

Strained-SiGe Complementary MOSFETs Adopting Different Thicknesses of Silicon Cap Layers for Low Power and High Performance Applications

Bongki Mheen, Young-Joo Song, Jin-Young Kang, and Songcheol Hong

We introduce a strained-SiGe technology adopting different thicknesses of Si cap layers towards low power and high performance CMOS applications. By simply adopting 3 and 7 nm thick Si-cap layers in n-channel and p-channel MOSFETs, respectively, the transconductances and driving currents of both devices were enhanced by 7 to 37% and 6 to 72%. These improvements seemed responsible for the formation of a lightly doped retrograde high-electron-mobility Si surface channel in nMOSFETs and a compressively strained high-hole-mobility $\text{Si}_{0.8}\text{Ge}_{0.2}$ buried channel in pMOSFETs. In addition, the nMOSFET exhibited greatly reduced subthreshold swing values (that is, reduced standby power consumption), and the pMOSFET revealed greatly suppressed $1/f$ noise and gate-leakage levels. Unlike the conventional strained-Si CMOS employing a relatively thick (typically $> 2 \mu\text{m}$) $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ relaxed buffer layer, the strained-SiGe CMOS with a very thin (20 nm) $\text{Si}_{0.8}\text{Ge}_{0.2}$ layer in this study showed a negligible self-heating problem. Consequently, the proposed strained-SiGe CMOS design structure should be a good candidate for low power and high performance digital/analog applications.

Keywords: SiGe, strained-Si, strained-SiGe, hetero-structure MOSFET.

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I. Introduction

The aggressive device scaling of complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) devices has significantly improved the device's operating speed and power consumption in digital and analog ICs, expanding its application to the RF and optical communication arena where the compound and SiGe bipolar technology have dominated [1], [2]. CMOS scaling, however, is facing a number of obstacles known as short channel effects, making it very difficult to sustain the trend of device performance improvements. To overcome the scaling obstacles in a conventional Si CMOS, channel engineering using $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ layers has been tried and extensively studied [3]-[6]. In the approach, the 4.2% lattice mismatch between Si and Ge has been used to create tensile and/or compressive forces in Si and $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ layers in order to introduce additional performance enhancements, which cannot be achievable by a simple device scaling at the sub-100 nm device feature size. Therefore, as found in the 2003 International Technology Roadmap for Semiconductors, the Si/ $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ CMOS is being considered as one of the key emerging CMOS technologies [7].

The performance enhancement in strained-Si/SiGe CMOS devices primarily depends on improved carrier-transport (that is, larger carrier mobility and high-field velocity [8]) in the strained layers, resulting from the energy band splitting and subsequent effective mass reduction [9]. Up to 170% performance enhancements in drain current, maximum transconductance, and field-effect mobility have been reported for the conventional strained-Si MOSFET, which includes a tensile-strained Si channel on a thick $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ relaxed buffer [5].

However, this device structure suffers from the $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ buffer-related problems. The most significant one is the device performance degradation due to self-heating because of the very low thermal conductivity of $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ material. In addition, the immature and expensive $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ buffer technology is known to significantly deteriorate the production yield and cost. As an alternative choice to alleviate the existing problems in the conventional strained-Si CMOS, the strained- $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ CMOS structure employing a very thin $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ layer (< 20 nm) has been widely studied. Nevertheless, device structure optimizations of the strained $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ CMOS and immunity to self-heating have rarely been reported.

In this paper, we introduce a new strained- $\text{Si}_{0.8}\text{Ge}_{0.2}$ CMOS device structure utilizing different thicknesses of Si-cap layers in n-channel and p-channel MOSFETs, without incorporating a relatively thick $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ buffer. Using the proposed structure, while a compressively strained SiGe epi layer is used for hole mobility enhancement in p-channel MOSFETs, a relatively thick low doped Si-cap layer is used for the electron channel in an n-channel MOSFET to enhance electron mobility by lightly doped retrograde channel effect [10]. This device structure was proven to be easily adopted in a commercial CMOS process without a significant increase of cost. The resultant device performances were investigated after a brief review of the challenges in strained Si and $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ CMOS approaches.

