



MOSFET threshold voltage: Definition, extraction, and some applications

Osmar Franca Siebel*, Marcio Cherem Schneider, Carlos Galup-Montoro

Department of Electrical Engineering, Campus Universitário, Federal University of Santa Catarina – UFSC, Trindade, CEP 88040-900, Florianópolis, SC, Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This paper exploits a universal current-based definition of the threshold voltage (V_T) and discusses some direct methods to measure it. The consistency, accuracy, and sensitivity of the extraction procedures to second-order effects are examined through numerical simulations and experimental measurements. In addition to three procedures based on dc current measurements we propose an automatic V_T -extractor circuit which allows the direct determination of the threshold voltage with minimum influence of second-order effects.

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1. Introduction

The threshold voltage V_T of the MOSFET is a fundamental parameter in circuit design and testing, as well as in technology characterization, and should be used whatever the model adopted for the transistor. The classical definition of threshold, the gate voltage at which $\phi_s = 2\phi_F + V$, which links the surface (ϕ_s), the Fermi (ϕ_F), and the channel (V) potentials is indeed ‘surface-potential-based’. Thus, even if a designer is using for circuit simulations a ϕ_s -based model of the transistor that does not explicitly use the threshold voltage as a parameter, he or she must be aware of its value.

V_T represents a physical change in the phenomenon that prevails in the current flow through the device as it goes from weak to strong inversion. Since this transition is very gradual, no specific point can be directly identified as the threshold voltage in the I_D vs. V_G characteristic. This is one of the reasons why many extraction methods of the threshold voltage have been presented in the literature [1]. Another reason is the sometimes poor modeling, since to accurately extract V_T it is essential that the model includes the drift and diffusion transport mechanisms, both important near the threshold condition. Extraction methods based solely on the strong (SI) or weak (WI) inversion models are inherently inaccurate since to determine the threshold voltage (which is found between the SI and WI regions) experimental data are extrapolated from only one of these two operating regions.

This study is based on a universal threshold voltage definition for field-effect transistors. We begin by recalling this general threshold voltage definition (equality between the drift and diffusion components of the drain current) and compare it to the classical surface-potential-based definition.

We then describe three V_T -extraction procedures that can be applied to measured or simulated data. In the constant current (CC) method the MOSFET operates in the saturation region while in the g_{ch}/I_D and g_m/I_D methods the MOS transistor operates in the linear region. The consistency and accuracy of these methods are verified through numerical simulations using MOSFET long-channel models. Next we study how parasitic series resistance, carrier velocity saturation, channel-length modulation (CLM) and drain-induced barrier lowering (DIBL) affect each V_T -extraction method. Experimental results for V_T -extraction are then presented along with examples of applications of V_T measurements to quantify mismatch between transistors and in temperature sensing.

Finally, we present an automatic V_T -extractor circuit based on the g_{ch}/I_D procedure which allows the direct determination of V_T with minimum influence of CLM, DIBL, and carrier velocity saturation.

2. Current-based threshold definition and V_T -extraction methods

The weak inversion current in a MOSFET is essentially due to carrier diffusion, whereas the strong inversion current is mostly due to carrier drift, as shown in Fig. 1. At some point, the drift and diffusion components of the current are equal. Taking this point to define the threshold [2] allows a universal definition of threshold voltage, which can be applied even to intrinsic substrate MOSFETs

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +55 48 3721 7720; fax: +55 48 3721 9280.

E-mail addresses: osiebel@yahoo.com.br (O.F. Siebel), marcio@eel.ufsc.br (M.C. Schneider), carlos@eel.ufsc.br (C. Galup-Montoro).

[3] for which the classical definition of threshold based on the $2\phi_F$ potential drop is meaningless.

The current-based threshold definition is easily understood in the case of bulk MOSFETs, recalling the incrementally linear relationship between the inversion charge density Q'_I and the surface potential ϕ_s [2,4]:

$$dQ'_I = (C'_{ox} + C'_b)d\phi_s = nC'_{ox}d\phi_s \quad (1)$$

where C'_{ox} and C'_b are the oxide and depletion capacitances per unit area, respectively, and n is the slope factor. Since the drift current is proportional to

$$-Q'_I \frac{d\phi_s}{dx} = -\frac{Q'_I dQ'_I}{nC'_{ox} dx} \quad (2)$$

and the diffusion current is proportional to $\phi_t dQ'_I/dx$, both components are equal when $Q'_I = Q'_{Ip} = -nC'_{ox}\phi_t$ [2]. x is the coordinate along the channel and Q'_{Ip} is called the thermal charge density since it is the effective channel capacitance per unit area nC'_{ox} times the thermal voltage ϕ_t . For bulk MOS transistors there is a small difference, of the order of the thermal voltage ϕ_t , between the classical and the current-based threshold voltages, as shown in Table 1 [5]. Thus, if we are interested in the classical

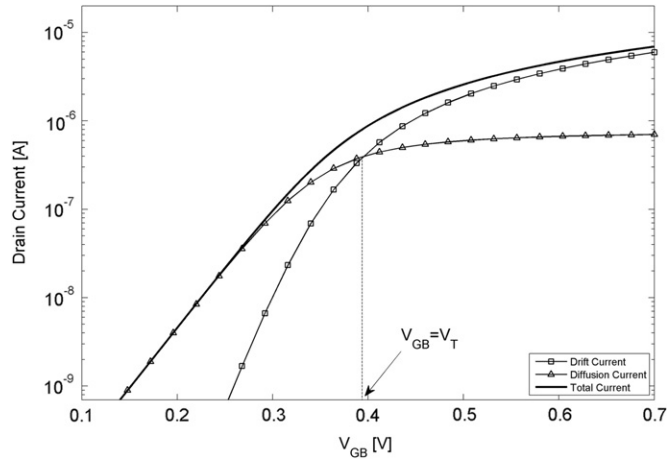


Fig. 1. Drain current and its diffusion and drift components vs. gate voltage for a MOSFET operating in the linear region with $V_{DS} = \phi_t/2 = 13$ mV.

