

Compact Broadband Terahertz Perfect Absorber Based on Multi-Interference and Diffraction Effects

Cheng Shi, Xiao Fei Zang, Lin Chen, Yan Peng, Bin Cai, Geoffrey R. Nash, and Yi Ming Zhu

Abstract—High absorption over a wide frequency band has attracted considerable interest due to its potential applications in imaging and anti-radar cloaking devices. In order to make these devices more integrated, the thickness of the absorber is crucial. In this paper, a compact, polarization-independent, broadband, omnidirectional terahertz (THz) absorber is proposed, fabricated, and evaluated. This THz absorber is based on the combined effect of the multi-interference and diffraction. It is experimentally demonstrated that over 95% absorption can be obtained in the frequency range from 0.75 to 2.41 THz. This well-designed thinner absorber not only reduces the device thickness to 120 μm , but also introduces more interference peaks so that the absorption spectrum is significantly enlarged. Five successive absorption peaks at 0.88, 1.20, 1.53, 1.96, and 2.23 THz are combined into a broadband THz absorption spectrum.

Index Terms—Metamaterial, multi-interference, terahertz absorber.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE concept of trapping energy over a wide bandwidth has been a hot research topic for decades. To date, these energy-trapping devices have found significant applications in diverse areas including sensor detection [1], power harvesting [2], imaging spectrum system [3], and so on. With the advent

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of metamaterials, nearly unity power can be captured at a certain frequency. The metamaterial perfect absorber (MPA) was first reported in 2008 [4], [5], which consists of a three-layer structure that includes a subwavelength frequency-selective surface (FSS) layer, a dielectric spacer layer, and a metal ground plane. The electric ring resonator (ERR) in the FSS layer can introduce a phase change at a given frequency, which leads to the destructive interference of the reflective waves and results in an absorption peak [6], [7]. Obviously, a single electric ring resonator (ERR) structure in the FSS can lead to only one resonance frequency in the absorption spectrum [8]. To realize a broadband absorption spectrum, one must design several FSS layers with slightly different ERR structures and spacer layers with different thicknesses to make the absorption peaks closely positioned. By stacking the well-designed FSS/dielectric layers, these absorption peaks can be merged into a broadband absorption spectrum [9], [10]. However, stacking layers increases the difficulty of fabrication and makes it hard for such terahertz absorbers [11] to realize the expected performances in the experiments [12]. Recently, heavily doped silicon grating terahertz absorbers [13]–[15] have been reported as an alternative design for achieving high absorption for a broad bandwidth in the terahertz regime. Since the diffractions of different orders can reduce the reflection at certain frequencies, the grating structure is designed to eliminate the reflection of the materials (i.e., heavily doped silicon). The grating absorbers can substantially simplify the fabrication of the broadband absorber. At the meantime, it requires a thick substrate to passively absorb the diffracted power. However, the interference caused by the upper and lower interface of the grating has a large free spectral range (FSR). The large spectral range between two interference peaks limited the absorption bandwidth, because only one interference peak can be combined with the diffraction peaks to form the absorption spectrum [Fig. 1(a)]. In this paper, a new design is proposed and demonstrated which can not only reduce the thickness of the broadband absorber but also merge more absorption peaks into an even broader absorption spectrum [Fig. 1(b)].

Our new design develops new features of the substrate layer and decreases its thickness. By reducing the substrate's thickness and depositing a thin metallic film on the back side of the substrate, the substrate layer acts as a dispersive resonant cavity instead of a lossy material which reduces the transmitted energy passively. By combining the advantages of metamaterial absorbers and grating absorbers, we exploit simultaneously multi-interference effect and diffraction effect. The reflected waves from the upper and lower interface of the substrate will

