On electron heating in magnetron sputtering discharges

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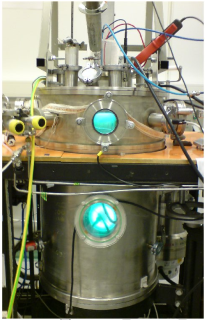
Introduction

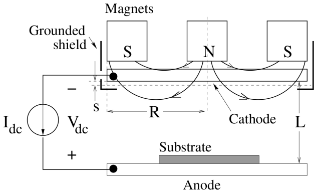
- Magnetron sputtering has been the workhorse of plasma based sputtering methods for almost five decades
- Magnetron sputtering discharges are widely used in thin film processing

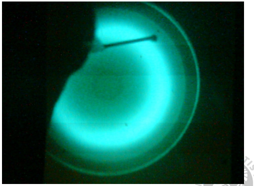
- Applications include
  - thin films in integrated circuits
  - magnetic material
  - hard, protective, and wear resistant coatings
  - optical coatings
  - decorative coatings
  - low friction films



Introduction

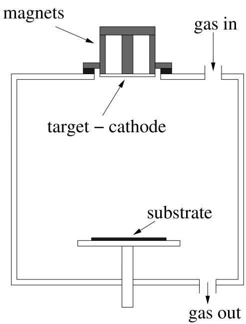
- A magnet is placed at the back of the cathode target with the pole pieces at the center and perimeter
- The magnetic field confines the energetic electrons near the cathode, where they undergo numerous ionizing collisions before being lost to a grounded surface
- If the cathode plate is circular, the magnetic confinement is seen as a torus shaped plasma that hovers in front of the target





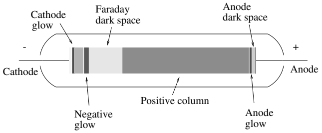
Introduction

- Magnetron sputtering has been a highly sucessfull technique that has a number of industrial applications
- The conventional wisdom is that plasma generation is based on the supply of energy via secondary electrons (SEs) accelerated from the target
- One of the remaining fundamental questions is how electrons are heated in the magnetron sputtering discharge



dc magnetron sputtering discharge

dc magnetron sputtering discharge

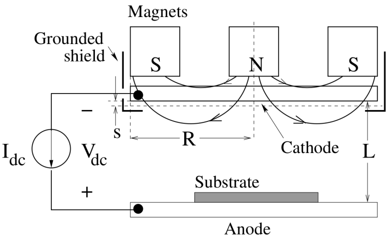


- A dc discharge with a cold cathode is sustained by secondary electron emission from the cathode by ion bombardment
- The discharge current at the target consists of electron current I_{e} and ion current I_{i} or

$$I_{\mathrm{D}} = I_{\mathrm{e}} + I_{\mathrm{i}} = I_{\mathrm{i}}(1 + \gamma_{\mathrm{SE}})$$

  where γ_{SE} is the secondary electron emission coefficient
- Note that $\gamma_{\mathrm{SE}} \sim 0.05 - 0.2$ for most metals, so at the target, the dominating fraction of the discharge current is ion current

dc magnetron sputtering discharge



- In magnetron sputtering, in order increase the lifetime of the electrons in the cathode target vicinity, magnets are placed behind the target surface

- To account for the electrons that are not trapped we define an effective secondary electron emission coefficient

$$\gamma_{\rm SE,eff} = m\epsilon_{\rm e}(1-r)\gamma_{\rm SE}$$

where

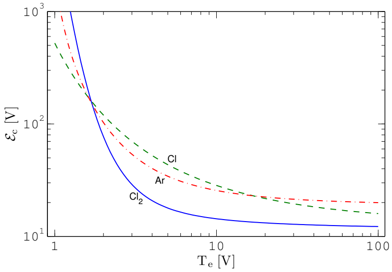
  - $\epsilon_{\rm e}$ is the fraction of the electron energy that is used for ionization before being lost
  - m is a factor that accounts for secondary electrons ionizing in the sheath
  - r is the recapture probability of secondary electrons

