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Diindenoperylene as ambipolar semiconductor: Influence of electrode materials and mobility asymmetry in organic field-effect transistors

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Organic field-effect transistors were prepared using diindenoperylene as molecular semiconductor. An insulating alkane layer was used to separate the semiconductor from the underlying oxide and to suppress effects of electron traps at that surface. Diindenoperylene transistors were studied for various electrode materials. Unipolar p- and n-type as well as ambipolar devices were realized. An electron mobility of up to 0.14 cm²/V s and a hole mobility of up to 0.052 cm²/V s were found. The temperature dependent analysis shows similar trap distributions for both carrier types. Therefore the asymmetry in electron and hole transport seems to be an intrinsic effect of diindenoperylene. © 2011 American Institute of Physics. [doi:10.1063/1.3598423]

The transport of electrons and holes in organic semiconductors can be realized by the reduction in bulk and interface trap states as well as by adjustment of the injection barriers. With these requirements bipolar transport has proven to be an intrinsic property of organic semiconductors as shown first for single crystals and later on for thin films, especially in field-effect transistors. Diindenoperylene [DIP, C_{26}H_{16}]—molecular structure shown in Fig. 1(a)—has been shown to exhibit electron and hole transport in single crystals. It is stable against oxidation and decomposition even at elevated temperatures. Due to the good crystallization behavior DIP is a promising candidate for the application in field-effect transistors and solar cells. In this letter the ambipolar and bipolar transport is analyzed for DIP in thin-film transistors.

Thin-film transistors were prepared on highly doped silicon wafers with a 320 nm thermally grown oxide. Additionally a layer of the insulating long chain alkane tetratetracontane (TTC, C_{44}H_{90}) was deposited by thermal evaporation (thickness about 10 nm) to separate the charge carrier transport in the molecular semiconductor from the silicon oxide surface. The excellent passivation behavior of TTC was reported in the literature. TTC forms crystalline layers of upright standing, elongated molecules. The layers were smoothed by thermal annealing at 60 °C for 2 h as shown earlier. 25 nm of DIP—purified by thermal gradient vacuum sublimation—were deposited as active, semiconducting layer on top of a 10 nm thick TTC layer by thermal evaporation. The whole processing was carried out under high vacuum or under inert atmosphere. The morphology of such a film is shown by a scanning force microscopy image in Fig. 1(b). It is clearly visible that DIP forms a polycrystalline film with a typical grain diameter of about 250 nm. Larger grain size can be realized in DIP films by substrate heating during the evaporation of DIP. This process, however, is not applicable here due to the low melting point of the TTC layer. Therefore the annealing temperature of the TTC layer is limited to 60 °C and the substrate temperature during evaporation of DIP is kept at room temperature. Various electrode materials (aluminum, silver, tetracyanoquinodimethane-tetrathiafulvalene TTF-TCNQ) have been used to realize unipolar electron, unipolar hole, and ambipolar transport in different transistors in a top contact geometry. The metal layers had a thickness of 50 nm and the organic metal TTF-TCNQ a thickness of 150 nm. Furthermore field-effect transistors (FETs) with two different electrode materials were prepared by a parallactic shadow mask displacement technique. Thereby the Al layer was evaporated at first and afterwards with a slight lateral shift the TTF-TCNQ layer. The resulting transistor is displayed as cross section sketch in Fig. 1(c). The electrical characterization was performed under high vacuum conditions in a cryostat. The measured output characteristics at room temperature have been analyzed by the transfer length method using channel lengths between 50 and 150 μm whereas the analysis in the linear range using the Shockley equation has been applied for the examination of temperature dependent measurements to determine the field-effect mobility. The variations in mobility between several produced devices with equivalent injection behavior were less than 10%. The two best samples are used to determine the here given averaged values.

