

Single-Mode High-Speed 1550 nm Wafer Fused VCSELs for Narrow WDM Systems

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Abstract—High power single-mode wafer fused 1550 nm VCSELs with an active region based on InGaAs quantum wells are fabricated. An InP-based optical cavity and two AlGaAs/GaAs distributed Bragg reflector heterostructures were grown by molecular-beam epitaxy. The current and optical confinements are provided by a lateral-structured buried tunnel junction with $\sim 6 \mu\text{m}$ diameter and etching depth of $\sim 20 \text{ nm}$. The VCSELs demonstrate $\sim 3.4 \text{ mW}$ single-mode continuous-wave output optical power and a threshold current about 2 mA at 20°C. The output optical power exceeds 1 mW at 70°C. A -3 dB modulation bandwidth $> 13 \text{ GHz}$ is obtained at 20°C. Non-return-to-zero data transmission under back-to-back condition of $\sim 37 \text{ Gbps}$ is shown.

Index Terms—Vertical-cavity surface-emitting lasers (VCSELs), wafer fusion, optical modulation, InP, optical interconnects.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE infrastructure of more recent data centers is emerging to a coexistence between multimode fibers and single-mode fibers (SMF) enabling WDM (Wavelength-Division Multiplexing) solutions. Thus, both larger capacity and longer reach is achieved as the data centers grow in both size and traffic [1], [2]. The spectral efficiency of data center networks can be further increased by using SDM (Spatial Division Multiplexing) technique based on multicore fibers (MCF) or few-mode fibers (FMF) [3], [4], [5]. Moreover, LW SM VCSELs reduce the negative effect of modal and chromatic dispersion in an optical link. As a result, C-band VCSELs are promising for next generation giga data centers, where optical links based on SM fibers with longer transmission distances are important, in particular for wavelength multiplexing [6]. Additionally, SDM transmission through MCFs using long-wavelength (LW) VCSELs are enabling large-scale data center networks [7]. Therefore, 1550 nm SM VCSELs show a great potential not only for next-generation short-reach optical interconnects, but also for SDM transceivers. A 50+ Gbps per channel capacity up to 116 km distance based on direct modulated 1550 nm VCSEL with discrete multitone format has been demonstrated [8]. Moreover, a 200-Gbps transmission over 100-meter multi-mode fiber with direct detection and 28-km few-mode fiber using a 1550 nm 2-D VCSEL matrix with coherent detection were presented as well [9]. The development of the monolithic (grown in a single epitaxial process) LW VCSELs is challenging due to critical limitations inherent to InAlGaAsP/InP [10] and InAlGaAs/GaAs material systems.

There are two major technologies for the fabrication of high-speed 1550 nm VCSELs, actively using a buried tunnel junction (BTJ) concept (both schematically represented in Ref. 11). The first one involves a hybrid integration of an InP-based optical cavity with dielectric distributed Bragg reflectors (DBR) [12], [13], [14], [15], [16]. One of the unique features of the VCSELs developed by the Vertilas/TUM team is to use thick (about 50 μm) galvanic gold as a substrate. The second one involves direct wafer fusion (WF) of an InP-based optical cavity with two GaAs-based DBRs [17], [18]. The EPFL team fabricated full wafers of WF VCSELs

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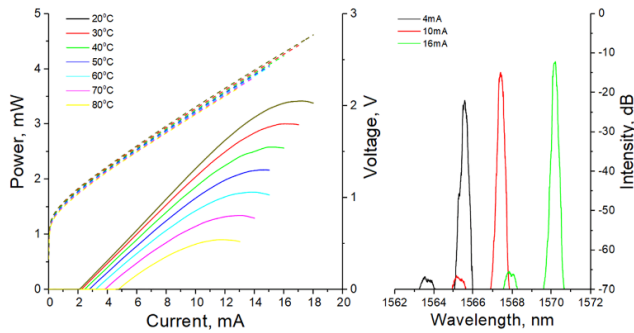


Fig. 2. CW LIV characteristics measured at 20–90°C and the lasing spectra at 20°C and at various drive currents.

the dynamic device performance in relation with previously MBE-grown 1550 nm WF VCSELS [25].