dc magnetron sputtering discharge

- These secondary electrons are accelerated in the cathode dark space – referred to as primary electrons
- They must produce sufficient number of ions to release more electrons from the cathode
- The number of electron-ion pairs created by each secondary electron is then

$$\mathcal{N} \approx \frac{V_\mathrm{D}}{\mathcal{E}_\mathrm{c}}$$

where $\mathcal{E}_\mathrm{c}$ is the energy loss per electron-ion pair created



dc magnetron sputtering discharge

- To sustain the discharge the condition

$$\gamma_{\mathrm{SE,eff}} \mathcal{N} = 1$$

has to be fulfilled

- This defines the minimum voltage to sustain the discharge as

$$V_{\mathrm{D,min}} = \frac{\mathcal{E}_{\mathrm{c}}}{\beta \gamma_{\mathrm{SE,eff}}}$$

referred to as Thornton equation

  - β is the fraction of ions that return to the cathode

Magnetron sputtering: basic physics and application to cylindrical magnetrons

John A. Thornton

Telic Corporation, 1631 Colorado Avenue, Santa Monica, California 90404

(Received 22 September 1977; accepted 7 December 1977)

Magnetron sputtering sources can be defined as diode devices in which magnetic fields are used in concert with the cathode surface to form electron traps which are so configured that the **E**×**B** electron-drift currents close on themselves. Coaxial cylindrical magnetron sputtering sources in which post or hollow cathodes are operated in axial magnetic fields have been reported for a number of years. However, their performance is limited by end losses. A remarkable performance is achieved when the end losses are eliminated by proper shaping of the magnetic field or by using suitably placed electron-reflecting surfaces. High currents and sputtering rates can be obtained, nearly independent of voltage, even at low pressures. This characterizes what has been defined as the *magnetron mode* of operation. This paper reviews the basic principles that underly the operation of dc sputtering sources in the magnetron mode with particular emphasis on cylindrical magnetrons. The important attributes of these devices as sputtering sources are also reviewed.

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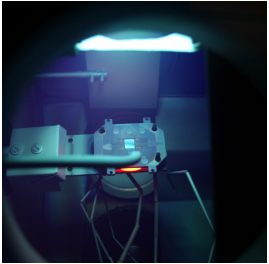
Thornton (1978) JVST **15**(2) 171

dc magnetron sputtering discharge

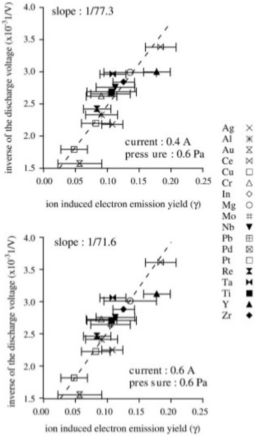
- The basic assumption is that acceleration across the sheath is the main source of energy for the electrons
- Above breakdown the parmeters m, β, ϵ_e and r can vary with the applied voltage
- We can rewrite the Thornton equation for any voltage

$$\frac{1}{V_D} = \frac{\beta m \epsilon_e (1 - r)}{\mathcal{E}_c} \gamma_{SE}$$



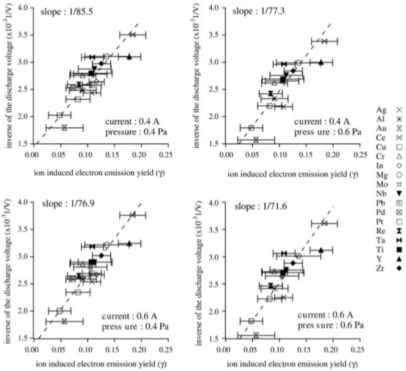
dc magnetron sputtering discharge

- A plot of the inverse discharge voltage $1/V_\mathrm{D}$ against γ_SE should then give a straight line through the origin
- Depla et al. measured the discharge voltage for a 5 cm diameter target for Ar working gas for 18 different target materials
- Since all the data is taken in the same magnetron, at same current and pressure, the discharge parameters parmeters m, β, ϵ_e and $\mathcal{E}_\mathrm{c}$ are independent of γ_SE