Table 1

Classical and current-based threshold definitions [5].

Physical meaning	Value of ϕ_s at threshold	Value of Q'_I at threshold	Difference in V_T relative to the classical definition
Surface concentration of electrons = bulk concentration of holes	$2\phi_F + V$	$-(n-1)C'_{ox}\phi_t$	0
Drift component = diffusion component of drain current	$2\phi_F + V + \phi_t \ln((n)/(n-1))$	$-nC'_{ox}\phi_t$	$\phi_t [1 + n \ln(\frac{n}{n-1})]$

Table 2

Long-channel MOSFET expressions [3]. I_S is the specific current, i_f is the forward normalized current, i_r is the reverse normalized current, μ is the mobility, W is the channel width, and L is the channel length.

Variable	Expression	
Drain current	$I_D = I_F - I_R = I_S(i_f - i_r)$	(3)
Specific current	$I_S = \mu n C'_{ox} \frac{\phi_t^2 W}{2 L}$	(4)
Source (drain) transconductance	$g_{ms(d)} = -\mu \frac{W}{L} Q'_{IS(D)} = \frac{2I_S}{\phi_t} (\sqrt{1 + i_{f(r)}} - 1)$	(5)
Source (drain)-to-bulk voltage (unified current control model (UICM))	$V_P - V_{S(D)} = \phi_t [\sqrt{1 + i_{f(r)}} - 2 + \ln(\sqrt{1 + i_{f(r)}} - 1)]$	(6)
Pinch-off voltage	$V_P \cong (V_G - V_T)/n$	(7)

definition of threshold (in which case we must have $n > 1$), we can easily correct the value of the current-based threshold using Table 1. In the following we will focus only on the current-based definition of threshold.

2.1. Constant current (CC) procedure

The most direct procedure to extract the current-based threshold voltage is the CC method. In effect, for a saturated long-channel transistor ($i_r = 0$) the drain current is $3I_S$ ($i_f = 3$) and $V_P = V_S$ when the inversion charge density at the source equals Q'_{Ip} , as can be easily verified from Eqs. (3)–(6) in Table 2. Thus, when biasing a MOSFET in the diode connection with a constant drain current ($I_D = 3I_S$) (Fig. 2), we have $V_G = V_T$ for $V_S = 0$.

The procedure is similar to that of the CC method widely used in industry, but in our case the bias current is related to a specific inversion charge density (the thermal charge density). However, the procedure has two drawbacks. First, we must measure or estimate the value of I_S before the method is applied. I_S can be estimated from Eq. (4); even though (4) gives a rough approximation of I_S , it has been shown in [6] that the sensitivity of the extracted V_T with respect to the bias current $3I_S$ is low. Second, the transistor operates in the saturation region, where short-channel effects interfere with the value of the measured threshold

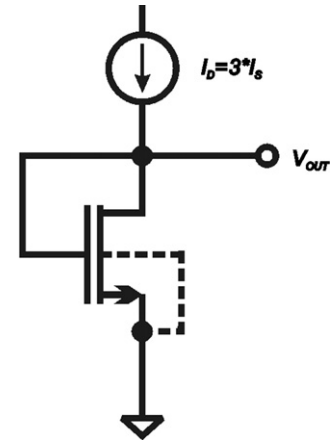


Fig. 2. Common source circuit driven by a constant current source of $3I_S$.

voltage. To circumvent these two drawbacks the g_m/I_D procedure was introduced.

2.2. g_m/I_D procedure

The transconductance-to-current ratio g_m/I_D given by

$$\frac{g_m}{I_D} = \frac{1}{I_D} \frac{dI_D}{dV_G} = \frac{g_{ms} - g_{md}}{nI_D} = \frac{2}{n\phi_t(\sqrt{1+i_f} + \sqrt{1+i_r})} \quad (8)$$

can be easily obtained from Eqs. (3)–(5). In the linear region ($i_f \cong i_r$) Eq.(8) reduces to

$$\frac{g_m}{I_D} \cong \frac{1}{n\phi_t\sqrt{1+i_f}} \quad (9)$$

Thus, if we neglect the variation of the slope factor n with the gate voltage, the channel is under the threshold condition ($i_r \cong i_f = 3$) when the transconductance-to-current ratio g_m/I_D is at half its maximum value. Consequently, we have a direct method that allows us to determine the threshold voltage and the specific current from the g_m/I_D curve in the linear region.

The effect of a non-zero drain-to-source voltage can be included to improve the accuracy. For $V_{DS} = \phi_t/2$ and $i_f = 3$ we obtain $i_r = 2.12$ from Eq. (6). For this value of i_r , V_T is the gate voltage for which $g_m/I_D = 0.531 \cdot (g_m/I_D)_{\max}$ and $I_S = 1.136 \cdot I_D$.

The circuit configuration for the g_m/I_D procedure is shown in Fig. 3. The transconductance-to-current ratio (g_m/I_D) is extracted as a function of the gate voltage for a constant $V_{DS} = \phi_t/2$. Fig. 4

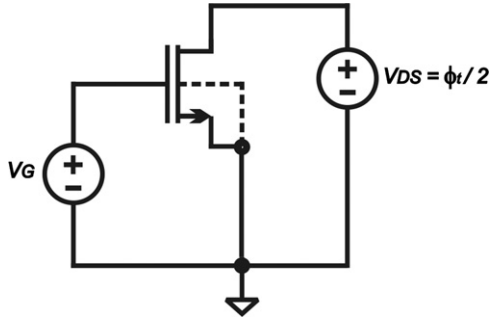


Fig. 3. Circuit configuration for measuring the g_m/I_D characteristic in the linear region.

