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Modeling the post-burn-in abnormal base current in AlGaAs/GaAs heterojunction bipolar transistors

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The base current of AlGaAs/GaAs heterojunction bipolar transistor subjected to a long burn-in test often exhibits an abnormal characteristic with an ideality factor of about 3, rather than a normal ideality factor between 1 and 2, in the midvoltage range. We develop an analytical model to investigate the physical mechanisms underlying such a characteristic. Consistent with the finding of an experimental work reported recently, our model calculations show that the recombination current in the base has an ideality factor of about 3 in the midvoltage range and that such a current is responsible for the observed abnormal base current in heterojunction bipolar transistor after a long burn-in test. Post-burn-in data measured from two different heterojunction bipolar transistors are also included in support of the model. © 1996 American Institute of Physics.
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I. INTRODUCTION

Burn-in tests carried out in a thermal and/or electrical stress condition are useful in determining the long-term performance of AlGaAs/GaAs heterojunction bipolar transistors (HBTs).¹⁻³ Experimental results often show that the burn-in test increases considerably the base current I_B but does not alter notably the collector current I_C . Furthermore, an abnormal base current with an ideality factor $n \approx 3$ in the midvoltage range is often observed in the Gummel plot of a HBT subjected to a relatively long-hour burn-in test.¹⁻³ An attempt has been made earlier to model the HBT post-burn-in behavior.⁴ The analysis was based on the theory that the defects at the base surface may migrate to the heterointerface during the high thermal/electrical stress condition (i.e., recombination/thermal enhanced defect diffusion⁵). While such a model can successfully describe I_B and I_C in HBTs subjected to a relative short burn-in test (I_B and I_C after 144 h stress shown in Fig. 1), it fails to predict I_B with $n \approx 3$ characteristics observed in the HBT after a long-hour stress test, as evidenced by the results of I_B measured after 300 h stress given in Fig. 1. Sugahara *et al.*³ have suggested that such an abnormal current can be attributed to a significant increase in the number of defects in the strained base (i.e., stress-induced defects) during the long stress hours. Also, they have demonstrated that the post-burn-in I_B can be greatly reduced if the base lattice strain is relaxed.

This article presents a comprehensive theoretical study on the abnormal base current in the post-burn-in HBT. Based on the Shockley-Read-Hall (SRH) recombination statistics, a model for the recombination current in the base region is developed. Our model calculations show that such a current has an ideality factor of about 3 in the midvoltage range and thus is responsible for the observed abnormal base current in HBT after a long burn-in test. With the aid of the model and measurement data, physical mechanisms underlying the ob-

served abnormal base current in the post-burn-in HBT are also discussed.

II. MODEL DEVELOPMENT

A. Pre-burn-in HBT

We focus on the base current of a mesa-etched $N/p^+/n$ HBT. There are two major components for the base current of pre-burn-in HBT,

$$I_B = I_{BL} + I_{BN}, \quad (1)$$

where I_{BL} is the base leakage current and I_{BN} is the normal base current. For the bias condition of applied base-collector voltage $V_{CB}=0$ and base-emitter voltage $V_{BE}>0$ (i.e., forward-active mode), the base leakage current is originated from the leakage of electron from the base to emitter through the emitter-base periphery and is the dominate current component for I_B at relatively small V_{BE} .⁶ This current is given by⁶

$$I_{BL} = P_E J'_{BL} [1 - \exp(-V_{BE} F_L / V_T)], \quad (2)$$

where P_E is the emitter perimeter length, J'_{BL} is the fully activated (i.e., $V_{BE} \gg V_T$) base leakage current density, and F_L is an empirical parameter determining the shape of the base leakage current.

The normal base current in general consists of:

- (1) the recombination current I_{SCRE} in the emitter side of the heterojunction space-charge region;
- (2) the recombination current I_{SCRB} in the base side of the heterojunction space-charge region;
- (3) the surface recombination current I_{RS} at the emitter side walls and extrinsic base surface;
- (4) the recombination current I_{QNB} in the QNB; and
- (5) the injection current I_{RE} from the base into emitter.