From Depla et al. (2009) TSF **517** 2825

dc magnetron sputtering discharge



From Depla et al. (2009) TSF **517** 2825

- $1/V_D$ against γ_{SE} for gas pressures of 0.4 and 0.6 Pa and discharge currents 0.4 A and 0.6 A
- It can be seen that a straight line indeed results, but that it does not pass through the origin

dc magnetron sputtering discharge

- We here propose that the intercept is due to Ohmic heating
- We can now write the inverse discharge voltage $1/V_{\rm D}$ in the form of a generalized Thornton equation

$$\frac{1}{V_{\rm D}} = \underbrace{\frac{\beta \epsilon_{\rm e}^{\rm H} m(1-r)(1-\delta_{\rm IR})}{\mathcal{E}_c^{\rm H}}}_{a} \gamma_{\rm SE} + \underbrace{\frac{\epsilon_{\rm e}^{\rm C} \langle I_{\rm e}/I_{\rm D}\rangle_{\rm IR} \delta_{\rm IR}}{\mathcal{E}_c^{\rm C}}}_{b}$$

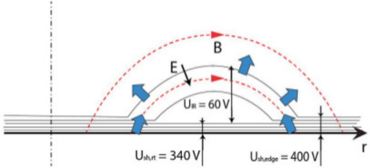
or

$$\frac{1}{V_{\rm D}} = a\gamma_{\rm SE} + b$$

- We associate b with the Ohmic heating process

dc magnetron sputtering discharge

- The figure shows schematically the magnetic field lines and the electric equipotential surfaces above the racetrack
- A potential $V_{\rm sh}$ falls over the sheath, and the rest of the applied voltage, $V_{\rm IR} = V_{\rm D} - V_{\rm sh}$, falls across the extended pre-sheath, the ionization region (IR), $\delta_{\rm IR} = V_{\rm IR}/V_{\rm D}$
- Ohmic heating, the dissipation of locally deposited electric energy $\mathbf{J}_{\rm e} \cdot \mathbf{E}$ to the electrons in the plasma volume outside the sheath



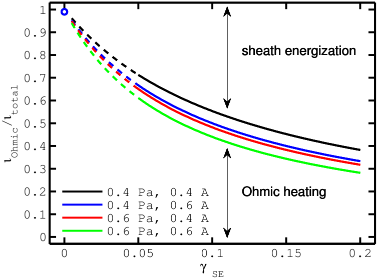
From Brenning et al. (2016) PSST **25** 065024

dc magnetron sputtering discharge

I_D (A)	p (Pa)	Slope k	Intercept l	$\delta_{IR} = U_{IR}/U_D$
0.4	0.4	0.0117	0.001 45	0.19
0.4	0.6	0.0129	0.001 20	0.16
0.6	0.4	0.0130	0.001 30	0.17
0.6	0.6	0.0140	0.001 10	0.15

- It follows that the fraction of the total ionization that is due to Ohmic heating can be obtained directly from the line fit parameters *a* and *b*
- This can be written as a function of only the secondary electron yield γ_{SE}

$$\frac{\iota_{Ohmic}}{\iota_{total}} = \frac{b}{a\gamma_{SE} + b}$$



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dc magnetron sputtering discharge

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- The fraction of the discharge voltage that falls over the ionization region

$$\delta_{\rm IR} = \frac{V_{\rm IR}}{V_{\rm D}}$$

can be estimated from

$$b = \frac{\epsilon_{\rm e}^{\rm C} \langle I_{\rm e}/I_{\rm D}\rangle_{\rm IR}\delta_{\rm IR}}{\mathcal{E}_c^{\rm C}}$$