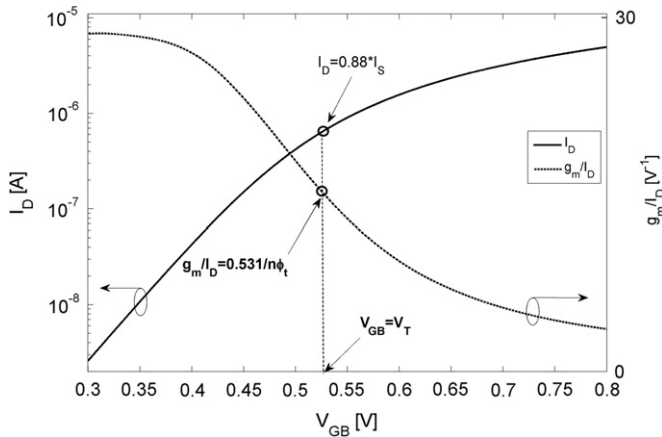


Fig. 4. Experimental measurements of I_D and g_m/I_D as a function of V_G for the circuit in Fig. 3. The circles on the g_m/I_D and I_D plots were used to extract the values of V_T ($=525$ mV) and I_S ($=0.72$ μ A) for an NMOS transistor ($W/L=16$ μ m/ 2 μ m) in a 0.35 μ m CMOS process.

shows the determination of I_S and V_T from the I_D vs. V_G and g_m/I_D vs. V_G curves.

2.3. g_{ch}/I_D procedure

The main drawback of the g_m/I_D method is the variation in the slope factor with V_{GB} . In order to avoid this drawback we can determine the threshold voltage at constant gate-to-substrate voltage and low drain-to-source voltage. The circuit configuration used to determine the channel conductance-to-current ratio g_{ch}/I_D in the linear region is shown in Fig. 5. The drain current (I_D) at a constant drain-to-source voltage ($V_{DS} = \phi_t/2$) is measured as a function of the source voltage (V_S).

For the circuit in Fig. 5, the variation of the drain current is:

$$\Delta I_D = -g_{ms}\Delta V_S + g_{md}\Delta V_D \quad (10)$$

where g_{ms} and g_{md} are the source and drain transconductance, respectively.

Since in our case $\Delta V_D = \Delta V_S$, we can calculate the channel conductance-to-drain current ratio from Eqs. (3) and (5) as

$$\frac{g_{ch}}{I_D} = -\frac{1}{I_D} \frac{dI_D}{dV_S} = \frac{2}{\phi_t(\sqrt{1+i_f} + \sqrt{1+i_r})} \quad (11)$$

For $V_{DS} \ll \phi_t$, $i_f \cong i_r$ and Eq. (11) becomes

$$\frac{g_{ch}}{I_D} = \frac{1}{\phi_t(\sqrt{1+i_f})} \quad (12)$$

Thus, as in the previous case, for $i_f = 3$ the channel conductance-to-current ratio is one-half of the peak value $1/\phi_t$. In order to account for the error introduced by $V_{DS} = \phi_t/2$, we use Eq. (6) to calculate the value of i_r , which equals 2.12. Substituting these values ($i_f = 3$ and $i_r = 2.12$) in (11) we find $g_{ch}/I_D = 0.531/\phi_t$. At this point of the g_{ch}/I_D curve, $V_S = V_P$ and $I_S = 1.136 \cdot I_D$, as can be easily verified using Eqs. (3), (5), and (6).

Finally, V_T is the gate voltage at which the condition $V_P = 0$ holds (see Eq. (7)). The points on the I_D and g_{ch}/I_D curves that are used to determine I_S and V_T are presented in Fig. 6.

Comparing Eqs. (9) and (12), we note that the advantage of the extraction method based on the channel conductance over that based on the gate transconductance is that the former is independent of the slope factor (body factor) since V_{GB} is kept constant during the measurement.

Important characteristics related to the g_m/I_D , g_{ch}/I_D , and CC extraction methods are summarized in Table 3. The CC method is, in principle, the simplest one; however, the transistor operates in the saturation region. Therefore, the CC method is more sensitive to second-order effects (e.g., DIBL, CLM and velocity saturation).

The g_{ch}/I_D and g_m/I_D methods are similar, but the drawback of the g_m/I_D method is the influence of the variation in the slope factor on the determination of V_T .

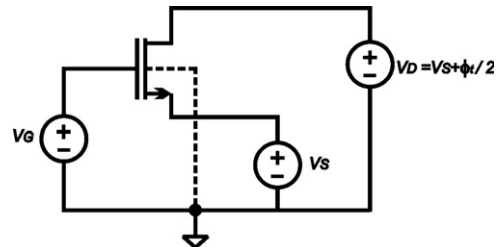


Fig. 5. Circuit configuration for measuring the g_{ch}/I_D characteristic in the linear region.

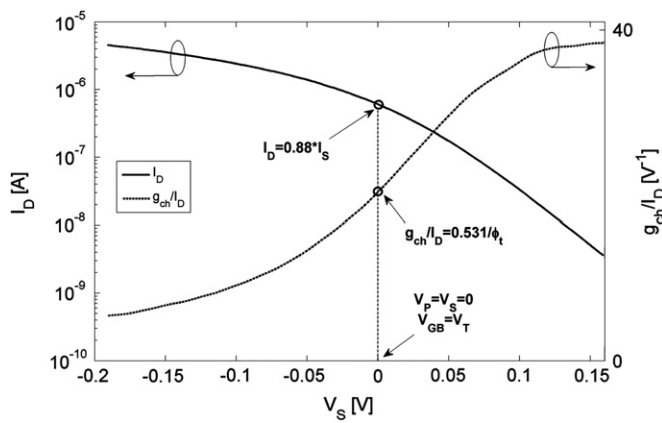


Fig. 6. Experimental measurements of I_D and g_{ch}/I_D characteristics as a function of V_S for the circuit presented in Fig. 5. The extracted values are $V_T=522$ mV and $I_S=0.697$ μ A for an NMOS transistor ($W/L=16$ μ m/ 2 μ m) in a 0.35 μ m CMOS technology. In this case, the value of the gate voltage is equal to the threshold voltage since $g_{ch}/I_D=0.531/\phi_t$ for $V_S=0$.

