

An Empirical Defect-Related Photo Leakage Current Model for LTPS TFTs Based on the Unit Lux Current

Ya-Hsiang Tai, *Member, IEEE*, Yan-Fu Kuo, and Guo-Pei Sun

Abstract—In this paper, the photosensitive effect of n-type low-temperature polycrystalline silicon (LTPS) thin-film transistors (TFTs) after dc stress is analyzed. It is found that the illumination behaviors for poly-Si TFTs are dependent on the defect types created by different stress conditions of hot-carrier and self-heating effects. For a given stress-induced device degradation, the anomalous illumination behaviors are observed, and these photo-induced leakage currents are not included in the present SPICE device model. Therefore, based on trap-assisted and Poole–Frenkel effect, an empirical defect-related photo leakage current model based on Unit Lux Current (ULC) is proposed to depict the photo-induced current after device degradation. Furthermore, the verified equation of ULC is analytically derived and has good agreement with the experimental data.

Index Terms—DC stress, leakage current, photosensitivity, poly-Si thin-film transistor (TFT).

I. INTRODUCTION

LOW-TEMPERATURE polycrystalline silicon (LTPS) thin-film transistors (TFTs) have attracted much attention for active matrix liquid crystal display (LCD) and active matrix organic light-emitting diode applications due to the high mobility and the capability of realizing integrated circuits on the same glass [1]. For its application, several ambient light sensors using poly-Si TFTs, which is one of the value-added functions for high-end flat-panel display, have been reported [2]–[7]. Photosensitivity is a significant design consideration for achieving high-image-quality LCDs. However, it was reported that poly-Si TFTs suffer from several degradation mechanisms, such as hot carrier and self-heating effects [8]. The hot carrier effect has found that the degradation is related to the increase of strain bond tail states in the band gap of the poly-Si film and damaged region is near the drain. The self heating effect is reported in interface states near the source region, and the deep states in the poly-Si film near drain can be created [9]. Due to such degradation, the photo-induced leakage current is strongly

influenced, which is difficultly designed for sensing circuits. In this paper, we deliberately apply both stress conditions to manipulate the defect-related photo behaviors and modify the Unit Lux Current (ULC) [10] equations in TFTs. Comparatively, this paper focused on how additional nonuniform defects and the photo leakage mechanism influence both lateral and gate–drain overlap depletions.

II. EXPERIMENTS

The self-aligned structure of top-gate n-type LTPS TFTs with lightly doped drain (LDD) structure was used in the experiment. First, the buffer oxide and a-Si:H films were deposited on glass substrates with plasma-enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD). The samples were then put in the oven for dehydrogenation. Then, the XeCl excimer laser scanned the a-Si:H film to recrystallize the a-Si:H film to poly-Si. After the poly-Si active area definition, 65 nm SiO₂ was deposited with PECVD as the gate insulator. Next, the metal gate was formed by sputter and then defined. The LDD and the n⁺ source/drain doping were formed by PH₃ implantation with dosages of 2×10^{13} cm⁻² and 2×10^{15} cm⁻², respectively. The LDD implantation was self-aligned, and the n⁺ regions were defined with a separate mask. Then, the interlayer of SiN_x was deposited. Subsequently, rapid thermal annealing was conducted to activate the dopants, whereas the poly-Si film was simultaneously hydrogenated for 30 min. Finally, contact hole formation and metallization were performed to complete the fabrication work. In this paper, n-channel LTPS TFTs having a channel width of 20 μm and a channel length of 5 μm with an LDD structure of length 2.5 μm are measured under different illumination conditions. The light was collimated and focused onto the device with top face white light illumination. The photo leakage current was induced by a halogen lamp irradiation stream with several neutral density filters (the light intensity ranging from dark to 31320 lx) through the objective of a microscope, and the light intensity was measured by a digital luminous flux meter.

Fig. 1 shows the photo leakage current, the power variation spectrum of the light source in the range of 350–750 nm, and the cross-sectional view of n-channel LTPS TFTs. In this paper, the TFTs are measured under different illumination conditions before and after bias stress. One of the stress conditions is that the drain voltage is equal to 20 V and the gate voltage is 3 V, which correspond to the hot carrier effect. The other condition of self heating stress is set to be 15 V for both the gate-to-source voltage V_{gs} and the drain-to-source voltage V_{ds}.

