GaN MOSFET with Boron Trichloride-Based Dry Recess Process

Y Jiang, Q P Wang, K Tamai, T Miyashita, S Motoyama, D J Wang, J P Ao, and Y Ohno

1Institute of Technology and Science, University of Tokushima, Japan
2School of Electronic Science and Technology, Faculty of Electronic Information and Electrical Engineering, Dalian University of Technology, China
3Research and Development Department, SAMCO Inc., Japan

E-mail: jpao@ee.tokushima-u.ac.jp

Abstract The dry recessed-gate GaN metal-oxide-semiconductor field-effect transistors (MOSFETs) on AlGaN/GaN heterostructure using boron trichloride (BCl₃) as etching gas were fabricated and characterized. Etching with different etching power was conducted. Devices with silicon tetrachloride (SiCl₄) etching gas were also prepared for comparison. Field-effect mobility and interface state density were extracted from current-voltage (I-V) characteristics. GaN MOSFETs on AlGaN/GaN heterostructure with BCl₃ based dry recess achieved a high maximum electron mobility of 141.5 cm²V⁻¹s⁻¹ and a low interface state density.

1. Introduction

Gallium nitride (GaN) has attracted much attention in the field of high-power and high-efficiency applications due to its remarkable material properties such as wide bandgap, high breakdown field, and high electron saturation velocity. For power electronics application, the enhancement-mode (E-mode) plays a vital role of realizing safe operation and reducing power consumption owing to the normally-off operation [1-3]. In order to realize E-mode GaN MOSFET, source and drain ohmic contact must be primarily produced. To avoid activation at high temperature required by the ion-implanted source and drain regions, AlGaN/GaN heterostructure with high electron density of polarization-induced two-dimensional electron gas (2DEG) could be utilized as source and drain contacts. To accomplish this structure, dry recess process is necessary to remove the AlGaN layer for forming the channel region in the GaN layer. The avoidance of etching damage is required to obtain a high-quality channel with high carrier mobility and low interface states. Inductively coupled plasma (ICP) system is used to etch the gate. Low ICP and bias power could decrease the etching rate which is benefit to reduce etching damage [4-6]. Low power might also get an irregular recess profile and even failure in the MOSFETs operation. In our previous work [4, 7], we achieved a precise control of ICP etching rate of 1.2 nm/min and determined the optimum ICP condition of GaN MOSFETs on AlGaN/GaN heterostructure with the etching gas of SiCl₄. However, the devices etched with SiCl₄ gas had a negative threshold voltage due to the possible silicon (Si) contamination.

In this paper, we tried to use BCl₃ instead of SiCl₄ as the gate recess etching gas in order to reduce the influence of Si contamination on threshold voltage. Then we discussed the influence of etching gas and conditions on the performance of dry recessed-gate GaN MOSFETs on AlGaN/GaN heterostructure, which were characterized by extracting the field-effect mobility and interface state density.
2. Experiments

The device structure is a ring-type MOSFET on AlGaN/GaN heterostructure grown on a sapphire substrate, as shown in Fig. 1. The epitaxial structure includes a buffer layer, a 2 μm i-GaN layer, a 20 nm n-AlGaN layer, and a 10 nm n-GaN layer. The composition ratio of the aluminum in AlGaN layer is 25%. The n-AlGaN layer and n-GaN layer are doped with Si of a concentration of $1.0 \times 10^{19} \text{ cm}^{-3}$. The sheet resistance of the wafer is around 500 $\Omega / \square$. To form the MOSFET structure, a 2DEG layer is used as the ohmic contact layer, and a surface etched i-GaN layer is used as the channel layer.

The device fabrication process was based upon standard photolithography and lift-off technologies. The SiO$_2$ film of about 500 nm thickness deposited by tetraethylorthosilicate (TEOS) plasma enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD) was used as the etching mask. The gate recess was conducted utilizing ICP system with BCl$_3$ and SiCl$_4$ gas. The etching conditions of five samples can be divided into three kinds (listed in Table 1).

1. Sample No. 1 and No. 2 were done with SiCl$_4$ gas, ICP power of 100 W and 50 W, respectively, bias power of 20 W, SiCl$_4$ gas flow rate of 3 sccm and working chamber pressure of 0.25 Pa (termed as: No. 1 SiCl$_4$ 100W/20W and No. 2 SiCl$_4$ 50W/20W, respectively). The etching rates of these two samples were about 1.2 nm/min and 1.0 nm/min, respectively.