II. Strained-Si vs. Strained-SiGe

The strained-Si technology enhances electron mobility substantially through biaxial tensile strain. Some drawbacks exist, however, and can be summarized as i) low thermal conductivity of $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ (pure Si : $\text{Si}_{0.8}\text{Ge}_{0.2} = 15 : 1$), ii) integration difficulties of pMOSFETs (larger than 50% of Ge mole-fraction in the $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ buffer is required to increase hole mobility), iii) significantly larger defect densities in the $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ buffer ($> 10^4$ cm^{-2}), iv) increased junction capacitance and leakage by a high dielectric constant and narrow energy band gap of $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$, and v) cost increase due to the $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ buffer. Even though there are several modifications to the conventional strained-Si technology to alleviate these problems, the poor thermal conductivity is considered as a key obstacle because of the hot electron channel and increased operating temperature of recent ICs. As known, the increased channel temperature degrades the carrier mobility significantly due to lattice scattering, which indeed makes the mobility enhancement in a strained channel meaningless [4]. The much lower thermal conductivity of $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$, compared to pure Si and pure Ge, is known to originate from the mismatch in acoustic impedance between Si and Ge [11]. The thermal conductivity of $\text{Si}_{0.8}\text{Ge}_{0.2}$ is about $5.1 \text{ Wm}^{-1} \text{ K}^{-1}$, while the

thermal conductivities of Si and Ge are $148 \text{ Wm}^{-1} \text{ K}^{-1}$ and $60 \text{ Wm}^{-1} \text{ K}^{-1}$, respectively [12]. Considering the $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ buffer layer thickness ($> 2 \mu\text{m}$) for full relaxations, its influence on the device's self-heating cannot be neglected [13]. Consequently, with a thick $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ buffer, there is no way to prevent device performance degradation due to self-heating, as similarly seen in Si-on-insulator MOSFETs.

Meanwhile, the strained-SiGe CMOS can easily increase the hole mobility through introducing a biaxial compressive strain by simply inserting a very thin (< 20 nm) $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ layer in the conventional Si CMOS structure at a lower cost. The remaining problem in the strained-SiGe design is the electron mobility enhancement in n-channel MOSFETs because the electron effective mass is relatively large in a compressively strained $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ layer [9]. In this study, using different Si-cap layer thicknesses (7 nm for nMOSFET, 3 nm for pMOSFET), both electron and hole mobility enhancements were successfully achieved.

III. Device Fabrication and Measurements

Prior to $\text{Si}/\text{Si}_{0.8}\text{Ge}_{0.2}/\text{Si}$ hetero-epitaxy, n-well and local oxidation isolation were formed on three *identical* Si substrates using the conventional $0.5 \mu\text{m}$ Si CMOS process. After opening active areas, $\text{Si}/\text{Si}_{0.8}\text{Ge}_{0.2}/\text{Si}$ epi-layers were grown on two of the wafers (B08 and B09) by reduced pressure chemical vapor deposition, and one remaining wafer was used as a Si control (B12). A thin Si cap layer was typically required to avoid the segregation and oxidation of Ge during thermal gate oxidation. The epitaxial structures of $\text{Si}_{0.8}\text{Ge}_{0.2}$ and Si MOSFETs in this study are shown and described in Fig. 1(a) and Table 1, respectively. Unlike the conventional strained-Si device, shown in Fig. 1(b), with a thick $\text{Si}_x\text{Ge}_{1-x}$ buffer ($> 2 \mu\text{m}$), the strained-SiGe had a thin (20 nm) $\text{Si}_{0.8}\text{Ge}_{0.2}$ layer below the two different Si-cap layers. The gate oxidation in H_2/O_2 ambient at 800°C ($\text{H}_2 : \text{O}_2 = 2 : 1$) for 12 minutes was done to produce a 7 nm thick gate-oxide. The unconsumed Si-cap layer thicknesses were measured to be 3 and 7 nm for B08 and B09, respectively, using transmission electron microscopy. No strain relaxation of the $\text{Si}_{0.8}\text{Ge}_{0.2}$ layer was observed after the oxidation. The in-situ phosphorus-doped ($> 10^{19} \text{ cm}^{-3}$) poly-Si by reduced pressure chemical vapor deposition at 550°C was used as a gate material. The samples were characterized by an on-wafer test using an HP4156B semiconductor parameter analyzer for DC measurements. The $1/f$ noise was measured by a set-up using an Agilent E4440A spectrum analyzer with an EG&G 5185 wideband low noise preamplifier for 10 Hz to 1 MHz. The normalized drain current spectral density (S_I/I_d^2) was derived from the fluctuation in drain voltage (V_{ds}) at the bias condition of $V_{ds} = -0.1 \text{ V}$ and $V_{gs} = V_{th} - 0.7 \text{ V}$. The