- We assume

$$\epsilon_{\rm e}^{\rm C} = 0.8, \quad \langle I_{\rm e}/I_{\rm D}\rangle_{\rm IR} \approx 0.5,$$

and

$$\mathcal{E}_c^{\rm C} = 53.5 \text{ V} \text{ for } T_{\rm e} = 3 \text{ V}$$

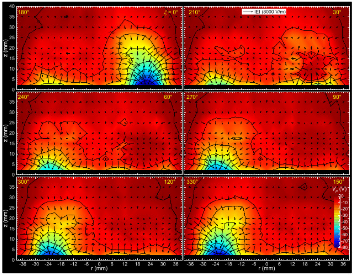
which gives

$$\delta_{\rm IR} = 0.15 - 0.19$$

- 15 - 19 % of the applied discharge voltage fall over the ionization region

dc magnetron sputtering discharge

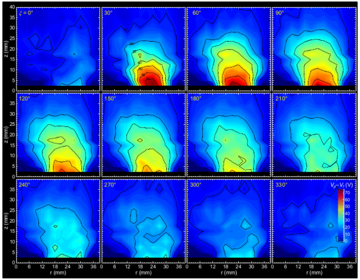
- Recent measurements have revealed strong electric fields parallel and perpendicular to the target of a dc magnetron sputtering discharge
- The largest **E**-fields result from a double layer structure at the leading edge of an ionization zone
- It is suggested that the double layer plays a crucial role in the energization of electrons since electrons can gain several tens of eV when crossing the double layer



From Panjan and Anders (2017) JAP **121** 063302

dc magnetron sputtering discharge

- Electrons gain energy when they encounter an electric field – a potential gradient, such as the field in the double layer
- The potential in the double layer jumps by 30 – 70 V ($\delta_{\rm IR} = 11 - 25$ %) in the region up to 20 mm over the racetrack area
- The electron heating power $\mathbf{J}_{\rm e} \cdot \mathbf{E}$ is associated with an acceleration of electrons in the electric field – this electron energization in a double layer is Ohmic heating



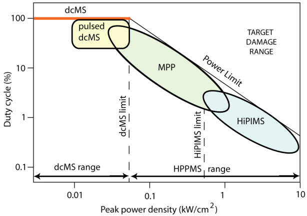
From Panjan and Anders (2017) JAP **121** 063302

- The distribution of $V_{\rm p} - V_{\rm f} \propto \langle E \rangle$ in the $r - z$ plane for a dcMS operated at 270 V and 0.27 Pa

High power impulse magnetron sputtering discharge

High power impulse magnetron sputtering discharge

- High ionization of sputtered material requires very high density plasma
- In a conventional dc magnetron sputtering discharge the power density (plasma density) is limited by the thermal load on the target
- High power pulsed magnetron sputtering (HPPMS)
- In a HiPIMS discharge a high power pulse is supplied for a short period
  - low frequency
  - low duty cycle
  - low average power



Gudmundsson et al. (2012), JVSTA **30** 030801

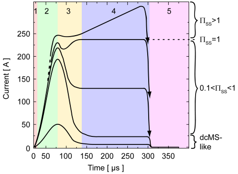
- Power density limits
  $p_t = 0.05$ kW/cm^2 dcMS limit
  $p_t = 0.5$ kW/cm^2 HiPIMS limit

Voltage - Current - Time characteristics

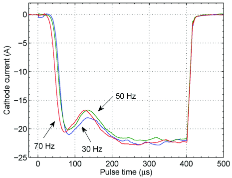
Non-reactive HiPIMS

HiPIMS - Voltage - Current - time

- In **non-reactive** discharge the current waveform shows an initial pressure dependent peak that is followed by a second phase that is power and material dependent
- The initial phase has a contribution from the working gas ions, whereas the later phase has a strong contribution from self-sputtering at high voltage



From Gudmundsson et al. (2012), JVSTA **30** 030801

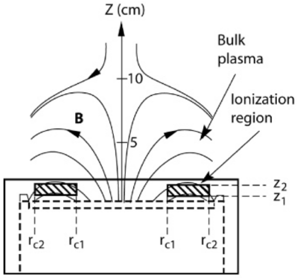


From Magnus et al. (2011) JAP **110** 083306

Ionization region model studies of non-reactive HiPIMS

Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

- The ionization region model (IRM) was developed to improve the understanding of the plasma behaviour during a HiPIMS pulse and the afterglow
- The main feature of the model is that an ionization region (IR) is defined next to the race track
- The IR is defined as an annular cylinder with outer radii r_{c2}, inner radii r_{c1} and length $L = z_2 - z_1$, extends from z_1 to z_2 axially away from the target