FIG. 1. (Color online) (a) Molecular structure of DIP (DIP, C_{26}H_{16}). (b) Scanning force microscopy image of a 25 nm DIP film on top of a 10 nm TTC layer. The image size is 2 × 2 μm². (c) Structure of the bottom-gate and top-contact field-effect transistor. Experiments are performed either with one single electrode material or with a bilayer of two different electrode materials.
A set of transfer characteristics in the linear range for DIP FETs is displayed in Fig. 2. Unipolar electron transport is observed for Al electrodes and unipolar hole transport for TTF-TCNQ electrodes, respectively. Silver electrodes allow the injection of both electrons and holes into the channel, resulting in the shown ambipolar behavior. The mobilities determined by transfer length measurements are summarized in Table I. It was found that the values at room temperature for the different top contacts differ only by a factor of 2 with the electron mobility being 0.1 cm$^2$/Vs and the hole mobility up to 0.05 cm$^2$/Vs. Remarkably, these mobilities obtained in thin-film transistors are one order of magnitude higher than the mobilities in DIP single crystals reported in the literature.\cite{A17} While in single crystals microcracks represent the major problem, in our thin film transistors the mobilities might be limited by the roughness of the underlying TTC film. The chosen film thickness is close to two complete monolayers of TTC. However, the TTC films show always a higher current density than the number of free surfaces is needed. This can be possibly due to the lowering of the work function in the top contact geometry to lower values as the given numbers of free surfaces are required. For example, the injection of holes into DIP is favored from the one-dimensional organic metal. In the results presented here the good alignment of the work functions of Al and TTF-TCNQ electrodes to the respective transport levels in DIP can be seen in the strongly reduced contact resistances (by a factor of 10 in comparison to the Ag electrode).

Additionally, drastically reduced switch-on voltages are observed for the unipolar transistors in comparison to the ambipolar ones. This effect can be explained by the better alignment of the contact Fermi level to the respective quasi-Fermi levels of the organic semiconductor in the unipolar case in contrast to the ambipolar case. These reduced switch-on voltages, resulting also in reduced threshold voltages, are the reason for the higher currents in the unipolar FETs having the same mobility as the ambipolar device with Ag electrodes. The effect of two different electrodes giving a good unipolar transport is transferred to an ambipolar field-effect transistor with “bilayer electrodes” as sketched in Fig. 1(c). As can be seen also in Fig. 2 the low switch-on voltages can be reproduced. However, lower mobilities are observed for the FETs with combined Al/TTF-TCNQ electrodes. The determination of the channel length is inaccurate in the device with two electrode materials so that the same values for the contact resistances are used as for the unipolar devices. However, the differences in the mobilities due to the fixed contact resistances are negligible. In addition, using different materials for source and drain contacts causes a built-in potential for the drain current which is not considered in the analysis.

A temperature dependent measurement has been performed for a device with the combined Al and TTF-TCNQ electrodes. The mobilities determined from the linear regime without consideration of the contact resistances are shown in Fig. 3 as a function of temperature. The electron mobility is always higher than the hole mobility, even though the asymmetry between electron and hole transport in this case is smaller than shown in Table I. Thereby a decreasing slope in the diagram—logarithm of the mobility versus reciprocal temperature—for lower temperature is observed resulting in...
a lower activation energy at low temperatures. The fitted activation energy is reduced for the electron (hole) transport from 72 meV (105 meV) at room temperature to 28 meV (49 meV) in the low temperature range with an uncertainty of less than 3 meV. This observation is not describable with a pure activation behavior, a grain boundary behavior, or grain boundary traps. Therefore the analysis for trap states like in CuPc. It rather seems to be an intrinsic material property, e.g., the different density of states is very similar and equal transport state distributions are observed. The combination of two different electrode materials allows a high current also in the saturation regime where the observation of light emission should be possible.

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17The low mobilities in the DIP single crystal are probably related to a structural phase transition occurring during cool down after the high temperature growth process. This phase transition generates internal stress which is released via the formation of small crystalline domains, Ref. 6.