Monte Carlo study of kink effect in isolated-gate InAs/AlSb high electron mobility transistors

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A semiclassical two-dimensional ensemble Monte Carlo simulator is used to perform a physical analysis of the kink effect in InAs/AlSb high electron mobility transistors (HEMTs). Kink effect, this is, an anomalous increase in the drain current $I_D$ when increasing the drain-to-source voltage $V_{DS}$, leads to a reduction in the gain and a rise in the level of noise, thus limiting the utility of these devices for microwave applications. Due to the small band gap of InAs, InAs/AlSb HEMTs are very susceptible to suffer from impact ionization processes, with the subsequent hole transport through the structure, both implicated in the kink effect. The results indicate that, when $V_{DS}$ is high enough for the onset of impact ionization, holes thus generated tend to pile up in the buffer (at the gate-drain side) due to the valence-band energy barrier between the buffer and the channel. Due to this accumulation of positive charge the channel is further opened and $I_D$ increases, leading to the kink effect in the $I$-$V$ characteristics and eventually to the device electrical breakdown. The understanding of this phenomenon provides useful information for the development of kink-effect-free InAs/AlSb HEMTs. © 2010 American Institute of Physics. [doi:10.1063/1.3503430]

I. INTRODUCTION

Sb-based heterostructures, based on narrow band-gap semiconductors, in particular AlSb/InAs, are being considered to further improve the performance of high electron mobility transistors (HEMTs) for low-power, high-frequency, and low-noise applications.1–5 However, these devices present some problems, in particular as the kink effect in the output current-voltage characteristics, caused by impact ionization and the subsequent hole dynamics in the heterostructure. In order to decrease the associated excessive gate leakage current, the conventional Schottky contact has been replaced by an insulated gate (by means of a native oxide, which naturally appears after the recess etch step). However, impact ionization is still significant, and a study of the involved physical effects is essential to further optimize the structure design and thus further reduce the negative consequences of kink effect.

The aim of this work is to perform a physical analysis of the kink effect in recessed isolated-gate AlSb/InAs HEMTs. Charge carrier dynamics in these devices have been monitored by means of a semiclassical two-dimensional (2D) ensemble Monte Carlo (MC) simulator,7,8 adequately adapted to correctly model AlSb/InAs heterostructures,9 in which both impact ionization and hole transport are included.10,11 The validity of this model has been checked by comparing the extrinsic output characteristics with experimental results. MC method has been proved to be a very useful tool when dealing with problems where the understanding of the microscopic behavior of carriers is essential, as occurs when analyzing kink effect phenomena.10,11 Moreover, the MC technique becomes the most adequate simulation tool since electron transport can easily turn into ballistic or at least quasiballistic in the channel of the analyzed transistors, because of the very high mobility of InAs.9 The MC approach allows us to determine the origin and magnitude of the kink effect in terms of internal quantities, such as electron and hole concentrations and electric field profile. Hence a complete physical understanding of the kink phenomenon in these devices is achieved, providing helpful information for the development of kink-free Sb-HEMTs.

The paper is organized as follows. In Sec. II, the physical model is detailed. The main results of our simulations and their discussion are provided in Sec. III. Finally, in Sec. IV, we draw the most important conclusions of this work.

II. PHYSICAL MODEL

For the device calculations, we make use of an ensemble MC simulator self-consistently coupled with a 2D Poisson solver which incorporates all the processes at the origin of the kink effect (impact ionization and hole dynamics). The simulated structure is very similar to the experimental one described in Ref. 5, what will be used to calibrate our model by reproducing the static characteristics. The source region, which is essentially ohmic, has been shortened in the simulated device in order to save computer time, its effect introduced as a resistance in a postprocessing stage. The structure under analysis is a 225 nm T-gate recessed HEMT [Fig. 1(a)], fabricated on a heterostructure consisting of a InP substrate (not simulated), a 800 nm AlSb buffer followed by a 15 nm thick InAs channel, two layers of AlSb (a 5 nm spacer and a 10 nm Schottky layer, separated by a 5 × 10^{12} cm^{-2} $\delta$-doped layer), and, finally, a 4 nm thick AlInAs and 5 nm...
thick InAs cap layer \((N_D=5 \times 10^{18} \text{ cm}^{-3})\). The MC parameters for the electron transport simulation in the involved materials can be found in Ref. 9. Figure 1(b) presents the conduction and valence bands provided by the MC simulations for the AlSb/InAs heterostructure.