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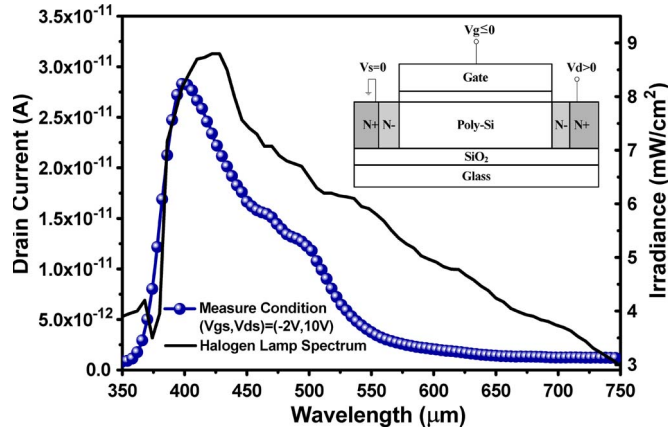


Fig. 1. Cross-sectional views of n-channel LTPS TFTs with LDD structure and photo leakage current: power variation spectrum of the light source.

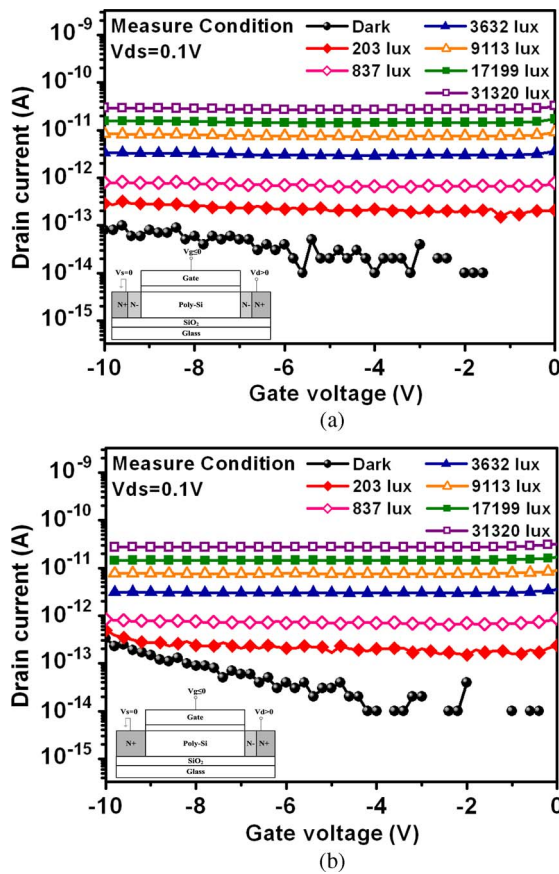


Fig. 2. I_{ds} - V_{gs} transfer characteristics under different illumination conditions for (a) conventional LDD and (b) only one-side LDD device structures.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Photosensitivity Confirmation

The previous study [12] revealed that the photo-induced current only happens at the drain side. To further confirm that the photo sensing area is mainly at the drain electrode side and the photo-induced current is not mutually affected by the source electrodes, a conventional LDD structure and a one-side LDD structure of TFTs are designed for examination. Fig. 2(a) and (b) shows the I_{ds} - V_{gs} characteristics with negative gate bias under different illumination conditions for the conventional LDD device structure and the one-side LDD device structure.

It can be seen that the off current of these two types of TFTs is lifted up to similar levels under different illumination intensities. It also reveals that the poly-Si TFT leakage current occurs at the depletion region of the drain junction and is not influenced by the source region. Therefore, the following discussion on the photosensitivity mechanism will only focus on the drain region.

B. Model Description and Analysis

In this paper, we take into account the photo leakage current induced per unit photo flux (ULC) [10] to analyze the photosensitivity of the LTPS TFTs. The ULC can be expressed by a linear combination of two components: 1) the leakage current induced in the lateral depletion region and 2) the leakage current induced in the gate-drain overlap depletion region [11]. When the device is operating at the low drain voltage, the ULC is attributed to the lateral depletion region by the channel-drain junction in reverse bias. When the drain voltage is large enough, the ULC increase considered that the reverse lateral depletion at the drain region extends as the gate-drain overlap depletion junction. However, the photosensitivity of the LTPS TFTs is influenced by both the defect state distribution and the density in the drain depletion region. Thus, in the aspect of poly-Si TFTs under electrical stress, the additional defects created a close drain depletion region, and consequently the ULC is drastically varied after hot carrier and self-heating degradation.

Fig. 3(a) and (b) shows the I_{ds} - V_{gs} transfer characteristics with 1-V drain voltage before and after hot carrier and self-heating stress under different illumination conditions. The previous study [12] revealed that the photo-induced current tendency is oppositely changed by the different stress conditions in the lateral depletion region by the channel-drain junction in reverse bias. It increases in the case of hot carrier, whereas it decreases for self-heating. Meanwhile, it correlated photosensitivity with the device parameters, such as mobility or threshold voltage, on the LTPS TFTs. Fig. 4(a) shows a normalized ULC and mobility at $V_{ds} = 0.6$ and 10 V, in accordance with the stress time for hot carrier stress. The variation trends have been normalized, and then we can pay attention on the tendencies of these unit parameters. As shown in the figure, it reveals that most of the trap states generated by hot carrier stress are crowded near the drain junction side. In contrast, the normalized ULC and the threshold voltage at $V_{ds} = 0.6$ and 10 V, in accordance with the stress time for self-heating stress, are compared in Fig. 4(b). It demonstrates that the extra defect states created by self-heating stress are spread in the whole poly-Si thin film throughout the channel. From those previously mentioned, the nonuniform defect distributions after dc stress cause the previous ULC equations to not agree with the experiment data very well. Therefore, the following discussion will focus on accurately modifying the ULC equations for not only lateral depletion but also gate-drain overlap depletion.