Table 3

Characteristics of the g_m/I_D , g_{ch}/I_D and constant current extraction methods.

Method	Operating region	$I_D@V_{GS}=V_T$	V_{DS}
g_{ch}/I_D	Linear	0.88^*I_S	$\phi_t/2$
g_m/I_D	Linear	0.88^*I_S	$\phi_t/2$
Constant current	Saturation	3^*I_S	V_T

3. Consistency of current-based methods for the extraction of V_T

In order to verify the consistency and accuracy of the V_T -extraction methods, numerical simulations were carried out using charge-based and surface-potential-based long-channel transistor models. Details of the models are given in the Appendix.

The consistency of a V_T -extraction method can be checked through simulation of the extraction circuit using a long-channel MOSFET model. Consistency means that the extracted value of V_T must be very close to the V_T calculated from the model parameters.

Numerical simulations were carried out using the MATLAB software and technological parameters from a generic 0.18 μ m CMOS process (acceptor doping concentration $N_A=2.3E+17$ cm^{-3} ; gate oxide thickness $t_{ox}=4.5$ nm; low field mobility $\mu_0=264$ $\text{cm}^2/\text{V s}$ and flat-band voltage $V_{FB}=-0.9$ V). A long-channel NMOS transistor ($W/L=2$ μ m/ 2 μ m) at a temperature of 27 $^\circ\text{C}$ was employed. The equilibrium threshold voltage (V_{TO}) for this process, calculated from (A2), is 386.4 mV.

From Fig. 7 we note that the g_{ch}/I_D characteristics using Q'_i -based and ϕ_s -based models are very close to each other. The V_T values using the g_{ch}/I_D procedure are 386.5 mV and 384.8 mV for Q'_i -based and ϕ_s -based models, respectively. These V_T values are very close to the expected value of threshold voltage ($V_{TO}=386.4$ mV), especially for the charge-based model.

The extracted values using the g_m/I_D , g_{ch}/I_D , and CC methods are presented in Table 4. The three methods have consistent and accurate results which differ from the expected value by no more than 2.6 mV.

4. Influence of second-order effects

In this section, the influence of second-order effects, namely channel-length modulation (CLM), velocity saturation (v_{sat}),

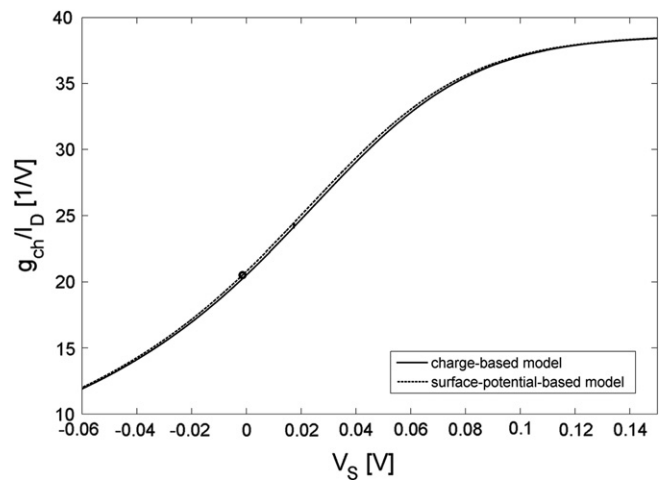


Fig. 7. g_{ch}/I_D characteristics for an NMOS transistor ($W/L=2$ μ m/ 2 μ m - Generic 0.18 μ m CMOS process) using charge-based and surface-potential-based MOSFET long-channel model. The circle indicates the point where $g_{ch}/I_D=0.531/\phi_t$. The extracted V_T values are 386.5 mV and 384.8 mV for the charge-based and surface-potential-based models, respectively.

Table 4

Extracted V_T values using g_m/I_D , g_{ch}/I_D and CC methods for Q'_i -based and ϕ_s -based long-channel models. V_{TO} ($=386.4$ mV) is the threshold voltage calculated from (A2).

Method		Q'_i -model	ϕ_s -model
g_{ch}/I_D	V_T (mV)	386.5	384.8
	$\Delta V=V_T-V_{TO}$	0.1 mV	-1.6 mV
g_m/I_D	V_T (mV)	389.0	387.5
	$\Delta V=V_T-V_{TO}$	2.6 mV	1.1 mV
CC	V_T (mV)	387.8	386.8
	$\Delta V=V_T-V_{TO}$	1.4 mV	0.4 mV

series resistance, and drain-induced barrier lowering (DIBL), on the V_T -extraction methods is investigated through electrical simulations.

The procedure adopted in this study consists of changing a specific set of input parameters to make the influence of a certain phenomenon negligible and then analyzing the difference in the outcome. For instance, if we change the default value of the velocity saturation parameter (v_{sat}) to a much greater value, the effect of velocity saturation becomes negligible. In this way, we can verify whether the velocity saturation phenomenon has any impact on the result obtained with the V_T -extraction method.

