Detection and Mixing of Two Modulated Optical Signals Using only a Single GaAs FET (Experimental Study)

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Abstract.- GaAs FET’s are widely used in system such LNA, PA, mixers, frequency multipliers, oscillators and attenuators. Recent works have shown the usefulness of these transistors in the optoelectronics field, as photodetectors or optoelectric mixers. In this paper an experimental study explores the idea of unifying the detection and mixing of two optical modulated signals at different wavelengths, using a single GaAs FET. The FET is biased at fixed V_{GS} and V_{DS} and loaded to 50Ω, while two optical modulated signals of different wavelength and frequencies are illuminating the gate of the FET. The results show that the FET can detect both signals and by means of the inherent nonlinearity in the channel of the FET, the sum and difference of both frequencies appear (up and down conversion). Moreover, this type of architecture demonstrates low distortion in contrast to its counterpart (electric and optoelectric mixers) and also, to obtain the same power level for the up and down conversion frequencies, the power level required for the RF and LO signals are much lower than the case of electric and optoelectric mixers. To our knowledge this is the first time that a single FET is used for detecting and mixing two optical modulated signals at the same time.

I.- INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, certain research groups have studied the effects of direct optical illumination on GaAs FET’s [1-3] with the intention of using them for optic communications. Typical applications reported using this technique are: the synchronization of oscillators [7], phase detection [8] and optoelectronic mixing [2-3].

Nevertheless, before developing the system previously mentioned it is necessary to understand the effects that the light produces in the FET. Basically the photoresponse in GaAs FET’s depends on the properties of the semiconductor. Furthermore, the mechanisms that explain the photoresponse in GaAs FET have been reported and demonstrated in the past [4-6]. The two basic effects related with the photoresponse are the photovoltaic (internal and external) and photoconductive.

The photoconductive effect is the increment of the conductivity due to the photogenerated carriers. On the other hand, when the photon energy of the light impinging on the semiconductor is larger than the material bandgap, the transistor absorbs a photon, and therefore the channel is modulated. This represents an increment in the drain current, and this effect is called internal photovoltaic effect. The external photovoltaic effect is related with a photovoltage that is induced by the illumination on the gate when an external resistor is connected in the gate circuit. This implies that the transistor should be constructed such that the incident light reaches the active region with minimum attenuation. However, this fact is not very common because most of the GaAs FET’s are optimized for high frequency amplification.

In recent years several research groups have shown that a microwave signal can be mixed with a modulated optical signal using GaAs FET’s [2], [3], [4]. Another experiment reported deals with a self-oscillating optoelectronic up converter using HBT [1]. In this approach, the HBT is configured as an oscillator, and a modulated optical signal illuminates the HBT producing the mixed signal at the output.

However, the mixing of two modulated optical signals of different frequencies and wavelengths has not been shown yet. Therefore, the motivation in this work is to demonstrate that a single GaAs FET’s can be used for detecting and mixing two different modulated optical signals at the same time without the necessity of an external electric signal (oscillator). This architecture shows a much higher IM3 suppression than the electric and optoelectric mixers; implying that an external filter with narrow band could be replaced with a broadband filter. In addition, to obtain the same power level for the up and down conversion frequencies, the power levels of the detected signals (RF and LO) are much lower than the case of electric and optoelectric mixers.

II.- SETUP CONFIGURATION AND MEASUREMENTS

In this section, a complete description of the workbench used in this work is described. For our experiment a MESFET and PHEMT GaAs FET were used. To observe their behavior under illumination, the I-V characteristics were measured for both FET’s using a Dynamic I-V Analyzer (DIVA) along with a monochromatic laser. A description of the setup configuration is presented in figure 1. Figure 2 shows the photoresponse of the MESFET, a similar response was obtained for the PHEMT (NE24200). In the I-V pulsed measurements, the width of the pulse used was 0.5µs, and a pulse separation of 1 ms. These conditions ensured that we could avoid traps effects.

Due to the bandgap of the GaAs (1.42eV), lasers with wavelength less than 873nm can be used to generate free carriers in the transistor. Therefore, for this study two laser,
one at 830 nm and the other at 850 nm were used. Once the wavelength of the lasers was defined, a second measurement was performed. The objective of this measurement was to determine the frequency band where the maximum photodetection is produced. Hence, a frequency sweep from 50 MHz up to 1 GHz was performed. The result shows that the maximum photodetection occurs at low frequency as shown in figure 3. Higher frequencies were not studied due to the limitation of our modulator (THORLABS TCLDM9), which works up to 1 GHz. Therefore, the RF and the LO signals were chosen to be 100 MHz, and 500 MHz respectively.