FIG. 1. Base and collector current characteristics of a post-burn-in (sub-jected to 240 °C temperature and 10^4 A/cm² current density stress) AlGaAs/GaAs HBT calculated from a previously developed model Ref. 4 and obtained from measurements. The model of Ref. 4 gives an accurate prediction for the HBT behavior after a relatively short stress test (i.e., 144 h), but fails to describe the base current (i.e., with an ideality factor of about 3 between $V_{BE}=0.3$ and 1.2 V) of the HBT subjected to a long stress test (i.e., 300 h).

The details of these current components can be been found in the literature.⁷ For pre-burn-in HBTs, I_{QNB} is negligible because the number of defects in the QNB is small and the base is very thin. In addition, I_{SCR_B} is neglected due to the fact that the majority of the space-charge region (SCR) resides in the emitter because of the very high base doping density. Thus,

$$I_{BN} = I_{SCRE} + I_{RS} + I_{RE}. \quad (3)$$

The ideality factor of this current ranging from 1 to 2.

B. Post-burn-in HBT

After a long burn-in test, the number of defects in the base will be increased significantly due to the strained lattice during the stress test.³ As a result, substantial electron-hole recombination occurs in both the base side of the SCR and the QNB, and the conventional thin QNB and thin SCR approximations are no longer valid. Thus, for a HBT after a long burn-in test,

$$I_{BN} = I_{BASE} + I_{SCRE} + I_{RS} + I_{RE}, \quad (4)$$

where $I_{BASE} = I_{SCR_B} + I_{QNB}$, and

$$I_{BASE} = Aq \int_0^{X_2} U^{SRH}(x) dx + Aq \int_{X_2}^{X_B} U^{SRH}(x) dx. \quad (5)$$

Here A is the emitter area, $x=0$ and X_2 are the boundaries of base-side SCR, $x=X_2$ and X_B are the boundaries of the QNB, and U^{SRH} is the total SRH recombination rate summing the recombination rates at each trapping state E_{Ti} ($i = 1, 2, \dots, N$, N is the total number of trapping states),

$$U^{SRH} = \sum_{i=1}^N U_i^{SRH}, \quad (6)$$

and⁷

$$U_i^{SRH} = (pn - n_i^2)(1 + \Gamma)(N_{Ti}\sigma_i v_{th})\{p + n + 2n_i \times \cosh[(E_{Ti} - E_i)/kT]\}^{-1}. \quad (7)$$

p and n are hole and electron concentrations in the QNB, n_i is the intrinsic free-carrier concentration, Γ is the trap-assisted tunneling factor, N_{Ti} is the trapping density at E_{Ti} , σ_i ($\approx 10^{-14}$ cm²) is the capture cross section at N_{Ti} , v_{th} ($\approx 10^7$ cm/s) is the electron thermal velocity, and E_i is the intrinsic Fermi energy. The trap-assisted tunneling is important for the high-field region, such as the emitter-base SCR, where electrons can tunnel through the energy band via traps and subsequently recombine with holes.⁸ In a low-field region, such as the QNB, Γ approaches zero. This factor is given by⁸

$$\Gamma = \left(\frac{\Delta E}{kT}\right) \int_0^1 \exp\left(\frac{u\Delta E}{kT} - K'u^{1.5}\right) du. \quad (8)$$

Here ΔE is the energy between the conduction-band edge and the trapping state energy since electrons in these energies are tunneling possible, and K' is a parameter inversely proportional to the local electric field ξ ,

$$K' = (4/3)(2m^*\Delta E^3)^{0.5}/(q\hbar\xi). \quad (9)$$

m^* is the effective electron mass and $\hbar$ is the reduced Planck constant. When ξ is large, K' is small, and Γ becomes large.

For the QNB, the minority-carrier lifetime τ_B is related to the electron concentration as⁹

$$\tau_B = (n - n_0)/U^{SRH} = \Delta n/U^{SRH}, \quad (10)$$

where n_0 is the equilibrium electron concentration and Δn is the excess electron concentration. For a base with an arbitrary length,⁷

$$\Delta n = \Delta n(X_2) \sinh[(X_B - x)/L_n] / \sinh[(X_B - X_2)/L_n]. \quad (11)$$