4.1. V_T extraction for a 0.35 μ m CMOS process

The parameters for the electrical simulations (BSIM3v3) are taken from a 0.35 μ m CMOS process. Four sets of input parameters were used to study the impact of second-order effects. The list of models and the input parameters that have been changed are presented in Table 5 [7]. All simulations were performed using the Spectre simulator (version 7.2). The results for a short-channel NMOS transistor ($W/L=16$ μ m/ 0.4 μ m) are presented in Fig. 8.

For a MOS transistor operating in the linear region, both drain and source series resistance can affect the outcome of the extraction methods. On the other hand, for a transistor in saturation the drain series resistance has no significant effect on the electrical behavior of the transistor. For these reasons, the CC method, which uses the transistor in saturation and with a current level comparable to that of the g_m/I_D and g_{ch}/I_D methods

Table 5

Characteristics of the models, with the list of changed input parameters, used to study the impact of second-order effects on the V_T -extraction methods.

Model	Input parameter changed
I – complete model	None
II – without series resistance	rsh, rdsw
III – without velocity saturation and CLM	vsat, pclm
IV – without DIBL	pdiblc1, pdiblc2, pdiblc3, eta0, etab, dsb

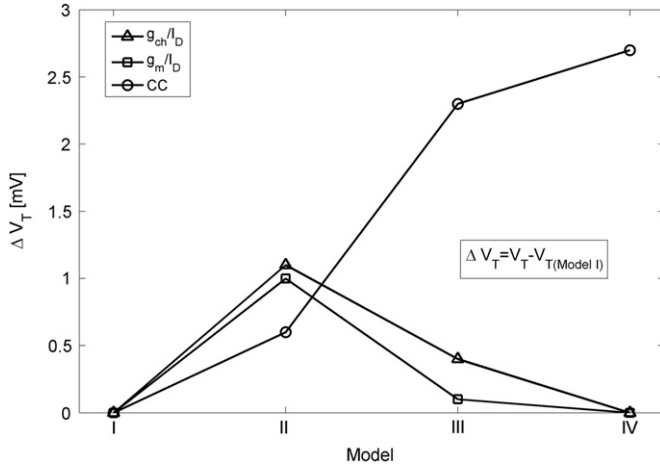


Fig. 8. Variation of extracted V_T for g_{ch}/I_D , g_m/I_D and CC methods using different models for an NMOS ($W/L=16 \mu\text{m} / 0.4 \mu\text{m}$) in a $0.35 \mu\text{m}$ CMOS process. Model I refers to the original set of input parameters (BSIM3v3), model II disregards the effect of series resistance, in model III the effects of velocity saturation and CLM are negligible, and model IV has no DIBL effect.

(which operate in the linear region), is less affected by parasitic resistances (Fig. 8).

As shown in Fig. 8, the effects of channel-length modulation and saturation velocity are more important in the CC method because the transistor operates in the saturation region.

DIBL is strongly dependent on both the drain voltage and the channel length. Therefore, the CC method, in which $V_{DS}=V_T$, is more affected by DIBL than the g_m/I_D and g_{ch}/I_D methods (Fig. 8).

The CC method is the procedure most affected by second-order effects with a maximum V_T variation of 2.7 mV. On the other hand, the g_m/I_D and g_{ch}/I_D methods present very similar behavior and are less sensitive to second-order effects with a maximum V_T variation of 1 mV.

It is worth mentioning that the impact of DIBL, CLM, v_{sat} and series resistance on the extraction method is considerably reduced for long-channel devices.

The V_T values extracted from the g_m/I_D , g_{ch}/I_D and constant current methods are shown in Fig. 9. In this figure, we can see that the V_T values obtained with these methods present similar behavior; in particular the g_m/I_D and g_{ch}/I_D methods give close values for the extracted V_T . Also, we can observe that the difference between the V_T values extracted applying the different methods is clearly reduced for long-channel devices due to the smaller impact of second-order effects on the extraction methods.

4.2. V_T extraction for a 90 nm CMOS process

The V_T values extracted from the g_m/I_D , g_{ch}/I_D and constant current methods as a function of the channel length for a 90 nm CMOS process are shown in Fig. 10, where the roll down of the V_T of the transistors with the shortest channel length is clear.

As shown in Table 6, the g_m/I_D and g_{ch}/I_D methods are insensitive to second-order effects presenting a maximum V_T

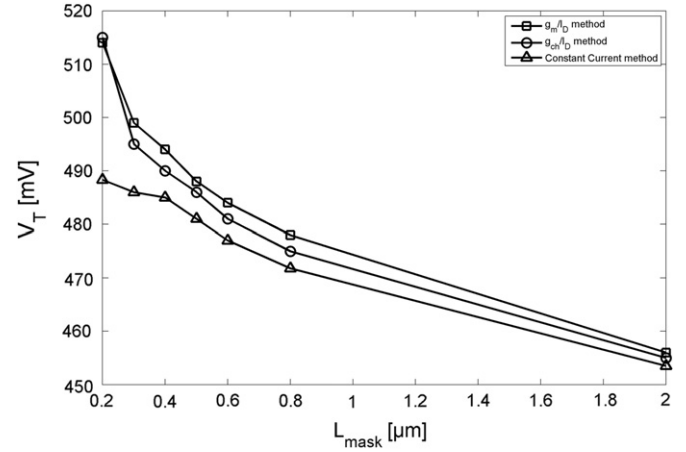


Fig. 9. Measured V_T values vs. mask channel length (L_{mask}) for g_m/I_D , g_{ch}/I_D and constant current methods for NMOS transistors with L_{mask} ranging from $0.2 \mu\text{m}$ to $2 \mu\text{m}$ and $W/L=100$, in a $0.18 \mu\text{m}$ CMOS technology.