Figure 3. Frequency dependence of the photoresponse for the MESFET at 850 nm (0.62 mW).

In the second configuration the LO signal is applied to the gate of the FET while the RF signal is an optical modulated signal that illuminates the gate of the FET, as shown in figure 5. It is worth to comment that this configuration is extensively used in optoelectronic mixers [2-3], hence, this configuration will be referred to as the optomixer case.

Finally the last configuration does not utilize any electrical signal, this means that both the RF and LO are optical modulated signals. To the best of our knowledge this type of configuration has not been reported yet. This configuration will be called the optic-optic case. The configuration of the workbench is presented in figure 6. The results for this entire configuration are presented in the next section. It will be clear that the last configuration presents a better performance in IM3 than the other two configurations as well as other advantages.

Figure 2. Pulse I-V characteristic of the MESFET. (Solid line) without illumination, (+) with illumination

Figure 4. Workbench for the electrical case.
III. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

In this section the spectrum at the output of the MESFET is presented in order to demonstrate the differences between each type of mixer (electrical case, optomixer case, and the optic-optic case).

The results for the electrical mixer are shown in figure 7. The RF (100MHz) and LO (500MHz) signals can be clearly discerned, as well as the IF (400MHz and 600MHz) and other IMD products.

For this case the power of the LO is greater than the RF power. These results are for the MESFET at \( V_{GS} = -0.35 \text{V} \), and \( V_{DS} = 1.0 \text{V} \), while the power levels for the two IF were -59.33dBm and -60.7dBm respectively.

For the optomixer case, figure 8 shows the results for the same MESFET and same bias conditions. It is worth mentioning that the laser wavelength used in this case was 830nm and the photodetected level was -33.3dBm, which correspond to the RF signal. At this same bias point the optomixer shows more distortion at the output than the electrical case. Furthermore, the IF power levels are similar to the above case (-55.9dBm and -56.9 dBm). A better performance could be reached if the bias point is changed.

The main advantage that can be seen in this case is the low power levels required for the LO and RF signals. These powers are lower than in the other two cases (-27.98dBm and -33.04dBm), however, the power levels of the IF obtained are -57.93dBm and -60.62dBm. The IF power levels are similar to the others two cases, and in addition, there is considerably less distortion.

For the optomixer case, figure 8 reveals the presence of higher harmonics of the LO signal with considerable power levels. This fact was expected due to a \( P_{oV} - P_{oL} \) test. The experiment reveals a significant increment of the output power using a
modulated laser at 830nm, and at the same frequency of the input.

Similar behavior was observed in the PHEMT, a summary of the experimental results obtained with the PHEMT is presented in Table I.

![Figure 9. Output spectrum for the optical-optical case.](image)

**IV. CONCLUSION**

In this work the potential use of MESFET and PHEMT for detection and mixing of two optical modulated signals at the same time was investigated. It was shown for the first time that commercially available MESFET and PHEMT devices are capable to detect and mix two optical signals modulated at two different frequencies and wavelengths. This topology has demonstrated a better performance (high IM3 suppression), however, harmonics of the LO signal are observed at the output of the mixer. A comparison between an electrical mixer, an optoelectronic mixer, and a proposed optic-optic mixer was made. The results show that in order to obtain the same power level of IF, the FET requires less power for optic-optic mixer.

**V. REFERENCES**


**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

The authors would like to thank Centellax Inc, for providing the probes and PHEMTs. This work was supported by a joint funding of CICESE and CONACYT project No.39835-Y, Mexico.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHEMT NE24200</th>
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<th>Power Level of the LO Signal (500MHz)</th>
<th>Power Level of the Down Conversion</th>
<th>Power Level of the Up Conversion</th>
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<tr>
<td>Electrical Case</td>
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<td>-4.42 dBm</td>
<td>-53.62 dBm</td>
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<td>Optomixer Case (830nm)</td>
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<td>-9.66 dBm</td>
<td>-56.95 dBm</td>
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<td>Optic-Optic Case</td>
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<td>-30.6 dBm</td>
<td>-55.78 dBm</td>
<td>-56.08 dBm</td>
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Table I. Results of the PHEMT