Impact ionization of electrons, which occurs in the \(\Gamma\) valley of InAs and leads to the appearance of holes, is included in the MC simulations by using the Keldysh approach,\(^{12}\) where the probability per unit time of having an impact ionization event is given by \(P(E)=S[(E-E_{ih})/E_{ih}]^{2}\) if \(E>E_{ih}\), and \(P(E)=0\) if \(E<E_{ih}\), \(E\) being the electron kinetic energy in the \(\Gamma\) valley, \(E_{ih}\) the ionization threshold energy and \(S\) a measure of the softness or hardness of the threshold, \(E_{ih}\) and \(S\) are considered as adjustable parameters to reproduce the ionization coefficient (number of impact ionization events that occur per unit length) measured in bulk materials. From each impact ionization occurrence, an electron in the \(\Gamma\) valley and a hole in the heavy-hole (HH) band emerge, while the electron originating the ionization process remains in the \(\Gamma\) valley. We have verified, by analyzing the hole dynamics in InAs with the MC approach, that hole impact ionization is negligible for the considered applied voltages. Figure 2 presents, for InAs (channel material), the simulated values of (a) the electron velocity with and without considering impact ionization in the simulations as a function of the electric field, and (b) the impact ionization coefficient for \(E_{ih}=0.41\) eV and \(S=10^{12}\) s\(^{-1}\) as a function of the inverse of the electric field in comparison with the results obtained in Refs. 12 and 13. For these values of \(E_{ih}\) and \(S\), a remarkable agreement with other numerical estimations of the impact ionization coefficient is achieved. According to Fig. 2(a), when impact ionization is considered, the electron peak velocity is higher than in the case of neglecting impact ionization processes. This occurs because the onset of impact ionization takes place for electron energies lower than those necessary for intervalley transfer (otherwise very frequent in bulk InAs), so that the electron occupancy in the \(\Gamma\) valley is higher than in the absence of impact ionization. As a consequence, the maximum electron velocity increases and takes place for a higher electric field.\(^{9}\) The calculated low-electric field mobility is about 28 000 cm\(^2\)/V s, within the experimental range.\(^{14}\)

With respect to the model used for hole dynamics, a typical spherical and nonparabolic valence-band structure is considered, including three sub-bands: HH and light-hole bands (HH and LH), degenerated at \(k=0\) and characterized by a different curvature in \(k\)-space, and a third split-off band (SOH), in which the band warping is accounted for by the use of approximated overlap functions.\(^{15}\) Ionized impurity, acoustic, polar, and nonpolar optical phonon scattering mechanisms are considered for holes.\(^{15,16}\) The hole physical parameters used in the simulations are reported in Table I, providing a low-electric field mobility of 350 cm\(^2\)/V s for InAs and 525 cm\(^2\)/V s for AlSb, both within the respective experimental ranges.\(^{14}\)

Another important process that is necessary to take into account for a proper analysis of kink effect is hole recombination.\(^{10}\) To this end we used a simple model in which hole recombination is considered to take place with a characteristic time \(\tau_{\text{rec}}\) (i.e., with a probability \(1/\tau_{\text{rec}}\)). We performed simulations with \(\tau_{\text{rec}}=0.05\) ns (even if in bulk materials it is usually considered to be of the order of 1 ns), since with this value together with those of \(E_{ih}\) and \(S\) adequately reproduce the experimental static \(I-V\) characteristics are adequately reproduced, as we will show in Sec. III.

![FIG. 1.](image1.png) (Color online) (a) Schematic drawing of the HEMT topology used in the simulations, (b) Conduction and valence bands for the AlSb/InAs heterostructure under analysis.

![FIG. 2.](image2.png) (Color online) MC values in bulk InAs of (a) the electron velocity in both cases with and without considering impact ionization vs electric field and (b) impact ionization coefficient vs inverse of electric field in comparison with the values in Refs. 12 and 13. \(E_{ih}=0.41\) eV, \(S=10^{12}\) s\(^{-1}\).
TABLE I. Physical parameters of holes in InAs and AlSb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>InAs</th>
<th>AlSb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Band gap (eV)</td>
<td>0.354</td>
<td>1.615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optical phonon energy (eV)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optical deformation potential (eV/m)</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acoustic deformation potential (eV)</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>6.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HH</th>
<th>LH</th>
<th>SOH</th>
<th>HH</th>
<th>LH</th>
<th>SOH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective mass (m^2/m_0)</td>
<td>0.570</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.140</td>
<td>0.6035</td>
<td>0.1070</td>
<td>0.2200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonparabolicity (1/eV)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy level from HH (eV)</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.973</td>
<td>0.973</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. RESULTS

Figure 3 shows the simulated (a) extrinsic and (b) intrinsic output I-V characteristics of the InAs/AlSb HEMT with and without impact ionization. The experimental I-V curves taken from Ref. 5 have been included in Fig. 3(a) for comparison. In order to carry out the comparison of the measured results (extrinsic) with those obtained from the simulation (intrinsic), it is necessary to include, in a postprocessing stage, the parasitic elements that are not considered in the intrinsic MC model.17 Thus, drain and source parasitic resistances associated with contact metallization and part of the ohmic regions not included in the simulation domain have been incorporated into the original MC results, with the best fit being obtained for RS = 0.13 Ω mm and RD = 0.38 Ω mm.