C. Empirical Defect-Related ULC Model

Several mechanisms of leakage current were discussed in the previous report [13]–[16]. For the purpose of effective medium modeling characteristics, we consider the poly-Si to be a

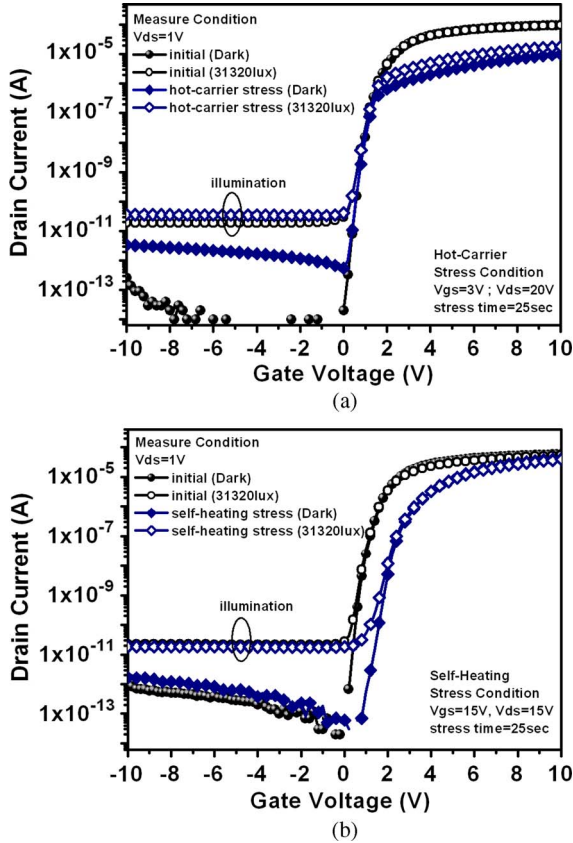


Fig. 3. I_{ds} - V_{gs} transfer characteristics with 1-V drain voltage before and after (a) hot carrier stress and (b) self-heating stress under different illumination conditions.

material with uniformly distributed trap density [10]. Due to the photocurrent behaviors of LTPS TFTs concerning the different types of additional nonuniform defects generated from various stress conditions, we suggest an empirical defect-related ULC model to describe the photosensitivity of the LTPS TFT after device degradation.

To explicitly analyze the trap-assisted leakage mechanism, an index V_{dx} is used to further divide the ULC into ULC_1 and ULC_2 to individually describe the influence of lateral and vertical field effects. At low drain bias, since the lateral electric field is relatively small, it is considered that the photo-induced current is a thermally generated current dominantly. It advises us to adjust the drain-bias dependence of the ULC model to approximately exponential forms. At higher drain bias, it is considered that the reverse lateral depletion at the drain region extends the vertical field effect and causes gate-induced drain leakage (GIDL) in the gate-drain overlap depletion junction. The value of the photo current should be associated with the carrier generation in the space charge region. By the junction reverse saturation current and the GIDL, the ULC_2 owing to the GIDL effect is also in an exponential relation base on the conductivity limited by the grain boundaries of the semiempirical analytical model. Thus, the ULC can be modified by a linear combination of these two components as

$$ULC = ULC_1 + ULC_2 \quad (2)$$

$$ULC_1 = A_1 \cdot \{\exp[B_1(V_d - V_{dx})] - 1\} + \chi \quad (3)$$

$$ULC_2 = A_2 \cdot \exp(-\eta \cdot V_g) \cdot \{\exp[B_2(V_d - V_{dx})] - 1\} \quad (4)$$