The definition of the volume covered by the IRM

From Raadu et al. (2011), PSST **20** 065007

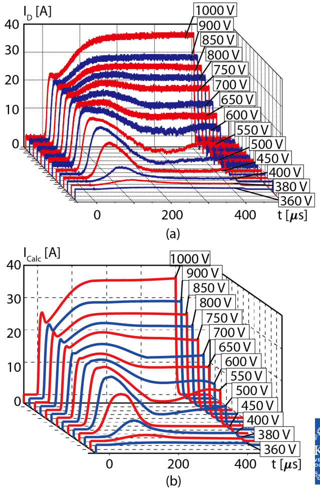
Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

- The temporal development is defined by a set of ordinary differential equations giving the first time derivatives of
  - the electron energy
  - the particle densities for all the particles
- The species assumed in the non-reactive-IRM are
  - electrons
  - argon atoms Ar($3s^2 3p^6$), warm argon atoms in the ground state Ar^W, hot argon atoms in the ground state Ar^H, Ar^m ($1s_5$ and $1s_3$) (11.6 eV), argon ions Ar^+ (15.76 eV)
  - titanium atoms Ti(a ^{3}F), titanium ions Ti^+ (6.83 eV), doubly ionized titanium ions Ti^{2+} (13.58 eV)
  - aluminium atoms Al($^2P_{1/2}$), aluminium ions Al^+ (5.99 eV), doubly ionized aluminium ions Al^{2+} (18.8 eV)

Detailed model description is given in Huo et al. (2017), JPD submitted 2017

Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

- The model is constrained by experimental data input and fitted to reproduce the measured discharge current and voltage curves, $I_{\mathrm{D}}(t)$ and $V_{\mathrm{D}}(t)$, respectively
- Two model fitting parameters were found to be sufficient for a discharge with Al target
  - V_{IR} accounts for the power transfer to the electrons
  - β is the probability of back-attraction of ions to the target



From Huo et al. (2017), JPD submitted 2017

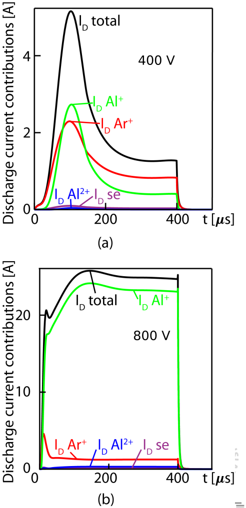
Experimental data from Anders et al. (2007) JAP **102** 113303

Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

- A **non-reactive** discharge with Al target
- When the discharge is operated at 400 V the contributions of Al^{+} and Ar^{+}-ions to the discharge current are very similar
- At 800 V Al^{+}-ions dominate the discharge current (**self-sputtering**) while the contribution of Ar^{+} is below 10 % except at the initiation of the pulse

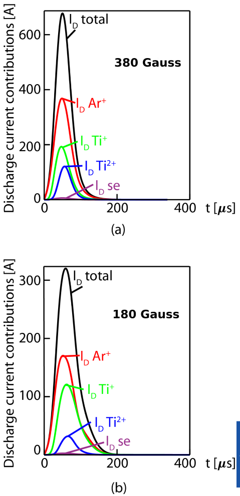
From Huo et al. (2017), JPD submitted 2017

Experimental data from Anders et al. (2007) JAP **102** 113303



Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

- A **non-reactive** discharge with Ti target
- The contributions to the discharge current for two cases, weak (180 Gauss) and strong (380 Gauss) magnetic field, at 75 Hz pulse frequency
- Stronger magnetic field leads to a higher discharge current
- Higher magnetic field strength leads to higher relative contribution of Ti^{2+} while it lowers the relative contribution of Ti^{+}