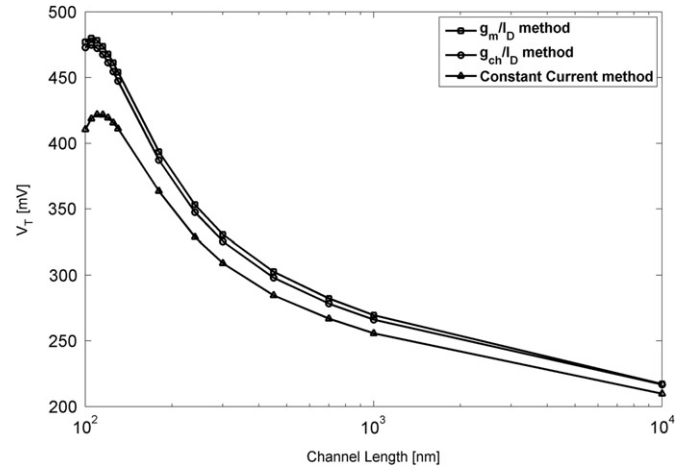


Fig. 10. Extracted V_T values vs. channel length for g_m/I_D , g_{ch}/I_D and constant current methods for NMOS transistors with channel length ranging from 100 nm to $10 \mu\text{m}$ and $W=120 \text{ nm}$, in a 90 nm CMOS technology.

variation of the order of 1 mV. On the other hand, the impact of DIBL, CLM and v_{sat} in the constant current method is really large (20–40 mV variations) for the 90 nm CMOS.

5. Applications

The threshold voltage is a fundamental electrical parameter used in technology characterization, aging evaluation, matching assessment, and in temperature and radiation sensors.

Table 6

Difference between the V_T extracted either using the complete model (original set of parameters of BSIM4) or the V_T extracted with the complete model in which short-channel effects are eliminated one at a time (or both CLM and v_{sat} effects are eliminated). The g_{ch}/I_D , g_m/I_D and CC methods are applied to an NMOS transistor ($W/L=120\text{ nm}/100\text{ nm}$) in a 90 nm CMOS process.

Method	Model disregarding DIBL effect (mV)	Model disregarding CLM effect (mV)	Model disregarding v_{sat} effect (mV)	Model disregarding CLM and v_{sat} effects (mV)
g_m/I_D	0.7	0.8	1.1	0.9
g_{ch}/I_D	*	0.9	1.1	1.3
CC	22.9	40.6	20.9	39.6

* The simulation could not be run using the g_{ch}/I_D method because of the discontinuity in the g_{ch}/I_D characteristic around $V_{DS}=0\text{V}$ when the DIBL was eliminated.

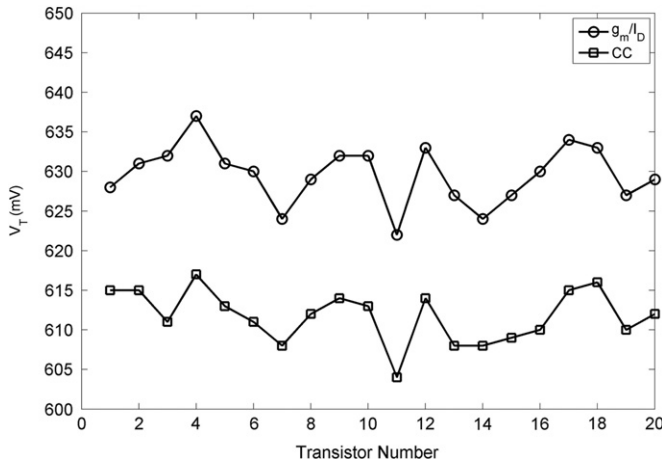


Fig. 11. V_T measurements using g_m/I_D and constant current (CC) methods for 20 matched NMOS transistors ($W=12\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ and $L=0.5\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ – 0.35 μm CMOS process) at room temperature. The V_T average values are 629 mV (g_m/I_D) and 612 mV (CC) and the relative standard deviations are 0.59% (g_m/I_D) and 0.54% (CC).

As an example of matching assessment, 20 matched NMOS transistors were measured and the V_T was extracted using the g_m/I_D and CC methods. Fig. 11 shows that the two methods present very close results as regards the deviation of each sample with respect to the average value. The CC method is of considerable interest because it is very simple and rapid. In fact, the CC method can be used as a V_T extractor circuit for tracking the V_T variation as a function of a specific parameter, e.g., temperature or ionizing radiation.

An example of the use of the CC method for temperature sensing is presented in Fig. 12. In this figure we can see that the thermal coefficient of V_T is approximately $-0.9\text{ mV}/^\circ\text{C}$. It is important to note that the specific current is slightly dependent on temperature (see Eq. (4) in Table 2), through ϕ_t and μ , and, to a lesser extent, n . Thus, the bias current was forced to track the variation of I_S , which was determined for each temperature through electrical simulation. In a more practical realization, I_S can be generated by means of a specific current (I_S) generator, as described in [8].

6. Automatic V_T -extractor circuit

An automatic V_T -extractor based on the g_{ch}/I_D method is shown in Fig. 13. In order to test the accuracy and feasibility of this circuit, a prototype was built using a commercial integrated

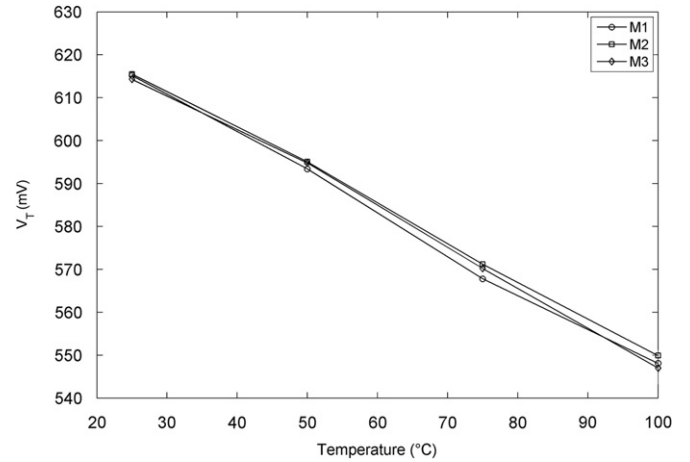


Fig. 12. V_T measurements using constant current (CC) methods vs. temperature for 3 matched NMOS transistors (M1, M2, M3) with $W=12\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ and $L=0.5\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ in a 0.35 μm CMOS process.