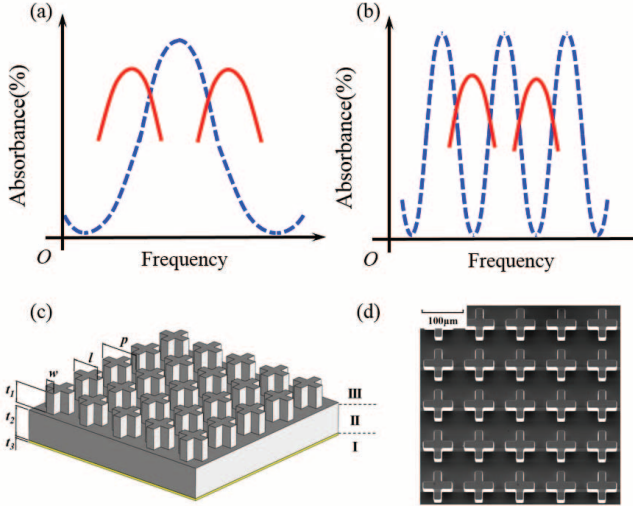


Fig. 1. Schematic of the design strategy. (a) Previous design: overlapping grating interference (blue lines) with the diffraction effect (red lines). (b) Our design: overlapping substrate interference (blue lines) with the diffraction effect (red lines) And the structure of the sample: (c) Schematic 3-D diagram. (d) SEM photograph.

interference with each other. The destructive interferences of the reflected waves form the peaks while the constructive interferences of the reflected waves form the dips in the absorption spectrum [blue line in Fig. 1(b)]. We then carefully design the grating structure so that the enhanced reflection related to the constructive interference can be eliminated by antireflection caused by the diffraction of the gratings. With a proper design, these two effects can be combined with each other and form a broadband absorption spectrum. Our design substantially enlarges the bandwidth of the absorption spectrum as well as simplifies the fabrication, while such a broadband absorption spectrum combined by five absorption peaks usually requires much thicker multilayer grating absorbers [16] or more complicated stacked MPAs. Our THz absorber presents over 90% absorption within the range from 0.65 to 2.45 THz. The relative absorption bandwidth (RAB) reaches up to 120%, which is broader than any other absorber in this frequency range to the best of our knowledge [17].

II. METHOD

A. Multi-Interference Model

The absorber is made up of three layers, which is similar to the construction of the single-resonance MPA. In our design, the traditional metal ERR and the polyimide spacer are replaced by the heavily doped silicon grating and spacer [Figs. 1(c) and (d)]. The geometric parameters are as follows: $w = 22 \mu\text{m}$, $l = 73 \mu\text{m}$, $p = 105 \mu\text{m}$, $t_1 = 51 \mu\text{m}$, $t_2 = 74 \mu\text{m}$, and $t_3 = 200 \text{ nm}$. As the thickness of the metal plate is much larger than the typical skin depth in the terahertz regime, the system absorption is only affected by the reflection in the grating surface. To analyze how the thinner substrate acts as the resonant cavity, the interference

model is established as illustrated in Fig. 2(a). The reflection waves of different orders can be calculated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}\tilde{I}_0 &= I_0 e^{i\omega t} \\ \tilde{r}_0 &= r_{11} I_0 e^{i(\omega t + \theta_{11})} \\ \tilde{r}_1 &= A^2 t_{12} t_{21} I_0 e^{i(\omega t + \theta_{12} + \theta_{21} + 2\delta + \pi)} \\ \tilde{r}_2 &= A^2 r_{22} e^{i(\theta_{22} + 2\delta + \pi)} \tilde{r}_1 = q \tilde{r}_1 \\ \tilde{r}_n &= q^{n-1} \tilde{r}_1\end{aligned}\quad (1)$$

where I_0 is the magnitude of the incident wave, r_{ii} , θ_{ii} are the magnitude and phase coefficients for the reflected waves from the i th layer back to the i th layer, t_{ij} , θ_{ij} are the magnitude and phase coefficients for the transmitted waves from the i th layer to the j th layer, $A = e^{-(2\pi)/(\lambda)\kappa d}$, and $\delta = nk_0 d$ are the propagation phase and loss caused by spacer layer with a thickness of d and refractive index $\tilde{n} = n - i\kappa$. These coefficients at individual interfaces can be derived from numerical simulations by decoupling the model [Figs. 2(b) and (c)] [19]. In this work, by optimizing the doping density, we chose $0.54 \Omega \text{ cm}$ boron-doped silicon, whose permittivity can be expressed by Drude model as [19]

$$\varepsilon(\omega) = 11.7 - \frac{3.64 \times 10^{26}}{\omega^2 + 1.74 \times 10^{13} \omega i}. \quad (2)$$

