Room Temperature–Operating Spin-Valve Transistors Formed by Vacuum Bonding

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Functional integration between semiconductors and ferromagnets was demonstrated with the spin-valve transistor. A ferromagnetic multilayer was sandwiched between two device-quality silicon substrates by means of vacuum bonding. The emitter Schottky barrier injected hot electrons into the spin-valve base. The collector Schottky barrier accepts only ballistic electrons, which makes the collector current very sensitive to magnetic fields. Room temperature operation was accomplished by preparing Si-Pt-Co-Cu-Co-Si devices. The vacuum bonding technique allows the realization of many ideas for vertical transport devices and forms a permanent link that is useful in demanding adhesion applications.

Ten years after its discovery (1), giant magnetoresistance (GMR) or, designated more appropriately, the spin-valve effect, has already shown its strength in applications such as read heads and magnetic random access memories (MRAMs). Driven by such low-field applications, a search for higher sensitivities is continuing. In the spin-valve effect, minority carrier electrons with long mean free paths can travel with low resistance through a multilayer when a magnetic field aligns magnetic fields. Room temperature operation was accomplished by preparing Si-Pt-Co-Cu-Co-Si devices. The vacuum bonding technique allows the realization of many ideas for vertical transport devices and forms a permanent link that is useful in demanding adhesion applications.

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were rotated toward each other, and the two freshly sputtered Pt surfaces came into contact. Bonding reduces their surface free energies, but stress created by roughness compensation during matching of the surfaces counteracts this drive. For microroughnesses smaller than about 2 nm, complete bonding proceeded spontaneously, that is, without force at RT. Additional energy may be extracted from the sputter energy. The adatoms typically arrive with an excess energy of about 1 to 20 eV (8). The resulting bonding strength was greater than the fracture strength of the silicon. The yield of the bonding procedure is surprisingly good (100% under standard conditions). High-resolution transmission electron microscopy (TEM) images of these vacuum-bonded metals show either grain boundary–like interfaces (Pt) or complete absence of an interface (Ti) because of recrystallization induced by interface energy minimization (9). A TEM image of the Co-Cu-Co-Pt SVT is shown in Fig. 2A. For RT operation of the SVT, the leakage current was decreased by replacing the Cu collector barrier by Co and by making the collector area smaller. Moreover, a Co-Cu-Co sandwich replaced the (Co-Cu)₄ multilayer base to increase the base transmission. Vacuum-bonded Si-Co-Cu-Co-Pt-Si SVTs with different device areas obtained after photolithography and etching are shown in Fig. 2B. Platinum was used to induce a barrier height difference between emitter and collector in order to minimize quantum mechanical reflections.