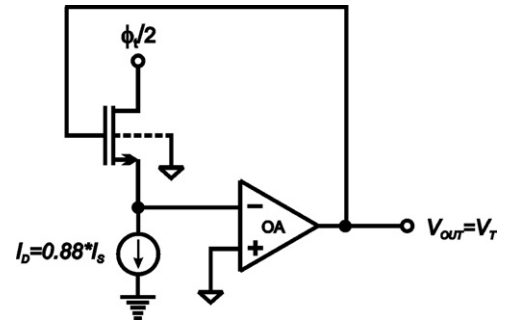


Fig. 13. Schematic of an automatic V_T -extractor circuit based on the g_{ch}/I_D method. OA is a low-offset operational amplifier.

Table 7

Experimental results for an NMOS transistor ($W/L=16\text{ }\mu\text{m}/2\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ – in a 0.35 μm CMOS process) using the V_T -extractor circuit presented in Fig. 13 and the g_{ch}/I_D method.

Transistor	g_{ch}/I_D method	V_T -extractor circuit
NMOS ($W/L=16\text{ }\mu\text{m}/2\text{ }\mu\text{m}$)	522 mV	526 mV

circuit (OPA2340) as the operational amplifier. The biasing signals ($I_D=0.88I_S$ and $V_D=\phi_t/2$) were generated by a semiconductor parameter analyzer (Agilent 4156C). The experimental results for an NMOS transistor ($W/L=16\text{ }\mu\text{m}/2\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ – in a 0.35 μm CMOS process) using this V_T -extractor circuit and the g_{ch}/I_D method are presented in Table 7.

It should be noted that this circuit can be fully integrated. The biasing signals ($I_D=0.88I_S$ and $V_D=\phi_t/2$) can be generated using a self-cascode MOSFET (SCM) (Fig. 14). In the SCM, the voltage V_x at the intermediate node is proportional to absolute temperature while the reference current (I_{ref}) is proportional to I_S . Therefore, we can combine two SCMs to generate signals proportional to I_S and ϕ_t . An example of an ultra-low-power self-biased current reference using the SCM can be found in [8].

The proposed V_T -extractor operates in moderate inversion and not in strong inversion as the previously reported circuits (see for example [9–12]). As a consequence, the new extractor circuit is suitable for low-power and low-voltage applications and additionally provides an accurate measurement of V_T insensitive to second-order effects.

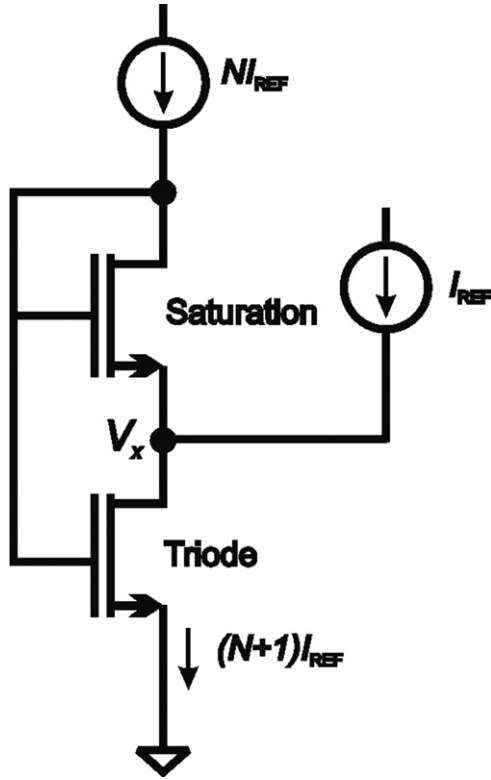


Fig. 14. Schematic of the self-cascode MOSFET (SCM) connected in diode configuration [8].

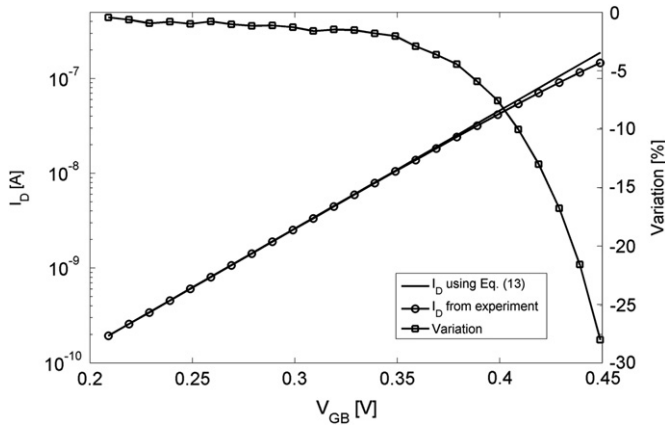


Fig. 15. Comparison between the drain current values obtained from Eq. (13) and experimental data for an NMOS ($W/L = 16 \mu\text{m}/2 \mu\text{m}$ – in a $0.35 \mu\text{m}$ CMOS process). The drain current values are indicated on the left y-axis while the difference between the two values is presented on the right y-axis. The values for the extracted parameters used in (13) are $n = 1.35$, $V_T = 526 \text{ mV}$, and $\mu_0 = 482 \text{ cm}^2/\text{V s}$.