An excellent agreement between experimental and simulated results is reached [Fig. 3(a)] when considering impact ionization in the simulations with values for the involved parameters of Eth = 0.41 eV, S = 10^{12} s^{-1}, and τe = 0.05 ns, as mentioned previously. A notable increase in ID takes place starting from a value of VDS high enough so that the electron energy is sufficient for the onset of impact ionization. On the contrary, in the absence of impact ionization the output curves are fitted just up to VDS = 0.2 V. In the inset of Fig. 3(b), the difference in the values of ID obtained with and without considering impact ionization is plotted as a function of VGS for different values of VDS. The increase in ID for a fixed VDS due to the appearance of holes grows with VGS. This behavior is the opposite of that found for lattice-matched InGaAs/InAlAs HEMTs, in which the increase in ID is lower for higher VGS. This occurs because although the electron concentration in the channel is larger when the channel opens, the maximum electron energy is reduced due to the lower gate-to-drain potential.10,11 In the case of InAs/AlSb HEMTs, the band gap of the channel material is much smaller than in InGaAs/InAlAs HEMTs, so that the threshold energy Eth is also smaller. Thus impact ionization probability still remains significant for higher values of VGS. Furthermore, impact ionization events occur not only near the maximum of electron energy (under the gate electrode), but all along the drain side of the channel, where the electron velocity is higher when increasing VGS (to be shown below).

The isolated gate reduces the gate leakage current, but in the experimental device IG still shows the typical bell-shape due to the outflow of holes, signature of impact ionization in standard Schottky–Gate field-effect transistors.5 IG is zero in the ideal simulated structures, since the gate current due to hole tunneling is not considered in our model.

MC simulations provide an insight into the kink effect for InAs/AlSb HEMTs. Initially, the influence of VGS will be analyzed. Figure 4 shows the profiles along the InAs channel of: (a) the number of impact ionization events taking place in the channel, (b) the sheet hole density in the buffer and the cap layer, (c) the sheet electron density, and (d) mean electron velocity in the channel, for VDS = 0.4 V and different values of VGS. As observed in Fig. 4(a), the impact ionization events take place in the drain side of the channel, mainly close to the drain side of the recess, where the electric field, and consequently the electron energy, is higher. In fact, the kink effect is commonly avoided (actually shifted to higher
With ionization events taking place in the InAs cap layer lead a lower electric field in that region. Moreover, the few impact ionization events in the channel per unit time and depth, (b) hole sheet density in the buffer and the cap layer, (c) sheet electron density, and (d) mean electron velocity in the channel for different values of $V_{GS}$ being $V_{DS}=0.4\, \text{V}$, $E_{th}=0.41\, \text{eV}$, $S=10^{12}\, \text{s}^{-1}$, and $\tau_{rec}=0.05\, \text{ns}$. The position of the gate and the recess is also indicated.

Even if a few holes generated by impact ionization in the drain side of the channel move toward the gate electrode and pile up in the gate side of the cap layer [Fig. 4(b)], they disappear by recombination.

To further illustrate this effect, Fig. 6 presents the contour maps of (a) the difference between the electron concentration with and without considering impact ionization, and (b) hole concentration, for a bias of $V_{DS}=0.4\, \text{V}$ and $V_{GS}=-0.6\, \text{V}$. Since the hole pileup takes place in the buffer, the difference in electron concentration under the gate between the two cases is higher at the bottom than at the top part of the channel. However, the most important increase in electron concentration appears at the drain side of the channel, thus further increasing the drain leakage current.

**IV. CONCLUSIONS**

We have presented a microscopic analysis of kink effect in insulated-gate recessed AlSb/InAs HEMTs based on MC simulations. The results allow interpreting the effect in terms of the pileup of holes (generated by impact ionization at the
drain region of the channel) at the drain-gate side of the buffer. This hole pileup takes place in the buffer because of the energy barrier in the valence band at the heterostructure between the AlSb buffer and the InAs channel. The positive charge due to the accumulation of holes contributes to further open the channel below the gate, mainly through its bottom side thus increasing the electron concentration in the active part of the device. Moreover, impact ionization produces an important enhancement of the electron concentration at the drain side of the channel, leading to a further increase in the drain conductance and the kink effect in the $I$-$V$ curves.

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