The CIP-magnetoresistance (MR) of the Co(4.4 nm)–Cu(8.8 nm)–Co(1 nm)–Pt (8.8 nm) sandwich in the SVT showed 0.1% MR after 300 K and 0.3% at 77 K. The CIP-MR was small because of shunting and channeling in the relatively thick Cu layer, diffusive surface scattering, and incomplete antiferromagnetic (AF) alignment caused by poor growth (silicide formation) on oxide-free silicon (Fig. 2A). Measurements of the emitter and collector Schottky barriers of the SVT showed barrier heights of 0.8 and 0.7 eV and ideality factors of 1.14 and 1.07 at 300 K, respectively. The common base curves corresponding with the electrical setup of Fig. 1A are shown in Fig. 3A, measured at saturation field (1 T). At 300 K, the curve with $I_{E} = 0$ shows the characteristic of the collector barrier and its reverse characteristics for $V_{CB} \geq 0$. The collector leakage current $I_{C}$ is about 0.1 μA, which is saturating as expected and is much smaller than the hot-electron currents, even at 300 K. $I_{C}$ follows the injected emitter current linearly, as expected from the transport equations. On cooling down, $I_{C}$ first decreases because of the rapid decrease of $I_{L}$. Then, after $I_{L}$ is reduced to negligible values, $I_{C}$ rises again because of the increased mean free paths in the base and semiconductors. As a result of the perpendicular trajectory, the exponential mean free path dependence, and possibly also the electron energy, the variation in $I_{C}$ is large (Fig. 3B). In this graph, $I_{C}$ is plotted versus applied magnetic field for an injection current of 25 mA and reverse bias of 0.5 V. At zero field, $I_{C}$ is small because antiparallel magnetizations block both spin-up and spin-down current. At large fields, the magnetizations of the two Co layers align and result in an enlarged (majority spin) current. The effect is 15%, which is a factor of 150 greater than for the CIP case. Nevertheless, taking $T_{SE} = 0.01$ (0.01 is a typical transmission factor in a metal base transistor with a 9-nm Pt film), $W/\lambda_{T}$ is about 5.5. The ratio $\lambda_{T}/\lambda_{l}$ is smaller than 2 (Fig. 4A), which we attribute to incomplete antiparallel ordering at zero field. Lowering the temperature increases the AF alignment, which is evidenced by the decreased $I_{C}(H_{C})$ at 200 and 100 K, whereas the current is greater at saturation. The $I_{L}(H_{C})$ results are not affected by applied emitter current, because the barrier height and electron energy of a Schottky barrier are not affected by applied bias.

By using proper spin-valve sandwiches in
the base, the relative change in collector current \( (I_p - I_{AP})/I_{AP} \) can be greater than 10000%, depending on the scattering asymmetry \( \lambda_c/\lambda_t \) and \( W_{C0}/\lambda_t \) (Fig. 4A). In general, such large changes may not be necessary. The noise in the SVT is caused mainly by three sources: (i) (particle-related) shot noise from the forward-biased emitter barrier; (ii) ordinary thermal, or Johnson, noise in the base resistance; and (iii) shot noise in the collector barrier. These fluctuations produce white noise at the terminals of the SVT. Because the thermal noise of electrons at \( T_D \) does not affect hot-electron transport, and the base thermal noise voltage does not influence the hot-electron \( I_c \) (the emitter is driven by a current source), the thermal noise is not found in \( I_c \). Hence, the collector noise current \( i_n \) is pure shot noise \( i_n = (2q\mu I_f)^{1/2} \) as in ordinary (Schottky) diodes (10). For this reason, the SNR increases with \( I_c \) and the absolute change in collector current \( I_p - I_{AP} \) is a more useful parameter for sensor applications than the relative change \( (I_p - I_{AP})/I_{AP} \). Because the output current decreases with \( W_{C0}/\lambda_t \) but the relative change increases with \( W_{C0}/\lambda_t \) and \( \lambda_c/\lambda_t \), an optimum for the SNR is found by plotting \( I_p - I_{AP} \) versus \( W_{C0}/\lambda_t \) (Fig. 4B). Here,

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(I_p - I_{AP})_n = \frac{I_p - I_{AP}}{\sqrt{2\pi T_n}} = \frac{T_p - T_{AP}}{T_n}
\]