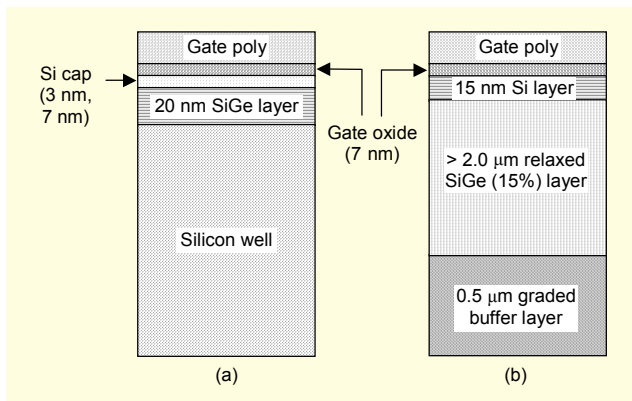


Fig. 1. Structure of (a) strained-Si and (b) strained-SiGe channels.

Table 1. Device species fabricated.

Species	Si cap (nm)	SiGe (nm)	T _{ox} (nm)	Notes	
Si	B12	X	X	7	Conventional Si MOSFET
Si _{0.8} Ge _{0.2}	B08	4	20	7	Standard strained-SiGe MOSFET
	B09	7	20	7	B08 with approx. 3 nm thicker Si cap

number of averages used in the 1/f noise measurement was 50. All measurements were performed at room temperature.

IV. Results and Discussion

Prior to detailed device characterization, self-heating properties of the Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} CMOS were estimated by measuring the device's current-voltage (IV) characteristics both in DC (duty = 99%) and pulsed mode (duty = 1%), as shown in Fig. 2. Contrary to the reported self-heating problem in strained-Si MOSFETs [13], the pulsed IV behavior was nearly the same as in DC IV, ignoring a little deviation due to measurement noise. This indicates that the thin Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} layer (20 nm) was sufficiently thin to emit the electron thermal energy in the channel to silicon substrates. This shows that the strained-Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} CMOS in this study had negligible self-heating problems during device operation.

As shown in Fig. 3 and Table 2, the strained-Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} CMOS with a thinner Si-cap layer (B08) exhibited the increased transconductance and driving current for the pMOSFET case, while the nMOSFET showed degraded properties, compared with the standard Si CMOS (B12). To investigate the carrier (electron) distribution in Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} nMOSFETs in this study, device simulations using SILVACO were conducted at the given gate bias. Figure 4 illustrates the conduction band profile of both Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} devices. As seen, the conduction band offset due to the Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} layer was negligible

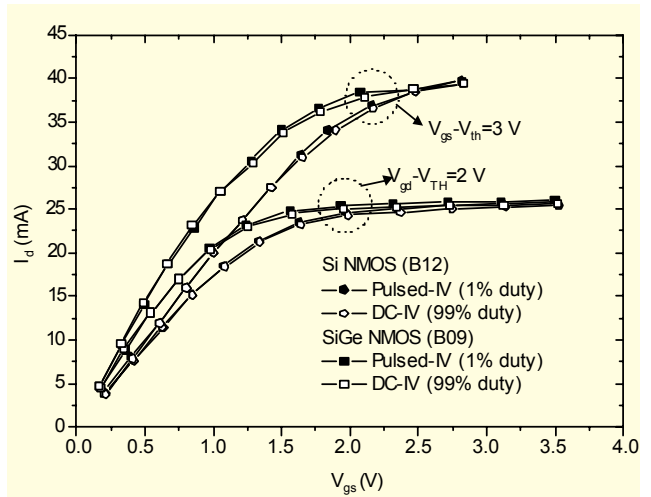


Fig. 2. Comparison of DC- and pulsed-IV characteristics of strained-Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} nMOSFET.