The high value of the imaginary part of the permittivity can lead to a relative large A . As the thickness of the substrate increases, the reflection waves of higher orders decline exponentially. In the aforementioned grating absorber, the substrate is so thick that all other reflective waves except \tilde{r}_0 tend to zero, so the role of the substrate is only to absorb the transmitted energy. We optimize the thickness of the substrate to a certain value, which will make the reflection waves of different orders interference with each other. The thinner spacer layer will now be evolved to a resonant cavity and introduce more interference. We can change the FSR to manipulate the frequencies of the interference positioned in the spectrum by adjusting the thickness of the substrate. In our case, the thickness of substrate d is chosen as $74 \mu\text{m}$, the magnitude of \tilde{r}_2 will be less than $0.01 I_0$, which makes the overall reflection waves are mainly contributed by \tilde{r}_0 and \tilde{r}_1 . From (1), we can conclude that, when $\theta_{12} + \theta_{21} + 2\delta + \pi - \theta_{22} = 2m\pi + \pi$ ($m \in \mathbb{Z}$), the overall reflection will reach the minima at $f_1 = 0.87 \text{ THz}$, $f_3 = 1.54 \text{ THz}$, and $f_5 = 2.25 \text{ THz}$, since \tilde{r}_0 and \tilde{r}_1 will destructively interference with each other [black dashed lines in Figs. 2(d) and (f)].

B. Impedance-Matching Condition of Diffraction Gratings

In order to achieve a broadband anti-reflection spectrum, enhanced reflection related to the constructive interference has to be tailored. Recent research has shown the grating on the heavily-doped silicon can reduce the reflection at certain frequencies [17]. Thus the diffraction grating structure is applied to eliminate the high reflection caused by the constructive interference. The impedance-matching condition will be fulfilled when the impedance of the grating is [16] $Z_{\text{gra}} = Z_0 \sqrt{\cos(\phi)}/n$, where $\phi = \sin^{-1}(m\lambda/(np))$ is the diffraction angle of the m th-order diffraction and n is the

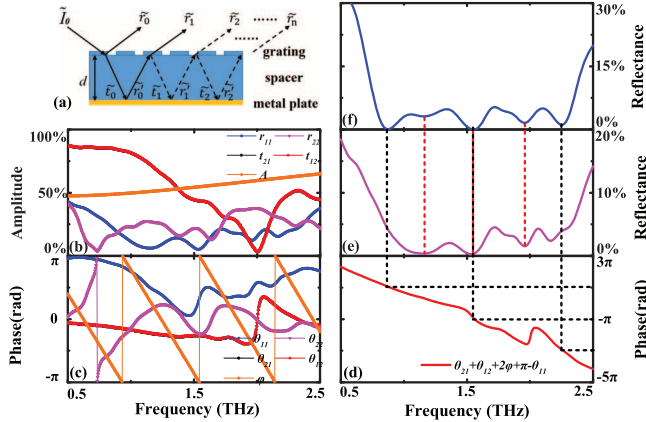


Fig. 2. Analysis of the contribution of the destructive interference to the overall reflection. (a) Interference model of the absorber. (b) Simulated magnitudes of the reflection and transmission coefficients for the decoupled model. (c) Simulated phases of the reflection and transmission coefficients for the decoupled model. (d) Calculated phase difference between \vec{r}_0 and \vec{r}_1 from the decoupled model. (e) Reflectance of the grating. (f) Reflectance of the whole structure.