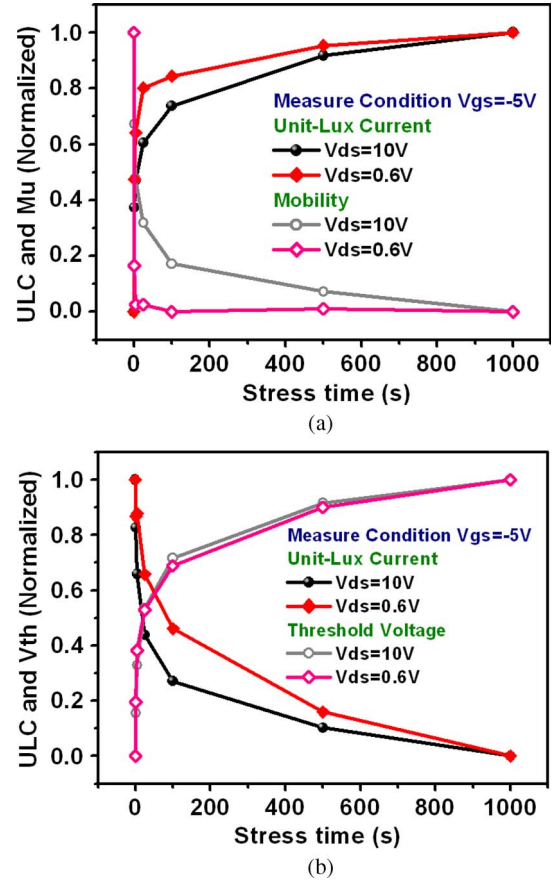


Fig. 4. (a) Normalized ULC and mobility at $V_{ds} = 0.6$ and 10 V with hot carrier stress times. (b) Normalized ULC and threshold voltage at $V_{ds} = 0.6$ and 10 V with self-heating stress times.

where V_{dx} is an indication boundary drain voltage that demarcated the lateral depletion region and the gate-drain overlap depletion region. (We can subtract ULC_1 from the total ULC curve; the rest of the total ULC is the second component called ULC_2 . The drain bias that increases the ULC from zero to positive point is an indication boundary.) χ corresponds to the photo leakage current induced by the per unit photo flux at V_{dx} (it is about 6.3–6.46 V before stress). A_1 , A_2 , B_1 , B_2 , and η are all fitting parameters. A_1 and A_2 correspond to the defect-related coefficients of ULC_1 and ULC_2 , respectively. B_1 and B_2 are the drain voltage dependences from dc stress per unit of depletion area. η is the scaling factor of ULC_2 about the exponential dependence on the negative gate bias of ULC_2 .

D. Hot Carrier Effects on ULC

The stress conditions are that the drain voltage is equal to 12 V and the gate voltage is 3 V, which is measured at different stress times of 1, 5, 25, 100, 500, and 1000 s, to investigate the hot carrier effect on the ULC. The ULC at $V_{gs} = -5$ V with different stress times is shown in Fig. 5. Similarly, for analyzing the photosensitivity on the defects influenced by lateral and vertical field effects, we also divide the ULC measurement data into two components. It can be seen that the ULC increase and slightly distort at lower drain bias with stress times. However, when the device operates at higher drain bias, the

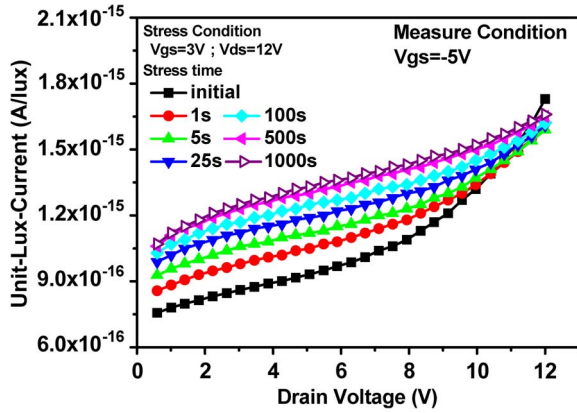


Fig. 5. Drain bias effect on ULC with different hot carrier stress times.

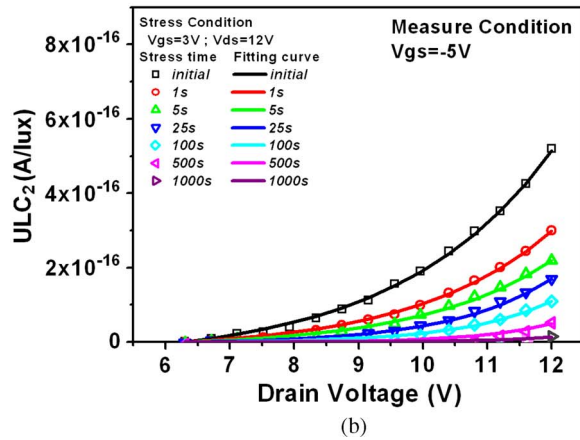
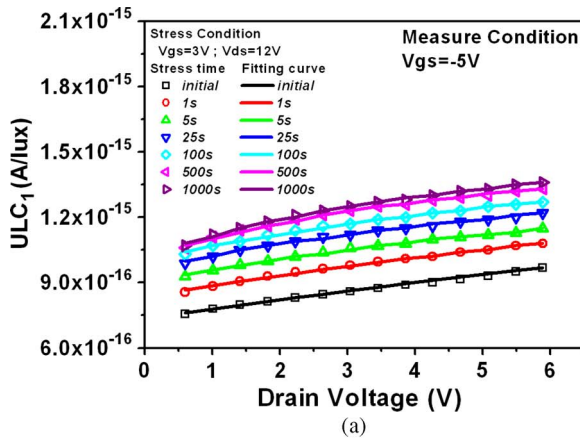