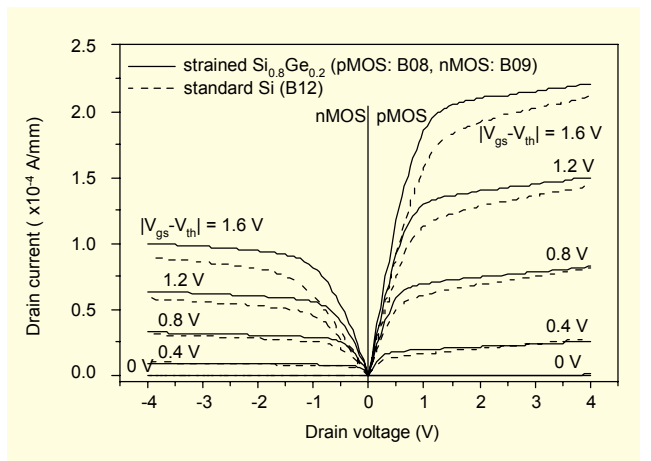


Fig. 3. IV characteristics of Si (B12) and strained-SiGe (B08) channel CMOS devices measured at equivalent V_{gs} .

because of its similar electron affinity value to that of the Si (thus, the band offset mainly occurs in a valence band). We found that more than 50% of the carriers existed in the Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} layer for a device with a thinner oxide (B08), whereas less than 15% of those existed in the layer for a device with a thicker oxide (B09). This implies that the Si-cap layer thickness of 3 nm in the Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} nMOSFET was not thick enough to include most of the inversion layer carriers in the Si-cap layer, which in turn indicates that electrons partially flow through the lower-electron-mobility region (electron mobility tends to degrade in a compressively strained Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} layer [9]).

The resultant transconductance reduction was 12%. However, by increasing the unconsumed Si-cap layer thickness from 3 to 7 nm in the sample B09, the transconductance of the nMOSFET was increased from 1.5 to 1.83 mS (a 22% improvement). This reflected that the 7 nm thick Si-cap layer

Table 2. DC characteristics of Si and Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} channel devices.

Type	Parameters	Unit	Si			
			B12	B08	B09	
NMOS	gm (sat.)	mS	1.71	1.50	1.83	
	DIBL	mV/V	36.69	10.45	12.52	
	S.S.	V _{ds} =0.1V	mV/dec	72.0	72.1	69.5
		V _{ds} =3.0V		80.5	71.5	68.3
	I _d (sat.)	mA	5.82	4.81	6.18	
PMOS	gm (sat.)	mS	0.73	1.00	0.72	
	DIBL	mV/V	19.31	4.69	10.45	
	S.S.	V _{ds} =0.1V	mV/dec	75.8	82.8	83.0
		V _{ds} =3.0V		73.4	82.4	81.7
	I _d (sat.)	mA	1.45	2.50	1.61	

DIBL: drain induced barrier lowering, S.S.: sub-threshold slope

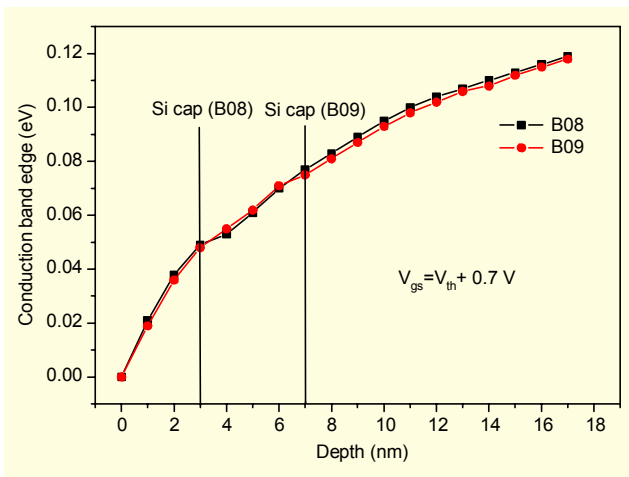


Fig. 4. Electron distribution in Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} nMOSFETs resulted from SILVACO device simulation.

could be used as a high-electron-mobility channel, which enhanced its transconductance value even superiorly to the standard Si nMOSFET (a 7% improvement). The transconductance enhancement in the Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} device with a thicker Si-cap layer over the standard Si device could be explained by the more lightly-doped channel in the device (that is, the impurity scattering is reduced) rather than the possible tensile-strained enhanced electron mobility by the SiGe epitaxial layer. The secondary ion mass depth profile of boron concentrations for sample B09 in Fig. 5 explained that the Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} layer in the device acted as an effective boron diffusion barrier [14], preventing boron out-diffusion into the Si-cap layer during epitaxy and subsequent annealing processes. This device design concept was similar to that of the