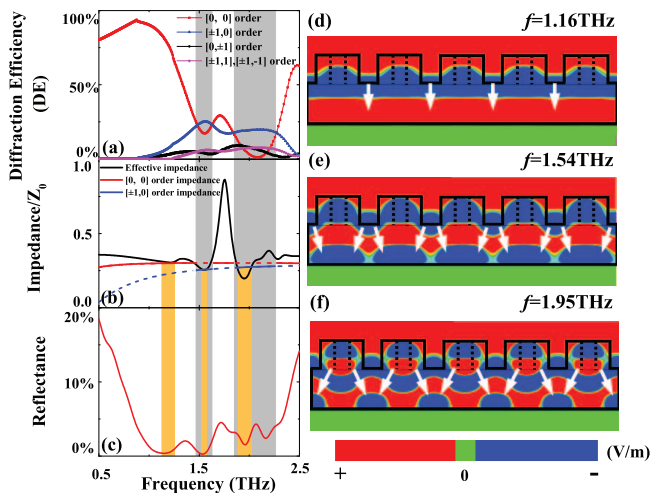


Fig. 3. Analyses of the contributions of the grating to the overall reflection. (a) Diffraction efficiencies for different orders calculated by the 2D-RCWA method. (b) Ideal and optimized impedance of the grating. (c) Reflectance of the grating. We highlight the frequencies where $[1,0]$ -order diffraction efficiency is greater than $[0,0]$ -order diffraction efficiency in gray and where the impedance-matching conditions occurred in orange. (d)–(f) Electric field distribution with diffraction directions (white arrows) of the x - z plane at (d) $f = 1.15$ THz, (e) $f = 1.54$ THz, and (f) $f = 1.95$ THz.

refractive index of the silicon spacer. Through the two-dimensional rigorous coupled-wave analysis (2D-RCWA) method [20], the diffraction efficiency of different orders is calculated, as demonstrated in Fig. 3(a). The gray zone in Fig. 3 indicates the frequency band where the $[\pm 1, 0]$ order diffraction is dominant. The ideal impedance of the grating should be the combination of the $[0, 0]$ order-impedance in the $[0, 0]$ order diffraction zone [red solid line in the white zone in Fig. 3(b)] and the $[\pm 1, 0]$ -order impedance in the $[\pm 1, 0]$ -order diffraction zone [blue solid line in the gray zone in Fig. 3(b)]. We retrieve the effective impedance of the grating by adopting the S -parameter retrieval method [21] and optimize the parameters of the grating to make its impedance equal to the ideal impedance at the corresponding frequencies. Based on the optimization, the impedance-matching condition is thus reached at $f_2 =$

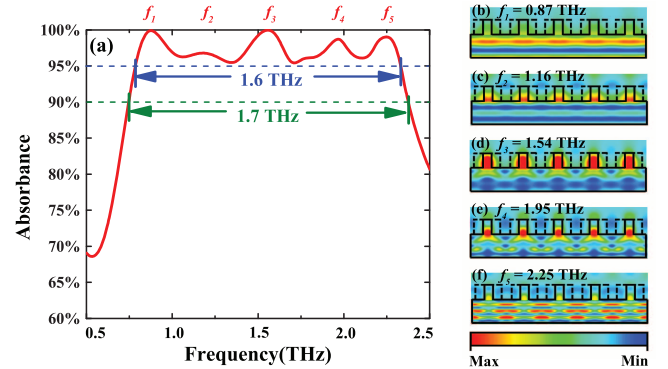


Fig. 4. Simulated results via CST microwave studio. (a) Absorption spectrum. (b)–(f) Energy density distributions in the x - z plane at $y = 36.5 \mu\text{m}$ at five absorption peaks.

1.16 THz, $f_3 = 1.54$ THz, and $f_4 = 1.95$ THz [highlighted as orange in Fig. 3(b) and (c)]. The distributions of the electric field at these frequencies [Fig. 3(d)–(f)] illustrate the strong $[0, 0]$ -order diffraction at $f_2 = 1.16$ THz, and $[\pm 1, 0]$ -order diffraction at $f_3 = 1.54$ THz and $f_4 = 1.95$ THz, which supports our analysis. So it can be concluded that the successive reflection dips of the absorber in a wide frequency region [Fig. 2(f)] results from the impedance-matching condition of the diffraction of the grating superposed on the destructive interference of the multi-layer structure [black and red dashed line in Fig. 2(d)–(f)].

III. EXPERIMENTS

To verify this analysis, the theoretical absorbance of designed absorber with two pairs of perfect electric walls and perfect magnetic walls bounding a propagation region was simulated via CST microwave studio®. As illustrated in Fig. 4(a), five near-unity absorption peaks can be observed in the simulated absorption spectrum which has a good agreement with our analysis. Furthermore, the energy density distributions of the absorber at each absorption peak frequency are plotted in Figs. 4(b)–(f), which clearly reveal that the energy is concentrated at the grating/spacer interface at f_2, f_3, f_4 and the energy are captured in the spacer at f_1, f_3, f_5 due to the destructive interference. These distributions confirm our analysis on how the destructive interference and the impedance-matching condition of the grating contribute to the absorption peaks.

