

DOCTORAL THESIS

Plasmonic properties of silver-based alloy thin films

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Abstract

The plasmonic properties of silver-based alloy thin films were studied. Silver-ytterbium (Ag-Yb) and silver-magnesium (Ag-Mg) prepared by thermal co-evaporation were investigated extensively for various thin film properties. The optical properties were intensively analyzed and discussed because the dielectric response of a material is particularly significant in terms of its plasmonic properties. The study of silver-based alloy thin films has been mostly about Ag alloying with other transition metals, but the results of Ag-Yb and Ag-Mg in this work showed that the intensity of plasma resonance is tunable, in which the idea may also apply to other silver-rich binary alloy thin films regardless of the kind of second metal components.

In our research, the Ag plasma resonance was weakened with respect to the concentration of Yb and Mg in the alloy thin films. The change in the optical characteristics around Ag plasma resonance frequency was attributed to an increase in “resonance damping”. This is confirmed from modeling using classical free-electron theory. The increase in the damping was experimentally corroborated by the concentration dependence of electrical conductivity and estimated average crystallite size of Ag-Yb and Ag-Mg thin films. The reduction in electrical conductivity was not only caused by introducing less conductive Yb or Mg but also through disturbing the Ag lattice structure to promote additional electron scattering at grain boundaries.

The Ag-Yb and Ag-Mg alloys carried intermediate properties between their pure components despite the presence of Yb or Mg oxides. Besides optical and electrical properties, changes in the electronic work function were also assessed since it is also important in applications. Plasmonic nanostructures and transparent organic light-emitting diodes (OLEDs) were fabricated to demonstrate their potential applications. Two-dimensional disc-arrays nanostructures composed of pure Ag and Ag-Yb were implemented to evaluate the plasmonic properties. The damping loss in Ag-Yb caused weakened coupling of incident photons and surface plasmons when compared to pure Ag without altering the coupling wavelengths, suggesting potential plasmonic materials for tuning the coupling strength of surface plasmons by controlling the concentration of Yb which may also apply to Ag-Mg. Ultrathin Ag-Yb and Ag-Mg films were used as cathodes in transparent OLEDs for demonstration, which was beneficial by virtue of overall device transmittance though sacrificing electrical conduction leading to poor light emission unless inserting additional ultrathin lithium fluoride to modify the ultrathin cathodes.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Abstract | i |
| Acknowledgements | ii |
| Table of Contents | iii |
| List of Figures | vi |
| List of Tables | xi |
| CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 Metals..... | 1 |
| 1.1.1 Metals as plasmonic materials | 2 |
| 1.1.2 Pure metals in plasmonic applications | 4 |
| 1.2 Alloys | 5 |
| 1.2.1 Making metastable alloys | 6 |
| 1.2.2 Potential applications of alloys in nanotechnology | 8 |
| 1.3 Scope of the research | 9 |
| CHAPTER 2 THEORY..... | 15 |
| 2.1 Electrical properties of metals | 15 |
| 2.1.1 Electrical conductivity of free-electron metals | 16 |
| 2.1.2 Electrical resistance and electron scattering | 19 |
| 2.1.3 Electrical resistance of metallic alloys..... | 21 |
| 2.1.4 Quantum corrections to electrical conductivity | 22 |
| 2.2 Optical properties of metals | 25 |
| 2.2.1 Optical constants and dielectric constants | 25 |
| 2.2.2 Simplified Drude model of optical properties | 27 |
| 2.2.3 Conductivity and optical properties | 29 |
| 2.2.4 Plasma frequency | 32 |
| 2.2.5 Bound-electron contributions..... | 34 |
| 2.3 Surface plasmons | 37 |
| CHAPTER 3 EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES | 41 |
| 3.1 Thin film Fabrication | 41 |
| 3.1.1 Sample preparations..... | 41 |
| 3.1.2 Thin film characterizations | 43 |
| 3.1.2.1 Film thickness determination..... | 43 |
| 3.1.2.2 Transmission measurement..... | 44 |
| 3.1.2.3 Spectroscopic ellipsometry | 44 |

| | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 3.1.2.4 | Four-point probe method | 46 |
| 3.1.2.5 | Kelvin probe method..... | 47 |
| 3.1.2.6 | Photoelectron spectroscopy | 50 |
| 3.1.2.7 | X-ray diffraction | 54 |
| 3.1.2.8 | Scanning electron microscopy | 56 |
| 3.2 | Plasmonic nanostructures..... | 57 |
| 3.2.1 | Preparation methods..... | 57 |
| 3.2.2 | Sample characterizations | 60 |
| 3.3 | Organic light-emitting diodes | 60 |
| 3.3.1 | Device structures and materials used..... | 60 |
| 3.3.2 | Fabrication procedures..... | 61 |
| 3.3.3 | Evaluations and interpretations on device performances..... | 63 |
| CHAPTER 4 PROPERTIES OF ALLOY THIN FILMS..... | | 67 |
| 4.1 | Optical properties of alloy thin films | 68 |
| 4.1.1 | Optical transmission of as-deposited pure metal thin films..... | 69 |
| 4.1.2 | Optical transmission of as-deposited alloy thin films..... | 72 |
| 4.1.3 | Plasma resonance of Ag..... | 76 |
| 4.1.4 | Dielectric function of alloy thin films..... | 81 |
| 4.2 | Electrical conductivity of alloy thin films | 91 |
| 4.3 | Electronic work function of alloy thin films..... | 94 |
| 4.3.1 | Calibration of UPS spectra using pure Ag thin films..... | 95 |
| 4.3.2 | Work function determined by UPS | 97 |
| 4.3.3 | Work function determined by Kelvin probe method | 98 |
| 4.4 | Elemental and chemical compositions determined by XPS | 101 |
| 4.4.1 | As-prepared pure Ag, pure Yb and Ag-Yb alloy thin films..... | 102 |
| 4.4.2 | Pure Yb thin film treated with argon ion sputtering | 111 |
| 4.5 | Structural and morphological properties of Ag-Yb alloy thin films | 116 |
| 4.5.1 | Crystal structures of pure Ag, pure Yb and Ag-Yb thin films | 116 |
| 4.5.2 | Surface morphology of Ag-Yb thin films | 123 |
| 4.6 | Summary..... | 126 |
| CHAPTER 5 APPLYING SILVER-BASED ALLOY THIN FILMS IN PLASMONIC AND ORGANIC LIGHT-EMITTING DEVICES..... | | 131 |
| 5.1 | Plasmonic nanostructures..... | 131 |
| 5.1.1 | Overview..... | 131 |
| 5.1.2 | Surface plasmon excitation | 133 |
| 5.1.3 | Analysis of resonance wavelengths | 137 |
| 5.1.4 | Summary..... | 140 |

| | | |
|--------------------|--|-----|
| 5.2 | Transparent OLEDs | 141 |
| 5.2.1 | Backgrounds | 141 |
| 5.2.2 | Effect of the thickness of metal cathode | 143 |
| 5.2.3 | Electron injection with Ag-Yb and Ag-Mg ultrathin cathodes | 148 |
| 5.2.4 | Summary | 153 |
| CHAPTER 6 | CONCLUSIONS..... | 155 |
| APPENDIX A | PERCENTAGE CONVERSIONS OF COMPOSITION RATIO OF AG-YB AND AG-MG BINARY ALLOYS..... | 158 |
| APPENDIX B | SUPPLEMENTARY EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS..... | 160 |
| List of References | | 164 |
| Curriculum Vitae | | 181 |