From Huo et al. (2017), JPD submitted 2017

Experimental data from Bradley et al. (2015) JPD **48** 215202

Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

- A primary current $I_{\rm prim}$ is defined as ions of the working gas, here Ar^+, that are ionized for the first time and then drawn to the target
- This is the dominating current in dc magnetron sputtering discharges
- This current has a critical upper limit

$$I_{\rm crit} = S_{\rm RT} e p_{\rm g} \sqrt{\frac{1}{2\pi m_{\rm g} k_{\rm B} T_{\rm g}}} = S_{\rm RT} e n_{\rm g} \sqrt{\frac{k_{\rm B} T_{\rm g}}{2\pi m_{\rm g}}}$$

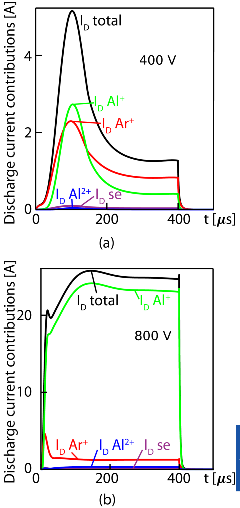
- Discharge currents $I_{\rm D}$ above $I_{\rm crit}$ are only possible if there is some kind of recycling of atoms that leave the target, become subsequently ionized and then are drawn back to the target

Anders et al. (2012), JPD **45** 012003

Huo et al. (2014), PSST **23** 025017

Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

- For the Al target the critical current is $I_{\rm crit} \approx 7$ A
- The experiment is operated from far below $I_{\rm crit}$ to high above it, up to 36 A.
- With increasing current $I_{\rm prim}$ gradually becomes a very small fraction of the total discharge current $I_{\rm D}$
- The current becomes mainly carried by singly charged Al^{+} ions, meaning that **self-sputter recycling** or the current $I_{\rm SS-recycle}$ dominates



(a)

(b)

From Huo et al. (2017), JPD submitted 2017

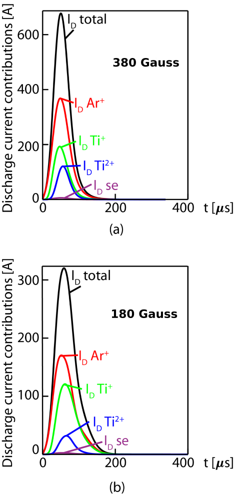
Experimental data from Anders et al. (2007) JAP **102** 113303

Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

- The discharge with the Ti target is operated with peak current far above the critical current of $I_{\rm crit} \approx 19$ A
- This discharge shows close to a 50/50 combination of **self-sputter recycling** $I_{\rm SS-recycle}$ and **working gas-recycling** $\mathrm{I}_{\rm gas-recycle}$
- For a discharge with Ti target, the recapture probability of secondary electrons r has to be added as a fitting parameter

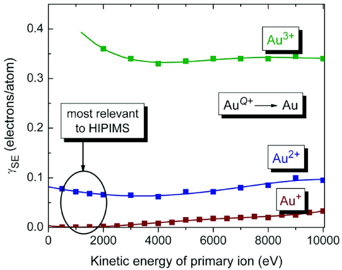
From Huo et al. (2017), JPD submitted 2017

Experimental data from Bradley et al. (2015) JPD **48** 215202



Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

- Recall that singly charged metal ions cannot create the secondary electrons – for metal self-sputtering (γ_{SE} is practically zero)
- The first ionization energies of many metals are insufficient to overcome the workfunction of the target material
- For the discharge with Al target operated at high voltage, self-sputter dominated, the effective secondary electron emission is essentially zero



From Anders (2008) APL **92** 201501

Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

- The power transfer to the electrons is given by

$$P_e = P_{SH} + P_{Ohm} = I_{e,SH}\,(V_D - V_{IR}) + \frac{I_D\,V_{IR}}{2}$$

where

$$P_{SH} = I_{e,SH} V_{SH} = \left(I_{Ar^+}\gamma_{Ar^+,eff} + \frac{1}{2} I_{M^{2+}}\gamma_{M^{2+},eff} \right) V_{SH}$$

and

$$P_{Ohm} = I_{e,IR} V_{IR} = \left\langle \frac{J_e}{J_D} \right\rangle I_D\,V_{IR}$$