Fig. 6. (a) First component (ULC_1) and (b) second component (ULC_2) of ULC versus drain bias with different hot carrier stress times.

photo-induced current is severely decreased. The calculated and experimental data of drain bias effect on the ULC with different hot carrier stress times are individually shown in Fig. 6(a) and (b). It is observed that the calculated results agree with our experiment data very well. Fig. 7(a) and (b) shows the fitting factors A_1 , A_2 and B_1 , B_2 of the modified ULC_1 and ULC_2 equations in (3) and (4) at $V_{gs} = -5$ V after hot carrier stress. It is noticed that the drain voltage dependences per unit depletion area B_1 and B_2 are raised with stress times. The tendencies of the defect-related coefficients A_1 and A_2 of ULC_1 and ULC_2 are reduced with stress times. It may be attributed to the photo

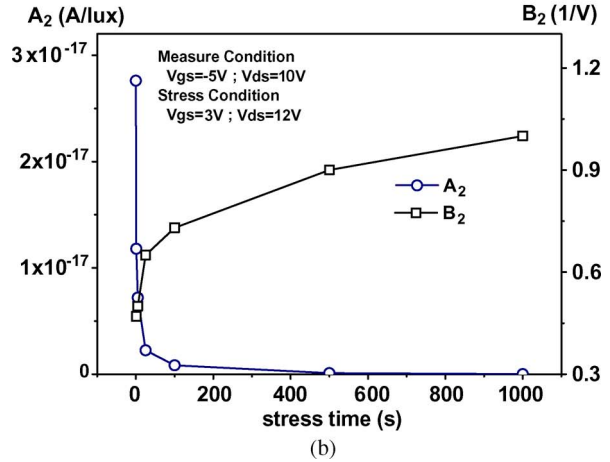
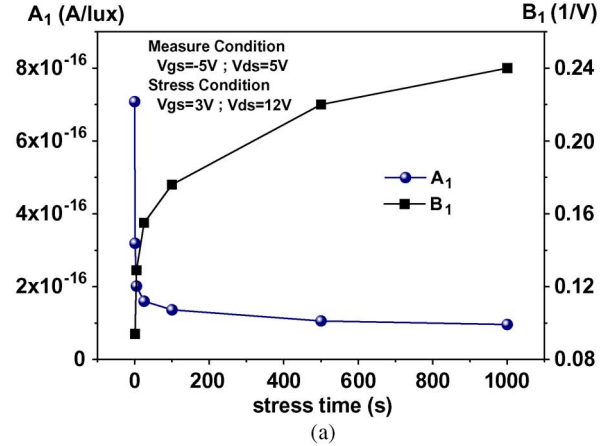


Fig. 7. Dependence of fitting factors A_1 , A_2 and B_1 , B_2 on hot carrier stress.

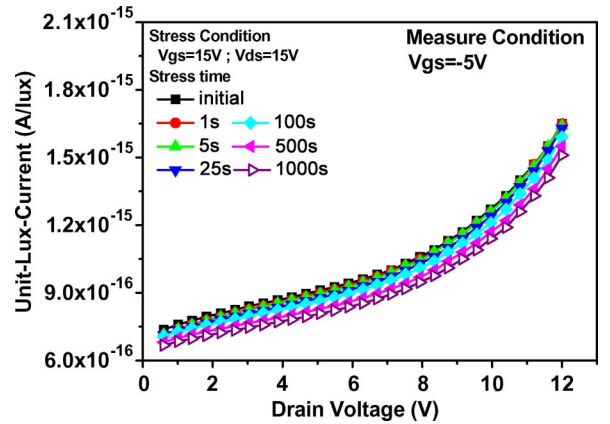
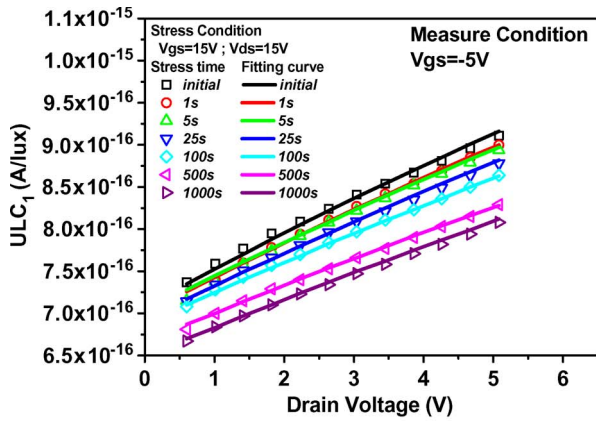


Fig. 8. Drain bias effect on ULC with different self-heating stress times.