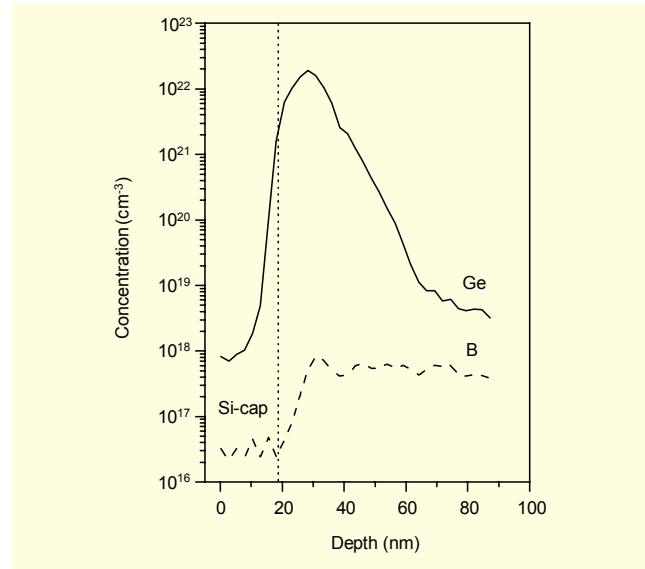


Fig. 5. SIMS depth profile of boron concentrations in n-channel MOSFET using Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} epitaxial layer.

Si MOSFET with a retrograde structure [10], in which a specially formed lightly-doped channel could minimize both impurity scattering and short channel effects.

In pMOSFET cases, it is well known that a compressively strained SiGe channel increases hole mobility [9], and this was also verified in this study such that the device's transconductance was enhanced from 0.73 mS (B12) to 1.0 mS (B08, a 37% improvement). Using a thicker Si-cap layer (B09), the transconductance was not enhanced significantly in this experiment because it is too far to affect the holes in the SiGe valence band offset (that is, the hole density in the SiGe layer is reduced). Consequently, by simply applying 7 and 3 nm of Si-cap thicknesses to n-channel and p-channel MOSFETs, respectively, the transconductance could be enhanced by 7 and 37%, when compared with those of the standard Si CMOS.

The subthreshold characteristics of Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} and Si CMOS are shown in Fig. 6. It shows that the subthreshold swing in Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} nMOSFETs is reduced to 70 mV/dec nearly independent of V_{ds}, which results in standby power consumption reduction in digital applications because the leakage current in higher supply voltage can be reduced substantially. This attributes to the lightly-doped channel (retrograde structure), resulting in the channel carrier confinement, which is supposed to reduce junction leakage currents when the device is operated in the subthreshold regime. Meanwhile, the subthreshold swing of the Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} pMOSFET was slightly degraded because the inversion-charge centroid was further away from the gate (buried channel) [9]. However, the drain-induced barrier lowering in the Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} pMOSFETs is improved to 4.69 mV/V, while that in Si-control is 19.31 mV/V, because of the channel confinement