Standard wafer grinding, metal evaporation, optical lithography, and inductively coupled plasma (ICP) etching techniques were used to fabricate the multilayer absorber. First, a 500- μm -thick silicon wafer was grinded to a thickness of 120 μm . A 20/180-nm Ti/Au metallic plate was then evaporated onto the silicon wafer. On the other side of the wafer, the grating structure was formed by the optical lithography of the photo resist and ICP etching.

We used a terahertz time-domain spectroscopy (THz-TDS) system [22] to experimentally evaluate the behavior of the fabricated absorber by measuring the reflectance spectra. The THz-TDS system can produce terahertz waves in the range of 0.2–2.8 THz with an 8-GHz spectral resolution. The measured spectra in transverse electric (TE) and transverse magnetic (TM) mode [Fig. 5(a) and (b)] reveal five absorption peaks at the

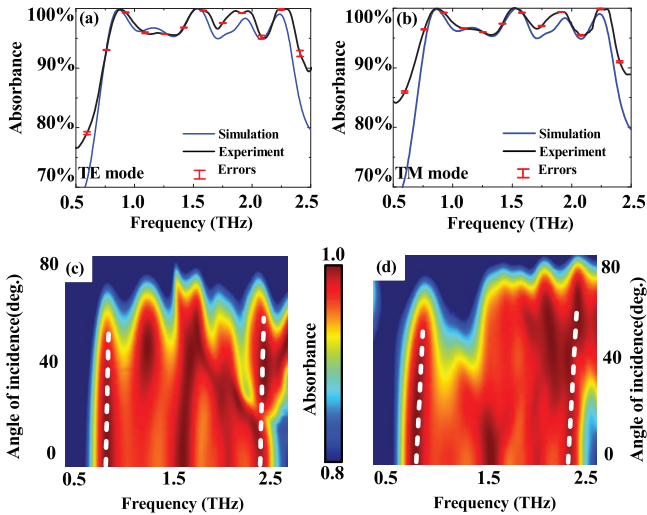


Fig. 5. Comparisons of the experimental results, errors and the simulated results in (a) TE mode and (b) TM mode. The dependences of the absorption spectra on incident angles in (c) TE mode and (d) TM mode.

frequency 0.88, 1.20, 1.53, 1.96 and 2.23 THz with absorbances of 99.7%, 95.8%, 99.9%, 99.5%, and 99.9%, respectively. Due to these five closely positioned absorption peaks, a wide frequency band is achieved from 0.75 to 2.41 THz, where the absorption is greater than 95%. Excellent agreement between simulation and experiment spectra is observed, where the slight differences can be attributed to, which may be caused by the tolerance of the samples fabrication and measurement errors.

IV. DISCUSSION

Numerical simulations of absorption spectrum with different angles of incidence under TE and TM polarization state are illustrated in Fig. 5(c) and (d). For an obliquely incident wave of TE and TM mode, the x component of the incident electric field in TE mode and incident magnetic field in TM mode will decrease with the increase of the angles of incidence. This will change the impedance of the structure which will affect the second, third, and fourth peaks. However, since the first and fifth peaks are mainly caused by the interference effect and irrelevant to the impedance, only slight differences and blue shifts of these peaks in both modes can be observed [the white dashed lines in Fig. 5(c) and (d)]. The absorber can still maintain an over 90% absorbance at a large incidence angle ranges from 0 degrees to 50 degrees under both polarization states. Furthermore, owing to the symmetrical design of the device, the absorption response is insensitive to polarizations states of the normal incident wave.

V. CONCLUSION

In summary, we have theoretically purposed and experimentally demonstrated a nearly perfect broadband compact absorber in THz regime. The absorber is much simpler to fabricate and has a larger RAB than other broadband MPA in the THz frequency range. The fabricated absorber presents $>95\%$ absorption over a frequency range of 1.7 THz. Destructive interference theory and impedance-matching condition of the grating are applied to elucidate the five successive absorption peaks at 0.88,

1.20, 1.53, 1.96, and 2.23 THz. Owing to the symmetrical design, the absorber is also insensitive to the polarization states of the incident wave. Furthermore, the absorber is also valid to a wide range of incident angles for both TE and TM polarizations.

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