III. VCSEL CHARACTERIZATION

A. Static Characteristics

The CW light-current-voltage (LIV) characteristics measured at various heatsink temperatures are shown in Figure 2. At 20°C the lasers demonstrate CW operation with a threshold current of less than 2.1 mA and a differential efficiency of more than 0.27 W/A (equivalent to ~21%). The threshold voltage is 1.1 V. The maximum wall plug efficiency (WPE) is ~11%. The maximum output optical power of about 3.4 mW was achieved at 17 mA. The lasing spectra measured at 20°C demonstrate single-mode lasing with a side mode suppression ratio (SMSR) of more than 45 dB (cf. Figure 2, right panel). Note that high-speed 1550 nm hybrid short-cavity VCSELS based on thick InAlGaAs QWs and n⁺-InGaAs/p⁺-In(Al)GaAs BTJ demonstrate SM lasing only for BTJ apertures less than 5 μm, while the maximum SM output optical power (SMSR ≥ 40 dB) does not exceed 2.4 mW, which is associated with a strong waveguide effect in such a laser structure [16]. At 70°C we observed a decrease in the maximum output optical power to ~1 mW accompanied by a threshold current increase to 3.9 mA. The maximum WPE value at 70°C is 6%. The estimated value of the maximum lasing temperature is about 95°C.

B. Small Signal Modulation

Electrical reflection (S_{11} parameter) and small-signal modulation response (S_{21} parameter) were measured using a Rodhe & Schwarz ZVA 40 network analyzer and a 25 GHz New Focus 1434 photodetector. To extract the key intrinsic parameters of the VCSEL, we used a three-pole transfer function describing the laser response to sinusoidal modulation of the drive current at a certain frequency f : $H(f) \propto f_R^2 / (f_R^2 - f^2 + j\gamma(f/2\pi))(1 + j(f/f_p))$, where f_R is the relaxation resonance frequency, γ is the intrinsic damping factor (damping), f_p is the parasitic cutoff frequency of the low-frequency filter formed by the capacitors and resistances of the laser. The results of small-signal frequency analysis and the intrinsic modulation parameters extracted from the measured $S_{21}(f)$ at 20°C are shown in Figure 3. The extracted -3dB modulation bandwidth f_{-3dB} (at which frequency response drops by -3 dB) reaches 12 GHz at a drive current of more than 10 mA with a modulation current efficiency (expressed by $MCEF = f_{-3dB} / (I - I_{th})^{0.5}$) of 4.5 GHz/(mA)^{0.5} (see Figure 3(b)). The relaxation resonance frequency f_R does not exceed the -3dB modulation bandwidth in the whole current range. The rate of increase of the f_R with

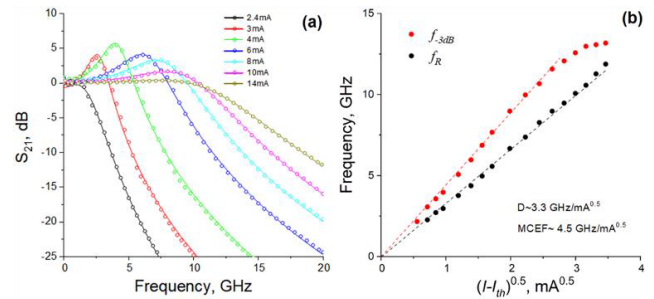


Fig. 3. (a) Measured (points) small signal modulation response S_{21} and the corresponding curve-fits (solid lines) for different drive currents; (b) relaxation resonance frequency f_R and -3dB modulation bandwidth f_{-3dB} as function of the squared root of the drive current above threshold. The temperature of measurements was 20°C.

the square root of the drive current above lasing threshold, the so-called D -factor, reflecting the level of differential gain and mode volume (expressed by $D = f_R / (I - I_{th})^{0.5}$), reaches 3.3 GHz/(mA)^{0.5}.

At moderate photon densities the intrinsic damping factor γ on the square of the relaxation resonance frequency f_R^2 dependence can be well described by a linear function ($\gamma = K f_R^2 + \gamma_0$). The K -factor reaches 0.45 ns, which is larger than that for 1550 nm VCSELS based on thick InAlGaAs QWs and InAlGaAs TJ [18] and 1550 nm WF VCSELS based on InGaAs QWs and InAlGaAs TJ [27] showing similar differential efficiencies.

