effect is successfully suppressed with the composite collector\cite{7}. The typical current gain is more than 60. The common-emitter breakdown voltage is 8.3 V, which is defined at a current density of $J_c = 10 \mu A/\mu m^2$. To our knowledge, the common-emitter breakdown voltage is the highest in InGaAs/InP DHBT in China with comparable high frequency performance\cite{5,8}.

100 MHz to 40 GHz measurements were carried out using an HP8510C VNA, which was calibrated using standard short-open-load-through (SOLT) standards. On-wafer open and short pad structures identical to those used by the devices were used to de-embed the pad parasitics. Figure 3 shows the current gain ($H_{21}$), maximum stable gain/maximum available gain (MSG/MAG) and Mason’s unilateral gain ($U$) as a function of the frequency at the collector–emitter junction voltage $V_{CE} = 2.0$ V and the collector current $I_C = 22$ mA. Extrapolating at –20 dB/decade, $f_t$ and $f_{max}$ are 170 GHz and 256 GHz, respectively. Figure 4 shows the variation of the $f_t$ and $f_{max}$ as a function of the collector current density at a collector–emitter voltage of 2.0 V. The decrease of $f_t$ at a high collector density is due to the Kirk effect, and thus the corresponding Kirk current density of 1.5 mA/$\mu m^2$ can be derived.

4. Conclusion

In summary, InGaAs/InP DHBTs have been designed and fabricated using standard manufacturing techniques on 3-inch wafers. Devices with an emitter area of $1 \times 15 \mu m^2$ show cutoff frequencies $f_t$ of 170 GHz and $f_{max}$ of 256 GHz, while maintaining a high break down voltage (BV$_{CEO}$) of more than 8 V, which is to our knowledge the highest BV$_{CEO}$ ever reported for InGaAs/InP DHBTs in China with comparable high frequency performance. The high speed InGaAs/InP DHBTs with a high breakdown voltage are suitable for voltage-controlled oscillators and mixers at W-band or even higher frequencies.

References