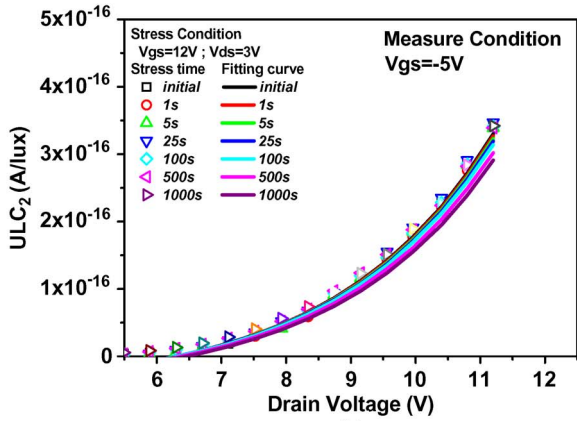
reexcited carrier increase, and the carriers slowly traveling by trap hopping.

E. Self Heating Effects on ULC

The stress condition is that the drain voltage is set to be 15 V for both V_{gs} and V_{ds} , which is measured at different stress times of 1, 5, 25, 100, 500, and 1000 s, to investigate the self heating effect on the ULC. The ULC at $V_{gs} = -5$ V with different stress times is shown in Fig. 8. By dividing the ULC measurement data into two components, it is obvious that



(a)



(b)

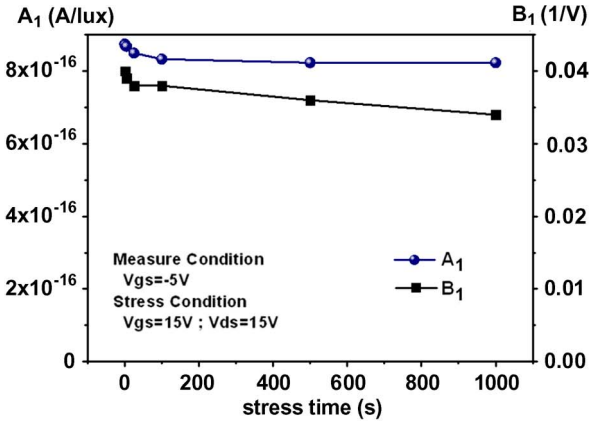
Fig. 9. (a) First component (ULC_1) and (b) second component (ULC_2) of ULC versus drain bias with different self-heating stress times.

the ULC decreases under lower drain voltage and is almost the same at higher drain bias with various stress times. In view of such conditions, Fig. 9(a) and (b) shows the calculated and experimental data of drain bias effect on the ULC with different self-heating stress times. Similarly, Fig. 10(a) and (b) shows the fitting factors of the modified ULC_1 and ULC_2 equations in (3) and (4) at $V_{gs} = -5$ V after self-heating stress. It appears that B_1 and B_2 and A_1 and A_2 are nearly unchanged with various stress times. Although hot carrier and self-heating stress affect the device photosensitivity in slightly different ways, the verified ULC equations are still properly consistent with the illumination behaviors after self-heating stress.

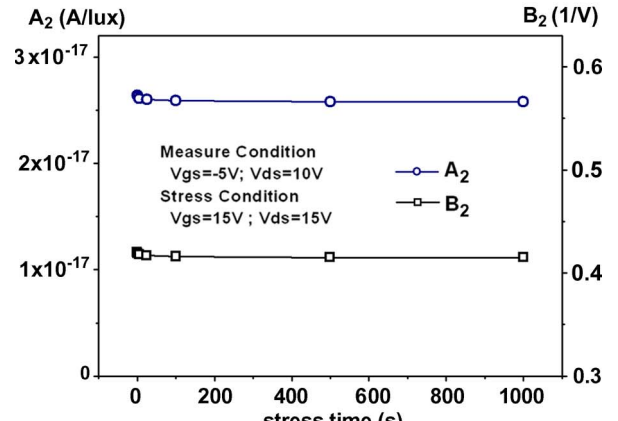
F. Mechanism of ULC

According to the experimental results of two stress conditions, a more complete mechanism of defect-related ULC is proposed to explain the photosensitive effect on the leakage current of LTPS TFT after dc stress.

Fig. 11 illustrates the band diagrams of the unstressed devices under the condition of $V_g < 0$ along the channel direction near the drain region at low and high drain biases. W_d indicates the length of the depletion region at the drain electrode side, where electron-hole pairs can be generated under illumination in the poly-Si film. It consists of the LDD region and the high hole concentration region in the channel induced by the



(a)



(b)

Fig. 10. Dependence of fitting factors A_1 , A_2 and B_1 , B_2 on self-heating stress.

negative gate bias. The generated electrons move along the drain electrode and the holes flow toward channel direction. For the case of devices at low drain bias with light irradiation, when the gate bias is changed, the channel/LDD junction is similar to the abrupt p^+n^- junction. As the lateral depletion region increases with the drain bias, the ULC_1 of the conduction mechanism in the low drain field is the thermal emission [17]. On the other hand, for high drain bias with light irradiation, the gate-drain overlap depletion region increases with both drain and gate bias, and the ULC_2 of the conduction mechanism at the high drain voltage is the field-enhanced emission in the space charge region [18].