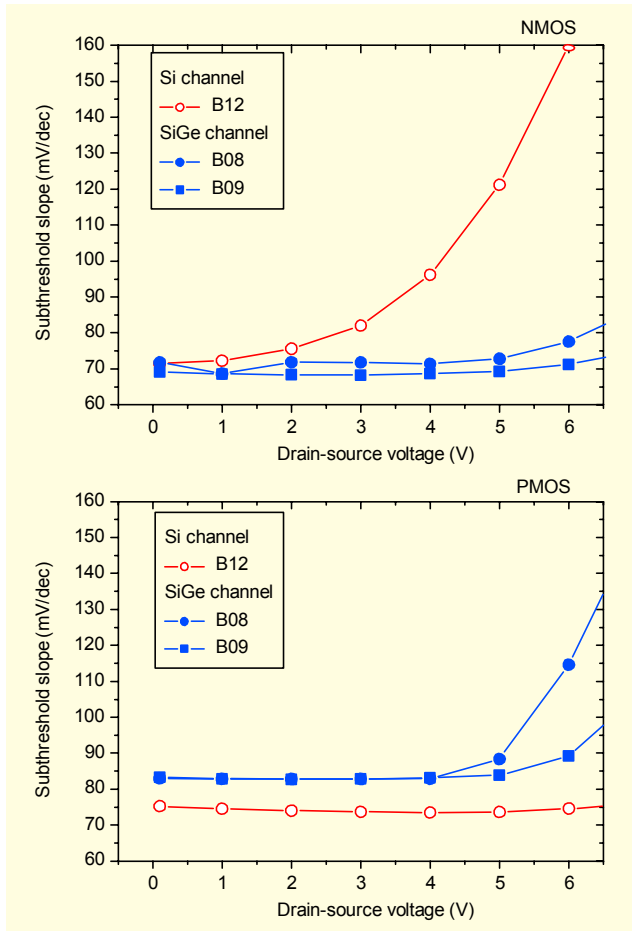


Fig. 6. Sub-threshold slope of strained-SiGe and strained-Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} CMOS devices.

effect as proposed in the simulation results [15].

The low frequency noise ($1/f$ noise) and gate leakage current properties in Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} and Si pMOSFETs were measured and compared in Figs. 7(a) and 7(b), respectively. The low frequency noise (normalized drain current noise level) in the Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} device was reduced by about 1/100 [16], compared with that in the Si device even though the measurement was limited by a system noise limitation below 10 kHz. Judged from the fact that the $1/f$ noise magnitude was reduced while the slope was sustained, it could be thought that the $1/f$ noise mechanism was not changed and only the effective defect density was reduced. This improvement may be explained by two main reasons. One reason is due to the hole confinement in the Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} buried channel, which separates the channel charge from the oxide traps at the gate oxide surface [17]. Since the probability of direct tunneling is known to be low even at a 1 nm thick unconsumed Si-cap thickness [14], the 3 nm thick Si cap is sufficient to prevent the direct tunneling to the oxide traps. The other reason is the reduction of effective oxide trap density [18], because the involved oxide-trap density close

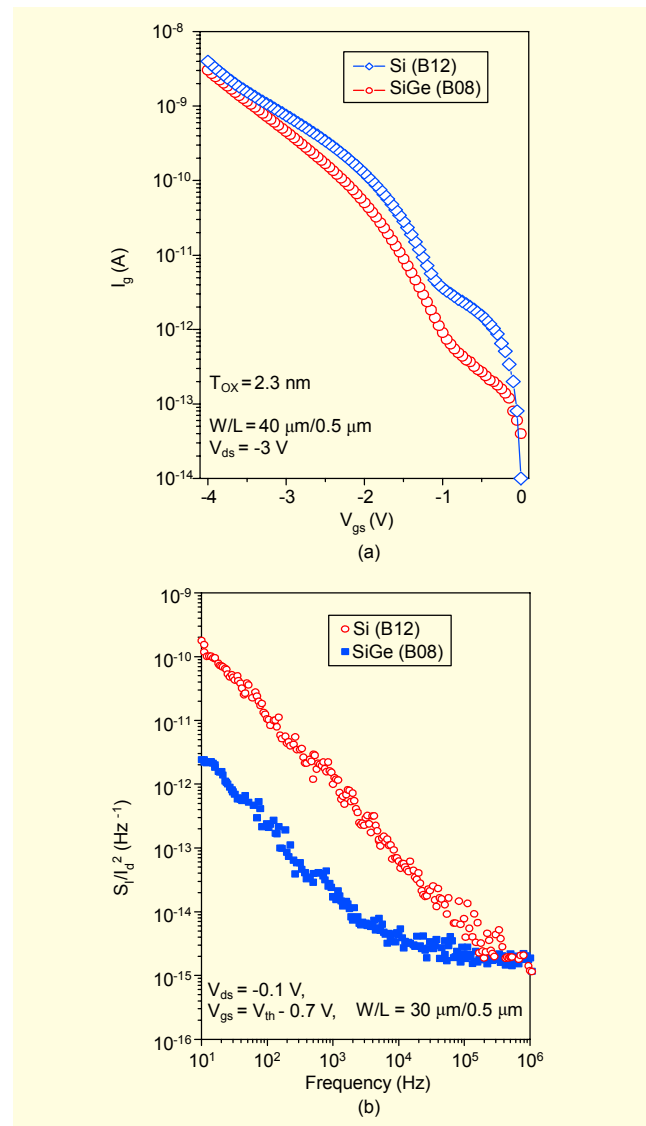


Fig. 7. Properties of (a) $1/f$ noise and (b) gate leakage in a strained-Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} pMOSFET.