is the normalized collector current difference between parallel and antiparallel magnetizations resulting from the two-channel model. We compare the SVT with a GMR film-measured CIP on an SNR basis by assuming a device area \( 1 \mu m \times 1 \mu m \), a bandwidth \( df \) of 100 MHz, \( \lambda_c/\lambda_t = 10 \), \( W_{C0}/\lambda_t = 4 \Rightarrow (I_p - I_{AP})_n = 0.4 \), \( I_p = 1 mA \), and \( T_n = 0.05 \) (loss is lower when a thinner Pt film is used, for example). For the SVT, the shot noise results in an SNR = 20 log \( (I_n)/I \) = 58 dB. Addition of a typical low-noise broadband (100 MHz) current (transimpedance) amplifier to this signal adds 1 pA/Hz \( ^{1/2} \) noise, resulting in a noise level of \( i_n = (i_n^2 + i_p^2)^{1/2} \) or SNR = 57 dB. Clearly, a large collector current is desired, which can be obtained by optimizing \( I_p - I_{AP} \) through \( W_{C0}/\lambda_t \) (type of metal and number of interfaces) and optimizing \( \lambda_c/\lambda_t \) (spin-value quality) and \( T_{SL} \) (Schottky barrier quality and nonmagnetic layer thickness). In epitaxial structures, spin-dependent resonance effects in the base might further enhance \( I_p - I_{AP} \). In cases where the input noise current of the amplifier limits the SNR of the SVT or when local amplification is desired, a major enhancement may be achieved by avalanche multiplication of the collector current. Application of a larger \( V_{CR} \) bias generates electron-hole pairs in the collector depletion layer, and multiplication of \( I_c \) may be as large as 100. The noise current of the SVT is also multiplied with this factor, therefore its SNR stays the same, but because the signal is much greater, the SNR of the system will be enhanced. A comparable 20-ohm GMR film with 1-mV effective output voltage (11) has a Johnson noise of \( i_n = (4kT R d)^{1/2} \) = 6 \( \mu \)V and an SNR of 45 dB. A typical hard disk amplifier adds 0.55 nV/Hz \( ^{1/2} \) or 5.5 \( \mu \)V of noise, resulting in 42 dB overall. In spite of the larger SNR of the SVT, the power dissipated in the SVT structure is greater (=1 mW). The maximum current through the GMR film is determined by electromigration, whereas the maximum current in the SVT is determined by heating. Analysis of this factor for specific sensor designs is required for a realistic comparison. Its intrinsic diode characteristics make selection transistors per storage cell redundant and make the SVT attractive for MRAM development.

References and Notes

Boundary Formation in Drosophila Wing: Notch Activity Attenuated by the POU Protein Nubbin

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Cell interactions mediated by Notch-family receptors have been implicated in the specification of tissue boundaries in vertebrate and insect development. Although Notch ligands are often widely expressed, tightly localized activation of Notch is critical for the formation of sharp boundaries. Evidence is presented here that the POU domain protein Nubbin contributes to the formation of a sharp dorsoventral boundary in the Drosophila wing. Nubbin represses Notch-dependent target genes and sets a threshold for Notch activity that defines the spatial domain of boundary-specific gene expression.

Spatially localized activation of Notch is required for specification of the dorsoventral (DV) boundary of the Drosophila wing (1–5). Notch signaling has also been implicated in establishing tissue boundaries in somite formation, in neurogenesis, and at the DV boundary of the vertebral limb (6–8). The tight localization of Notch activity in these systems contrasts with the broad distribution of Notch ligands. The problem of spatially limiting Notch activation is partially solved through activity of fringe genes (9), which modulate the sensitivity of Notch for its ligands and contribute to spatially limiting Notch activity (8, 10). Certain features of the abnormal wings in flies mutant for the nubbin gene suggested a possible role for Nubbin protein in spatially limiting Notch activity at the DV boundary of the wing (11, 12). The nubbin gene encodes a POU domain protein that is expressed in the developing wing primordium (11) (Fig. 1A).

The row of sensory bristles that makes up the wing margin is disorganized in nubbin mutant wings (11), suggesting a defect in Wingless or Notch activity. In preparations where the wing margin is viewed edge on, this disorganization reflects a broadening of the region where bristles form (Fig. 1, B and C). Margin bristles are normally specified in cells very close to the DV boundary, reflecting a requirement for high levels of Wingless signaling activity (13). The broadening of the margin suggests that Wingless might be ectopically expressed in nubbin mutant wing discs. Wingless is normally expressed in a stripe of two to three cells straddling the DV boundary (Fig. 1D). In nubbin mutant discs this stripe is widened considerably (Fig. 1E). Expression of the Notch targets vestigial and cut is similarly expanded at the DV boundary.