2. Sample No. 3 and No. 4 were etched with mixed BCl$_3$/Cl$_2$ gas (20/20 sccm), ICP power of 100 W, bias power of 25 W and at a working chamber pressure of 0.6 Pa. The etching depths were 110 nm and 60 nm respectively (termed as: No. 3 BCl$_3$/Cl$_2$, 110 nm and No. 4 BCl$_3$/Cl$_2$, 60 nm, respectively), and the etching rates were about 30 nm/min.

3. Sample No. 5 (termed as: No. 5 SiCl$_4$+Cl$_2$) was etched by two steps, and the average etching rate was about 20 nm/min. The first step was done by SiCl$_4$ gas with a flow rate of 4 sccm, ICP power of 50 W, bias power of 100 W and at a working chamber pressure of 0.25 Pa. The second step was done by Cl$_2$ gas with a flow rate of 4 sccm, ICP power of 50 W, bias power of 50 W and at a working chamber pressure of 0.25 Pa.

During the etching processes, the sample stage was cooled by helium gas to keep at the room temperature.

After these dry etching processes, the samples were immersed in HNO$_3$: BHF = 1:1 solution to remove the possible contamination of Si on the etched surface. As the gate insulator, a 103.5-nm-thick SiO$_2$ layer was then deposited by PECVD (SAMCO PD-220LC) with silane-based source, followed by annealing at 1000°C for 10 min in N$_2$ ambient. After the gate insulator patterning, the source and drain ohmic contacts were formed using Ti/Al/Ti/Au (50/200/40/40 nm) annealed at 850°C for 1 min in N$_2$ ambient. Transmission line model (TLM) measurement showed that the contact resistance was approximately 0.15-0.36 $\Omega$mm. A Ni/Au (70/30 nm) bi-layer was deposited as the gate metal.
Table 1 Dry etching process conditions of all the samples

| No. | Term                  | ICP Power (W) | Bias Power (W) | Gas     | Flow Rate (sccm) | Chamber Pressure (Pa) | Etching Rate (nm/min) | Recess Depth (nm) |
|-----|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|---------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1   | SiCl₄ 100W/20W        | 100           | 20             | SiCl₄   | 3                | 0.25                  | 1.2                   | 60                |
| 2   | SiCl₄ 50W/20W         | 50            | 20             | SiCl₄   | 3                | 0.25                  | 1.0                   | 60                |
| 3   | BCl₃/Cl₂, 60 nm       | 100           | 25             | BCl₃/Cl₂| 20/20            | 0.6                   | 30                    | 60                |
| 4   | BCl₃/Cl₂, 110 nm      | 100           | 25             | BCl₃/Cl₂| 20/20            | 0.6                   | 30                    | 110               |
| 5   | SiCl₄+Cl₂             | 50            | 100            | SiCl₄   | 4                | 0.25                  | 20                    | 100               |

3. Results and Discussion
The device used for evaluation is long channel ring-type MOSFET. It has a channel length $L$ of 94 μm and an effective channel width $W$ of 819 μm which was calculated from

$$W = \frac{2\pi L}{\ln r_{out} - \ln r_{in}},$$

where $r_{out}$ and $r_{in}$ is the outer and inner radius. For all the samples, the gate leakage currents were below $10^{-9}$ A with gate voltage from -10 V to 10 V and drain voltage of 0.1 V, as shown in Fig. 2. In particular, gate leakage is restrained even at a positive gate bias, which is beneficial to achieve the E-mode operation. To extract the capacitance of gate insulator, measurement of $C-V$ characteristics was performed under frequency of 100 kHz and with gate voltage from -10 to 15 V. From Fig. 3, we can observe the hysteresis and the negative threshold voltage from -5.5 to -3.5 V. The difference of threshold voltage by different etching gas is not clear. One reason is the possible positive charges existing in the gate insulator layer leading to a negative shift on the threshold voltage [8], and the other reason may be from the GaN channel layer of this work. Through the evaluation of device isolation, we confirmed that the isolation region had a large leakage current indicating that the GaN buffer layer is slight n-type rather than semi-insulating type.

![Fig. 2 Gate leakage current of GaN MOSFETs of all the samples with gate voltage from -10 to 10 V.](image-url)
Figure 3 The segment of $C-V$ characteristics curve of GaN MOSFETs of all the samples with gate voltage from -7 to 1 V.