In case of dominance of damping, the maximum theoretically achievable modulation bandwidth is estimated to be 20 GHz, while in the case of dominance of thermal effects, the maximum theoretically achievable modulation bandwidth does not exceed 18 GHz. Modeling the frequency dependence $S_{11}(f)$, showed a strong decrease in the parasitic capacitance of the reverse-biased p⁺n-junction region due to a significant reduction in the 2nd mesa size, which made it possible to increase the parasitic cut-off frequency up to 13–14 GHz. As clearly shown in Figure 3(a), the frequency response becomes overdamped at high photon density (more than 10 mA).

Note that these values present a record for 1550 nm VCSELS fabricated by the WF technology, regardless of the active region type or TJ use [18], [25], [26]. It should be noted that these results are inferior to the results obtained for a 1550 nm hybrid short-cavity VCSELS [16], where the device design allows not only to minimize the parasitic capacitance, but also to significantly reduce the mode volume.

C. Large Signal Modulation

To study large signal modulation performance of 1550 nm WF VCSELS the signal was generated by a SHF 12105A bit pattern generator, amplified by a SHF 827B amplifier followed by a tunable 3 dB attenuator. A pseudorandom binary sequence with a word length of 27⁻¹ was chosen. The emission of the VCSEL was coupled to the cleaved end of a 3 meter SMF. An isolator was used to suppress optical reflections. A 42 GHz Thorlabs RXM42AF optical probe was used to convert the oscilloscope. In Figure 4, we present large signal modulation measurement results at 20°C. Clear open eye diagrams (left-hand side of Figure 4) are obtained. The bit-error ratio (BER) characteristics for crosstalk (bath tub curves), which are shown on the right-hand side of Figure 4 can be used to extract the jitter. By applying 16 mA bias current and 300 mV modulation voltage, a record NRZ data rate for WF 1550 nm

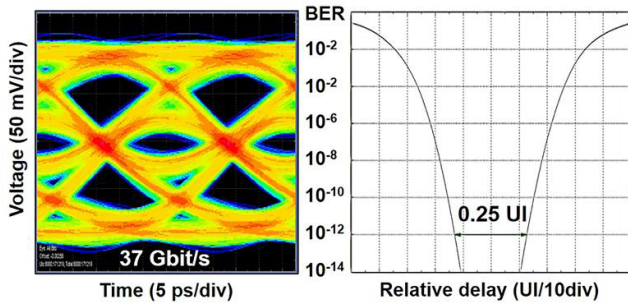


Fig. 4. Eye diagram (left) and bit error ratio (right) bathtub curve for a data rate of 37 Gbps across a 3 m SMF. The temperature of measurements was 20°C.

VCSELs of 37 Gbps under back-to-back (BTB) condition was observed (left-hand side in Figure 4). We observe 0.25 UI (6.75 ps) of eye opening and 75% total jitter (20.27 ps) at $\text{BER}=10^{-12}$ (right-hand side in Figure 4). Previously data rates up to 25 Gbps has been presented for MBE-grown 1550 nm WF VCSELs [25]. Moreover, for MOVPE-grown 1550 nm WF VCSELs the modulation performance is modest (approximately 10 Gbps [18]).

IV. CONCLUSION

Both the structure design as well as the mesa design were modified aimed to improve the dynamic device performance of MBE-grown 1550 nm WF VCSELs. The composite In(Al)GaAs BTJ has been optimized both in terms of enabling MBE-overgrowth of the surface relief formed in TJ and in terms of achieving a compromise between the small mode volume and the high SM output optical power. Doping of the overgrown n-InP layer was selected to achieve a compromise between low electrical resistance and high parasitic cut-off frequency. Decrease of parasitic capacitance of the reverse-biased p^+n -junction region outside the BTJ region allowed to raise the parasitic cut-off frequency up to 13–14 GHz, therefore, the key mechanism limiting the high-speed performance of such devices is damping of the relaxation oscillation. As a result, VCSELs with optimized both the structure design as well as device topology have shown more than 13 GHz modulation bandwidth and a 37 Gbps NRZ data transmission under BTB condition. The large output optical power and dynamic characteristics of studied 1550 nm InGaAs QW-based WF VCSELs indicate their potential for large distance transmission (e.g. 1 km), where a high bit rate keeping SM behavior is necessary in order to operate narrow WDM systems (e.g. 5 nm distance).

Further increase of modulation performance can be related with decrease the parasitic capacitance (by optimization of the top n-InP IC layer doping profile [28]) as well as photon lifetime adjustment (by changing the top DBR reflectivity) [18], [25].

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