Fig. 12 shows the band diagrams of the devices after hot carrier stress under the condition of $V_g < 0$ along the channel direction near the drain region at low and high drain biases. When the LTPS TFT devices after hot carrier stress are under optical illumination, the numerous electron-hole pairs from the additionally created shallow tail states are generated in the lateral depletion region. Therefore, the photo leakage current obviously increases due to the photo-induced carriers from the extra states created. Fig. 13 shows the photo leakage current spectrum of the light source in the range of 350–750 nm at lower bias after hot carrier stress. Furthermore, it is observed that the electron-hole pairs created via shallow subgap improved the long wavelength absorption. Nevertheless, in the gate-drain overlap depletion region, because the channel area

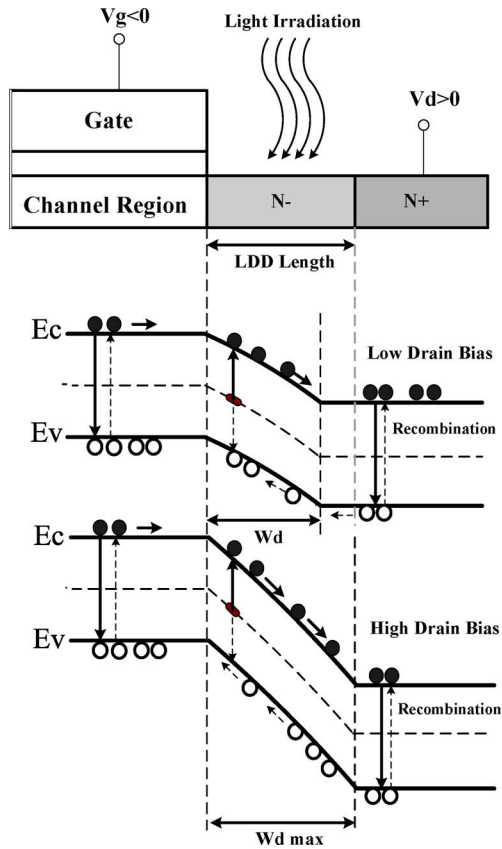


Fig. 11. Proposed model of the ULC mechanism for LTPS TFTs.

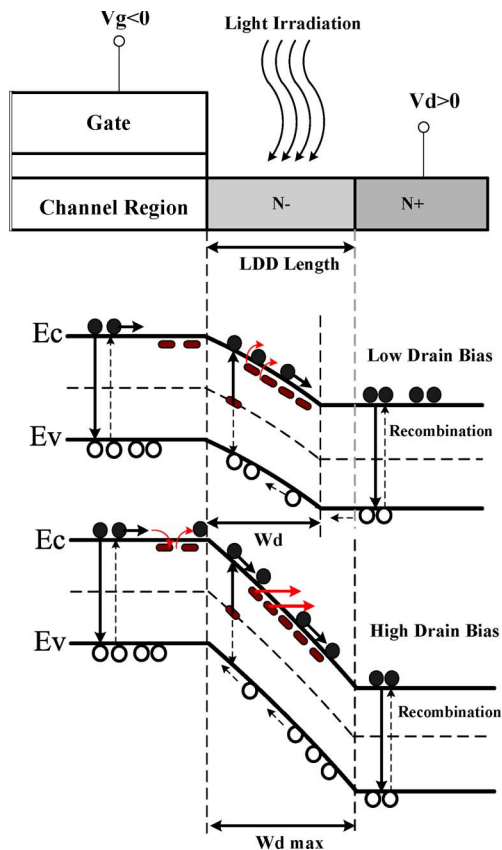


Fig. 12. Proposed hot carrier degradation model of the ULC mechanism for TFTs.

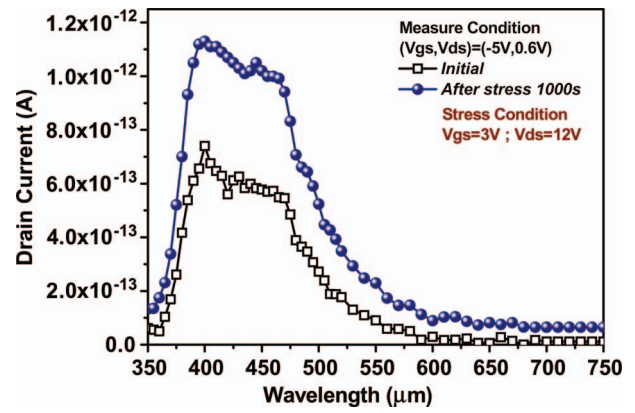


Fig. 13. Photo leakage current spectrum of the light source in the range of 350–750 nm at lower bias after hot carrier stress.