Figure 4 shows the $I_d-V_d$ characteristics of the device etched with BCl$_3$ gas and low etching rate. Drain voltages range from 0 to 20 V and gate voltage range from 10 to -3 V. Device operation up to gate voltage of 10 V was confirmed. A gate capacitance-transconductance method was adopted to determine the electron field-effect mobility. According to the basis of the gradual channel approximation of MOSFETs, field-effect mobility could be calculated as

$$\mu_{FE} = \frac{G_M L}{C_{OX} W V_d}$$

where $L$ is the gate length, $C_{OX}$ is the oxide capacitance per unit area, and $G_M$ is the transconductance. The field-effect mobility of all the samples is showed in Fig. 5. The electron mobility of two devices etched with BCl$_3$ gas are 141.5 and 136.0 cm$^2$/V·s, respectively, as listed in Table 2. The field-effect mobility of the device with the recess depth of 110 nm is only slightly lower than that of the device with the recess depth of 60 nm. Although the etching condition of these two samples was same, but a larger depth meant longer etching time and produced more surface contamination, which would degrade the mobility. However, for the device No. 5 etched with SiCl$_4$ and Cl$_2$ gas, the field-effect mobility decreased sharply, probably because of much etching surface damage caused by high bias power. The mobility is almost the same for the devices with 20 W bias power and different ICP power, implying that the mobility is more sensitive to the bias power instead of the ICP power. In reference [7], we have reported the influence of etching conditions on the recess profiles, mobility and interface state density for devices with ICP power from 50 to 100 W, bias power from 20 to 60 W and the etching mask of SiO$_2$. It showed that higher bias power would bring more interface states and lower mobility. It was considered to be due to the much serious surface damage and silicon contamination occurring at higher bias power.
Fig. 4 $I_d$-$V_d$ characteristics of the device etched with BCl$_3$ gas and the recess depth of 60 nm.

Fig. 5 The field-effect mobility of GaN MOSFETs of all the samples.

Table 2 The measured maximum field-effect mobility and interface state density of all the samples

| No | Term                     | Average of $C_{ox}$ $(10^{-11}$ Fcm$^{-2}$) | Field-effect Mobility $\mu_{FE}$ $(cm^2/V\cdot s)$ | Subthreshold Swing $S$ (mV/dec) | Interface State Density $D_{it}$ $(10^{11}$ cm$^{-2}$eV$^{-1}$) |
|----|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |                          |                                             | Forward | Reverse | Forward | Reverse | Forward | Reverse |                                             |
| 1  | SiCl$_4$ 100W/20W        | 3.45                                        | 133.3   | 133.9   | 141.5   | 137.6   | 2.96    | 2.82    |                                             |
| 2  | SiCl$_4$ 50W/20W         | 3.41                                        | 133.9   | 134.5   | 177.1   | 154.9   | 4.21    | 3.41    |                                             |
| 3  | BCl$_3$/Cl$_2$, 60 nm    | 3.47                                        | 141.1   | 141.5   | 112.1   | 139.7   | 1.91    | 2.91    |                                             |
| 4  | BCl$_3$/Cl$_2$, 110 nm   | 3.44                                        | 133.7   | 136.0   | 169.4   | 149.4   | 3.97    | 3.25    |                                             |
| 5  | SiCl$_4$+Cl$_2$          | 3.48                                        | 111.6   | 112.0   | 138.3   | 176.0   | 2.87    | 4.25    |                                             |

The equivalent circuit of the MOS structure can be presented as the oxide capacitance $C_{ox}$ connected in series with a parallel connection of the depletion capacitance $C_d$ and the interface-related capacitance $C_{it}$. In this case, based on the definition, the subthreshold swing $S$ could be expressed as
where $k$ is the Boltzmann constant, $T$ is the absolute temperature, and $q$ is the electron charge. Figure 6 shows the $I_d$-$V_g$ characteristics of the devices in the subthreshold region. Considering the depletion capacitance is zero, $C_{it}$ can be calculated from the extracted subthreshold swing $S$. The interface states density $D_{it}$ can then be calculated from $C_{it}$. The device etched with BCl$_3$ gas and the recess depth of 60 nm obtained a low interface state density, as listed in Table 2.

![Fig. 6 $I_d$-$V_g$ characteristics of GaN MOSFETs of all the samples in the subthreshold region](image)

4. Conclusion
The dry recessed-gate GaN MOSFETs on AlGaN/GaN heterostructure etched with BCl$_3$ gas were fabricated. A high maximum electron mobility of 141.5 cm$^2$V$^{-1}$s$^{-1}$ and a low interface state density were obtained. This indicates that BCl$_3$ is possibly a suitable candidate as an etching gas to fabricate MOSFETs on AlGaN/GaN heterostructure. Further work is necessary to optimize the recess process condition of BCl$_3$ gas.

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