to the Fermi level is much lower in the Si_{0.8}Ge_{0.2} pMOSFET by larger displacement of the hole quasi-Fermi level from the valence band edge at the oxide interface. Additionally, the enhanced transconductance also contributes to reduction of the normalized drain current noise level. Actually, the low frequency noise is one of the formidable problems in device scaling because the current noise spectral density can be increased by about more than a factor of L^{-3} as the gate length is shrunken [19]. Considering that the $1/f$ noise mainly affects the knotty design problems such as DC offsets in direct-conversion receivers, the reduced $1/f$ noise is expected to relieve the design constraints. The gate leakage current was also reduced over 0.3 at the direct tunneling regime because of the buried hole channel due to the valence band offset, as

shown in Fig. 7(b).

Finally, Figs. 8(a) through 8(d) illustrate one of the possible device fabrication sequences that selectively reduce the Si-cap layer thickness for pMOSFET.

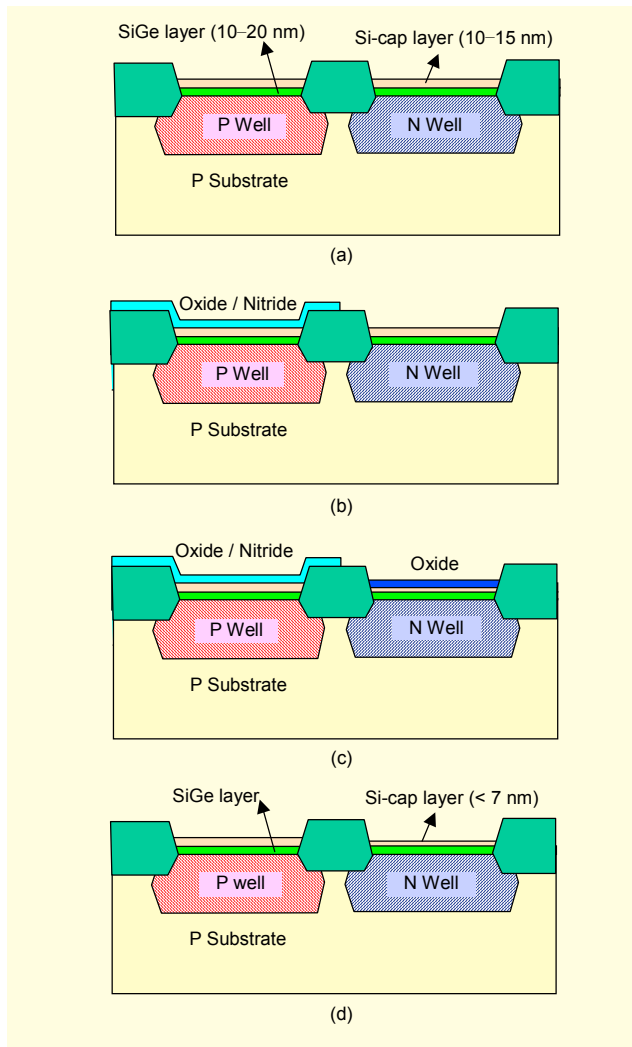


Fig. 8. Illustrative device fabrication sequences accommodating the difference in Si-cap layer thickness for nMOSFET and pMOSFET, simultaneously: (a) selective epitaxial growth of SiGe (10–20 nm) and Si-cap (10–15 nm) layers on active regions, (b) oxide/nitride deposition and active area opening in n-well region, (c) selective oxidation of the Si-cap layer for pMOSFETs, and (d) oxide/nitride removing.

V. Conclusion

In this paper, strained-SiGe complementary MOSFETs using different Si-cap layer thicknesses were proposed and fabricated for low power and high performance applications. Unlike the strained-Si devices which suffer from a self-heating problem, the proposed strained-SiGe CMOS devices with different Si-cap layers improved transconductance, leakage power, and 1/f

noise without self-heating or significant increase of fabrication cost. By simply inserting a strained-SiGe epitaxial layer in the conventional CMOS structure, the transconductance of n-channel and p-channel MOSFETs are enhanced by 7 and 37%, respectively, compared with conventional Si CMOS devices, with several enhancements (lower drain leakage current, lower 1/f noise, and lower gate leakage current). This indicates that high-performance and low power properties can be achieved by the present strained-SiGe CMOS technology towards advanced digital/analog applications.

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