Here $L_n = (D_n\tau_B)^{0.5}$ is the electron diffusion length in the QNB and, using the thermionic and tunneling mechanisms at heterointerface and Boltzmann statistics in the QNB,¹⁰

$$\Delta n(X_2) = qv_n\gamma_n N_E \exp(-V_{B1}/V_T)/\zeta, \quad (12)$$

$$\zeta = qD_n/(X_B - X_2 + D_n/v_s) + qv_n\gamma_n \times \exp[(V_{B2} - \Delta E_C/q)/V_T], \quad (13)$$

where v_n is the electron thermal velocity, γ_n is the electron tunneling coefficient, N_E is the emitter doping concentration, and V_{B1} and V_{B2} are the barrier potentials on the emitter and base sides of the junction, respectively. Since τ_B and Δn are related to each other, a numerical procedure is needed to calculate U^{SRH} , and thus I_{QNB} , iteratively, provided the parameters associated with the SRH process (i.e., E_{Ti} , N_{Ti} , and N) are specified.

For the SCR, n , p , and ξ distributions in the base side of SCR needed in Eqs. (7) and (8) are given by

$$n(x) = n(X_2) \exp[-V_i(x)/V_T], \quad (14)$$

$$p(x) = p(X_2) \exp[V_i(x)/V_T], \quad (15)$$

$$\xi(x) = -(qN_B/\epsilon_B)(X_2 - x) \quad (16)$$

FIG. 2. Recombination current in the base vs V_{BE} calculated from the model for three different cases of N_{Ti} and N .

where V_i is the electrostatic potential [i.e., $V_i(X_2)=0$ is chosen as the reference potential], N_B is the base doping concentration, and ϵ_B is the dielectric permittivity in base. The position-dependent V_i in the base side of SCR can be expressed as⁷

$$V_i(x) = -0.5(qN_B/\epsilon_B)(X_2 - x)^2. \quad (17)$$

As is shown later, I_{BASE} has an ideality factor of about 3 in the midvoltage range and thus is the current component contributing to the abnormal base current observed in the post-burn-in HBT.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

We first investigate the effects of E_{Ti} and N on the recombination current in the base. The device considered has a typical makeup of $5 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ emitter doping concentration, $0.15 \text{ } \mu\text{m}$ emitter layer thickness, 10^{19} cm^{-3} base doping concentration, and $0.1 \text{ } \mu\text{m}$ base layer thickness. Also, the conduction-band edge E_C has been chosen as the reference for E_{Ti} (i.e., $E_{Ti}=0$ if located at E_C). Three different E_{Ti} of 0.7, 1.1, and 1.4 eV will be considered to represent various

FIG. 3. Recombination current in the base calculated with and without the trap-assisted tunneling mechanism.

FIG. 4. SRH recombination rates vs base position calculated for three different V_{BE} .

trapping state locations in the band gap (i.e., deep-, intermediate-, and shallow-level trapping states). Furthermore, only E_{Ti} below E_i are considered because only these types of E_{Ti} are important to trap-assisted tunneling in the base side of the SCR.⁸ As is shown later, this is a major mechanism contributing to the abnormal base current.

Figure 2 shows I_{BASE} calculated from the model using fixed $N_{Ti}=10^{19} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ and a single trap with $E_{Ti}=0.7 \text{ eV}$, a single trap with $E_{Ti}=1.4 \text{ eV}$, and multiple traps with $E_{Ti}=0.7, 1.1, \text{ and } 1.4 \text{ eV}$ (i.e., $N=3$). The results suggest that I_{BASE} is relatively insensitive to E_{Ti} , but depends more on the number of trapping state N , particularly at small V_{BE} . Furthermore, all three currents exhibit an $n \approx 3$ characteristic.

Intuitively, one expects I_{BASE} increases with increasing E_{Ti} and increasing N because U^{SRH} is inversely and directly proportional $\cosh(E_{Ti}/kT)$ and N [see Eqs. (6) and (7)], respectively. This is true for small V_{BE} (i.e., $V_{BE} < 0.8 \text{ V}$), where the electric field in the SCR is high, and recombination via trap-assisted tunneling in the SCR is the dominant process. For high V_{BE} , however, the electric field in the SCR is small, and the SRH recombination in the QNB is more

FIG. 5. Recombination current in the base vs V_{BE} calculated from the model for three different N_{Ti} .