7. Subthreshold I - V characteristic: experimental vs. modeled values

The drain current in weak inversion can be expressed as [5]

$$I_D = n\mu_0 C'_{ox} \frac{W}{L} \phi_t^2 e^{(V_{GB} - V_T)/n\phi_t + 1} (1 - e^{-V_D/\phi_t}) \quad (13)$$

Thus, we can compare the drain current measured experimental with that of Eq. (13). For this comparison, we extracted from the experiment the values of μ_0 , n , and V_T (from the automatic V_T -extractor circuit of Fig. 13). Fig. 15 shows that the difference between the values obtained using (13) and the measured drain current is no greater than 5% for deep weak inversion over three decades of

current. It should be noted that the difference between fitting curve and the experimental data increases for higher gate voltages due to a closer approximation to the moderate inversion regime, where the exponential model starts to collapse.

8. Conclusions

This work extends that of [13] in the study of the g_m/I_D , g_{ch}/I_D , and CC extraction methods of the MOSFET threshold voltage using experimental results and numerical simulations. Numerical evaluation and measurements carried out using long-channel models showed that the three extraction procedures are self-consistent. Also, it is shown that the g_{ch}/I_D and g_m/I_D methods, which use the transistor in the linear region, are relatively insensitive to short-channel effects (DIBL, CLM and velocity saturation).

The g_{ch}/I_D procedure has two important advantages over the g_m/I_D method. Firstly, the g_{ch}/I_D procedure is independent of the variation in the slope factor and, secondly, we can build a simple low-power V_T -extractor circuit based on this method.

Finally, it is important to remark that, as shown in this study, the threshold voltage extraction procedures reviewed here can be applied to most of the MOSFET models, including BSIM 3, BSIM 4 and surface-potential-based models.

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Appendix

In the charge (Q'_I)-based Advanced Compact MOSFET (ACM), the drain current is given by [5]:

$$I_D = \frac{\mu W}{L} \left[\frac{Q'^2_{IS} - Q'^2_{ID}}{2nC'_{ox}} - \phi_t(Q'_{IS} - Q'_{ID}) \right] \quad (A1)$$

where Q'_{IS} and Q'_{ID} are the inversion charge per unit of area at the source and drain terminals, respectively. In the ACM model, the current-based threshold voltage V_{TO} in terms of the technological parameters is given by

$$V_{TO} = V_{FB} + 2\phi_F + \phi_t \left[1 + \ln\left(\frac{n}{n-1}\right) + \gamma \sqrt{2\phi_F + \phi_t \ln\left(\frac{n}{n-1}\right)} \right] \quad (A2)$$

where V_{FB} is the flat-band voltage, ϕ_F is the Fermi potential and γ is the body effect factor $\gamma = \sqrt{2q\epsilon_s N_A / C'_{ox}}$, N_A being the concentration of dopants and ϵ_s the silicon permittivity.

The consistency of a V_T -extraction method can be checked using a long-channel MOSFET model since the extracted value of V_T must be very close to V_{TO} .

The Brews' ϕ_s -based model is given by the following set of equations [14]

$$I_D = I_{drift} + I_{diff} \quad (A3)$$

$$I_{drift} = \frac{\mu W}{L} C'_{ox} \left[(V_{GB} - V_{FB})(\phi_{sL} - \phi_{s0}) - \frac{1}{2}(\phi_{sL}^2 - \phi_{s0}^2) - \frac{2}{3}\gamma \left[(\phi_{sL} - \phi_t)^{3/2} - (\phi_{s0} - \phi_t)^{3/2} \right] \right] \quad (A4)$$

$$I_{diff} = \frac{\mu W}{L} C'_{ox} \phi_t \left[(\phi_{sL} - \phi_{s0}) + \gamma \left[\sqrt{\phi_{sL} - \phi_t} - \sqrt{\phi_{s0} - \phi_t} \right] \right] \quad (A5)$$

where ϕ_{sL} and ϕ_{s0} are the surface potential at drain and source, respectively.

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Osmar Franca Siebel: Osmar Franca Siebel received his B.E. degree in electrical engineering from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) in 2004, and M.S. degree in electrical engineering from Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) in 2007. He is currently working towards his doctoral degree in electrical engineering at UFSC. From March 2008 to April 2009 he attended the IC Design Training Course of the IC Brazil Program. His doctoral research includes the design of a MOSFET radiation dosimeter and analog circuits.

Márcio Cherem Schneider: Márcio Cherem Schneider received the B.E. and M.S. degrees in electrical engineering from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) in 1975 and 1980, respectively, and doctoral degree in electrical engineering from University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil, in 1984. In 1976, he joined the Electrical Engineering Department of UFSC, where he is currently a professor. In 1995, he spent a one-year sabbatical at the Electronics Laboratory of the Swiss Federal Institute of technology, Lausanne. In 1997 and 2001, he was a Visiting Associate Professor at Texas A&M University. His main research interests are analog IC design and transistor modeling.

Carlos Galup-Montoro: Carlos Galup-Montoro studied engineering sciences at the University of the Republic, Montevideo, Uruguay, and electronic engineering at the National Polytechnic School of Grenoble (INPG), France. He received an engineering degree in electronics in 1979 and a doctorate degree in 1982, both from INPG. From 1982 to 1989 he was with the University of São Paulo, Brazil, where he was engaged in junction field effect transistor (JFET) fabrication and analog circuit design. Since 1990 he has been with the Electrical Engineering Department, Federal University of Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil where he is currently a professor. From August 1997 to February 1998 he was a research associate with the Analog Mixed Signal Group, Texas A&M University. From August 2008 to July 2009 he was a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley. His main research interests and expertise are in field effect transistors and sensor modeling, as well as analog and mixed signal circuit design.