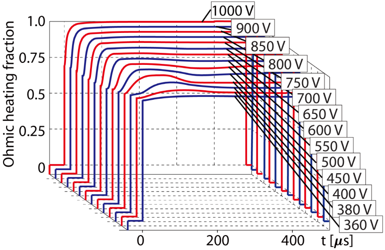
- Then $I_{e,SH} \sim \gamma_{SE}\epsilon_e m(1-r)I_D \sim 0.05 I_D$ and $I_{e,SH} \ll I_D/2$ so that

$$I_{e,SH} \ll I_D/2$$

and Ohmic heating is more efficient

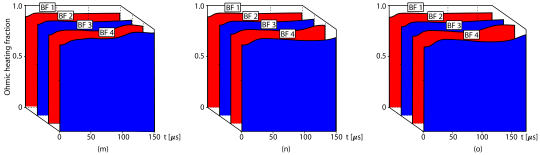
Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

- For the Al target, the fraction of the total electron heating that is attributable to Ohmic heating is found in the range of 0.87 (360 V) to 0.99 (1000 V).
- The domination of Al^{+}-ions, which have zero secondary electron emission yield, has the consequence that there is negligible sheath energization
- The ionization threshold for twice ionized Al^{2+}, 18.8 eV, is so high that few such ions are produced



From Huo et al. (2017), JPD submitted 2017

Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

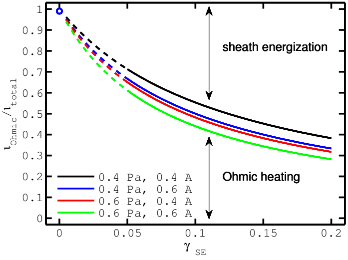


- For the discharge with Ti target more Ar^{+}-ions contribute to the current and the ionization degree of Ti^{2+} is more than order of magnitude larger than the ionization degree of Al^{2+}, so there are more secondary electrons
- The fraction of the total electron heating that is attributable to Ohmic heating is about 0.92
- Decreasing the magnetic field strength (BF1 to BF4) slightly reduces the Ohmic heating fraction

From Huo et al. (2017), JPD submitted 2017

Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

- The relative contributions to the total ionization ι_{total} due to Ohmic heating, ι_{Ohmic}, and sheath energization, ι_{sheath}
- A blue circle marks the HiPIMS study modelled by Huo et al. (2013)
- It is taken at the end of a 400 μs long pulse when the discharge was deep into the self-sputtering mode
- A large fraction of Al^{+} ions here gives $\gamma_{\text{SE,eff}}$ close to zero
- Note that this HiPIMS case $\gamma_{\text{SE,eff}}$ is consistent with the dcMS cases



From Brenning et al. (2016) PSST **25** 065024

Ionization region model non-reactive HiPIMS

- The model results show that for an argon discharge with Al target the contribution of Al^{+}-ions is over 90 % at 800 V, while Al^{+}-ions and Ar^{+}-ions contribute roughly equally to the discharge current at 400 V
- For high currents the discharge with Al target develops almost pure **self-sputter recycling**, while the discharge with Ti target exhibits close to a 50/50 combination of **self-sputter recycling** and **working gas-recycling**
- For a Ti target, a self-sputter yield significantly below unity makes working gas-recycling necessary at high currents.
- The model results show that Al^{2+}-ions contribute negligibly, while Ti^{2+}-ions effectively contribute to the production of secondary electrons
- The fraction of the total electron heating that is attributable to Ohmic heating is over 90 %

Summary

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- It has been demonstrated that Ohmic heating of the electrons can play a significant role in conventional dc magnetron sputtering discharges
- We used a ionization region model to explore the plasma composition and the electron heating mechanism in a high power impulse magnetron sputtering (HiPIMS) discharge
  - For high currents the discharge with Al target develops almost pure **self-sputter recycling**, while the discharge with Ti target exhibits close to a 50/50 combination of **self-sputter recycling** and **working gas-recycling**
  - The fraction of the total electron heating that is attributable to Ohmic heating is over 90 % in the HiPIMS discharge

Thank you for your attention

The slides can be downloaded at

http://langmuir.raunvis.hi.is/~tumi/ranns.html

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