FIG. 6. Pre- and post-burn-in base currents of HBT-1 calculated from the model and obtained from measurements.

significant. Since U^{SRH} in the QNB is a function of the electron concentration, an increase in E_{Ti} and increase in N will tend to increase U^{SRH} , but such a change will also tend to decrease τ_B and therefore decrease the electron concentration and U^{SRH} in the QNB. This compensating mechanism leads to a less significant effect of E_{Ti} and N on I_{BASE} , as observed in the region of $V_{\text{BE}} > 0.8$ V in Fig. 2. To further demonstrate this, we show in Fig. 3 I_{BASE} vs V_{BE} calculated with and without trap-assisted tunneling. It can be seen that the current component resulted from trap-assisted tunneling is negligible if V_{BE} is greater than 0.8 V. For this bias region, recombination current in the QNB is the dominant current, and I_{BASE} is less insensitive to N_{Ti} and N , as observed in Fig. 2. Also note that the abnormality of $n \approx 3$ is more evident in I_{BASE} with trap-assisted tunneling.

The dependence of $U^{\text{SRH}}(x)$ on V_{BE} is illustrated in Fig. 4. A logarithmic scale has been used for the x axis to illustrate the details of $U^{\text{SRH}}(x)$ in the base side of SCR (far left-hand side of the figure) due to trap-assisted tunneling. For relatively small V_{BE} (i.e., $V_{\text{BE}} = 0.4$ and 0.8 V), the recombination rate in the SCR decreases with increasing V_{BE}

FIG. 7. Pre- and post-burn-in base currents of HBT-2 calculated from the model and obtained from measurements (Ref. 3).

TABLE I. HBT structures and leakage current parameters.

Parameters	HBT-1	HBT-2
Emitter doping (cm^{-3})	5×10^{17}	5×10^{17}
Emitter thickness (μm)	0.17	0.18
Emitter area (μm^2)	100	30
Base doping (cm^{-3})	1×10^{19}	1×10^{19}
Base thickness (μm)	0.1	0.14
J'_{BL} (A/cm)	1×10^{-5}	1.33×10^{-6}
F_L	0.005	0.005

because of a smaller electric field and thus a smaller trap-assisted tunneling factor in the region. The trend is reversed if V_{BE} is further increased (i.e., $V_{\text{BE}} = 1.2$ V), however, due to the fact that the SCR is vanishing, and U^{SRH} becomes the QNB recombination rate.

Figure 5 shows the effect of N_{Ti} on the recombination current in the base. Here, we have arbitrarily chosen a single trap with $E_{Ti} = 0.7$ eV in calculations. Clearly, the value of N_{Ti} affects I_{BASE} significantly, and N_{Ti} will be the main parameter in fitting the model calculations with experimental data.

Figure 6 shows the total base currents of pre- and post-burn-in HBT-1 (device makeup and its leakage current parameters are given in Table I) calculated from the model and obtained from measurements. The plateaulike current for $V_{\text{BE}} < 0.8$ V in the pre-burn-in HBT is the base leakage current. For the post-stress HBT the current behavior for $V_{\text{BE}} > 0.2$ V is changed to that of $n \approx 3$. This is due to the fact that, in addition to the base leakage current, there is a large I_{BASE} in the post-burn-in HBT. $N_{Ti} = 8.75 \times 10^{18} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ has been used to fit the model to measured data, suggesting the stress-induced defect density in such a HBT is $8.75 \times 10^{18} \text{ cm}^{-3}$. A single trap with $E_{Ti} = 0.7$ eV has also been used.

Figure 7 shows the total base currents of pre- and post-burn-in HBT-2 (see Table I) calculated from the model and obtained from measurements.³ For this device, we found that the burn-in test resulted in $N_{Ti} = 2 \times 10^{18} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ in the base. This is smaller than N_{Ti} in HBT-1, due perhaps to the fact that HBT-2 is subjected to a less severe burn-in test (200°C and $7 \times 10^3 \text{ A/cm}^2$) than HBT-1 (240°C and 10^4 A/cm^2).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

A model has been developed to investigate the physical mechanisms underlying the abnormal base current (i.e., with an ideality factor of about 3) observed in the post-burn-in AlGaAs/GaAs heterojunction bipolar transistor (HBT). Our study confirms the finding of recent experimental work that such a current resulted from the significant electron-hole recombination via stress-induced defect centers in the base of the HBT. Furthermore, it has been shown that the trap-assisted tunneling is an important mechanism for recombination in the space-charge region when the bias voltage is relatively low. The model calculations compare favorably with data measured from two different HBTs.

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