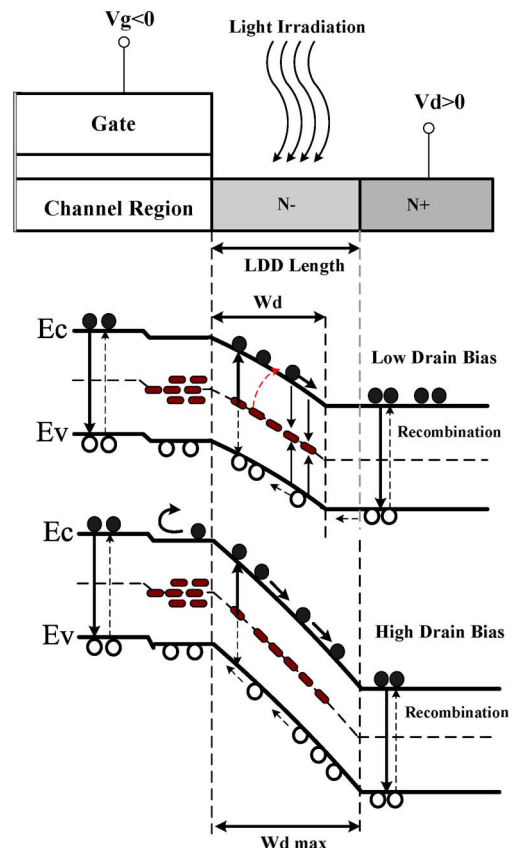


Fig. 14. Proposed self-heating degradation model of the ULC mechanism for TFTs.

is shielded by the gate metal, the photo-excited carriers was not induced by the irradiation stream. Meanwhile, the excess tail states close to the conduction and valence bands make the hopping of carriers by trap-assisted and Poole-Frenkel tunneling difficult [19].

Considering that the poly-Si TFTs are derived after self-heating degradation, Fig. 14 shows the band diagrams under the condition of $V_g < 0$ along the channel direction near the drain region at high drain biases. The symbols at midgap energy level are additional nonuniform defects. When the devices are derived after self heating stress, the high temperature in the poly-Si film can release hydrogen and cause plenty of dangling bonds

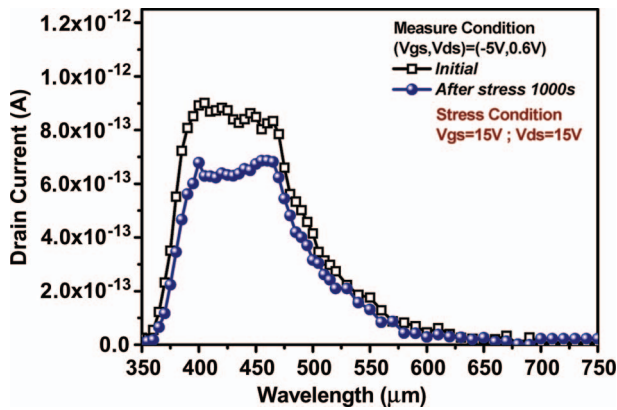


Fig. 15. Photo leakage current spectrum of the light source in the range of 350–750 nm at lower bias after self-heating stress.

to become deep states. These deep states near the mid level, in the lateral depletion region, can recombine the electron–hole pairs generated by irradiation. Although the photo-induced carriers might also excite due to the extra defects, the total current is eventually reduced by much recombination deep states. Fig. 15 provides the photo leakage current spectrum of the light source in the range of 350–750 nm at lower bias after self heating stress. It is noticed that the photo leakage current certainly decreased. On the other hand, in the gate–drain overlap depletion region, the hole concentration of the channel/LDD junction formed an abrupt p^+n^- junction accumulated by the gate electrodes. The accumulated holes captured by the extra deep states in the gate–drain overlap region slightly allow hole concentration. It makes channel/LDD junction with an abrupt high–low junction (p^+pn^- junction in this case). In addition, the p^+p junction forms a low-resistance ohmic contact for majority carriers (holes). The minority carriers (electrons) therefore considered relatively lower recombination velocity. This phenomenon causes ULC_2 to not dramatically decrease after self heating stress.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have applied hot carrier and self-heating stress conditions to correlate the photosensitivity with different types of defects on LTPS TFTs. This analysis allows us to understand the role of the different types of defects that result in anomalous photo current. Furthermore, based on both trap-assisted and Poole–Frenkel effects, a modified defect-related ULC model for TFT has been proposed to explain the illumination behaviors corresponding to the defects created by dc stress near the drain region. The empirical equation of ULC provides a potential modeling for simulation of LTPS TFT circuitry considering the photo effect after dc stress.

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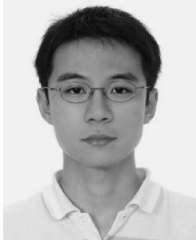


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