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Polyaniline on crystalline silicon heterojunction solar cells

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Organic/inorganic heterojunction solar cells were fabricated on the (100) face of n-type silicon crystals using acid-doped polyaniline (PANI) with widely varying conductivities. For films with conductivities below $10^{-1} \text{ S/cm}$, the open-circuit voltage $V_{OC}$ increases with increasing film conductivity as expected when $V_{OC}$ is limited by the work function of the film. Extrapolation of these results to the higher conductivity films indicates that PANI could support $V_{OC}$ of 0.7 V or larger. $V_{OC}$ measurements for the cells with higher conductivity PANI saturated at 0.51 V. We speculate that uncontrollable surface states at the PANI/Si interface are reducing these values. © 2007 American Institute of Physics [DOI: 10.1063/1.2789785]

Heterojunctions to crystalline silicon (c-Si) have long been of fundamental interest, and amorphous silicon (a-Si:H)/c-Si heterojunctions are now applied for some commercial “heterojunction with intrinsic thin layer” (HIT) solar cells. These heterojunction cells have achieved efficiencies as high as 21.8%, which approach the best results from HIT.0003-6951/2007/91(5)/0003-1

In this paper, we report our research on polyaniline/n-type silicon heterojunction solar cells. Doped polyaniline (PANI) conducts holes well (conductivities as high as $10^3 \text{ S/cm}$ have been reported), and this near-metallic or nanometalic character along with its stability in air makes polyaniline interesting for this application. PANI/c-Si heterojunctions have been examined as gas sensors. In the present work, we primarily explored the open-circuit voltage $V_{OC}$ of these heterojunctions under illumination. For PANI films with smaller conductivities (<$10^{-1} \text{ S/cm}$), the dependence of $V_{OC}$ upon conductivity was consistent with limitation by the work functions of the two materials; work function effects on the performance of polymer light-emitting diodes incorporating polyaniline were reported previously. Extrapolation of the measurements to the higher conductivity films suggests that PANI films could support $V_{OC}$ values of 0.7 V or higher, which is about the current limit achieved with a-Si:H/c-Si heterojunctions. The largest $V_{OC}$ we obtained was 0.51 V. Direct measurement of the built-in potential $V_{BI}$ in these cells indicates that PANI/Si surface states are limiting $V_{BI}$ and $V_{OC}$.

We used “emeraldine salt” dispersions of polyaniline in xylene from Sigma-Aldrich, Inc. (film conductivity $\sigma=10^1 \text{ S/cm}$) and from Ormecon GmbH ($\sigma=10^2 \text{ S/cm}$). To make solar cells, a dispersion was spin coated onto the freshly HF-etched, polished surface of n-type, (100) silicon wafers with an evaporated aluminum back contact; the area of the PANI film was typically about 1 cm$^2$. The films were dried in air following the manufacturer’s instructions [80 °C for 24 h (Aldrich) and 100 °C for 1 min (Ormecon)], and a 1 mm diameter gold contact was evaporated onto the PANI film. Films spun from the Ormecon dispersion were 0.35 μm thick. We prepared doped PANI films with widely varying conductivities ($10^{-5}$ to $10^1 \text{ S/cm}$) from the Aldrich dispersion by increasing its xylene concentration. This dilution (from 2% PANI by weight to 0.3%) reduced the thickness of the spun films from 0.4 to 0.1 μm, which appears consistent with the effect of the reduced viscosity for diluted films. Scanning electron microscopy indicated that these films were continuous, although with somewhat differing morphologies for the differing dilutions.

The dependence of the current density upon voltage is shown in Fig. 1 for a PANI/n-Si diode (Ormecon dispersion) for the dark and for tungsten-halogen illuminations through the PANI (intensity of 0.1 W/cm$^2$). The saturated photocurrent density is 17 mA/cm$^2$, which is reasonably consistent with the photon flux that reaches the c-Si after filtering by the PANI film. The open-circuit voltage $V_{OC}$ is 0.51 V, which is about 0.1 V below the values observed for c-Si based cells with metal back electrodes.

FIG. 1. Current density as a function of voltage across a PANI/c-Si diode (Ormecon dispersion, $1.2 \times 10^2 \text{ S/cm}$). The white-light illuminator intensity was 0.1 W/cm$^2$.

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of 41% is due to the lateral resistance of the PANI film (and the absence of a top metallic grid). It is of interest that the light and dark curves cross at about 0.6 V; while such “crossover” is not typical for homojunction c-Si diodes, it has been reported previously for heterojunctions of [poly(3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene):poly (styrenesulfonate)] (PEDOT:PSS) on a-Si:H.6,9

In Fig. 2, the open-circuit-voltages $V_{OC}$ (at intensity 0.58 W/cm$^2$) for each of a series of PANI/c-Si diodes are shown as a function of the conductivity $\sigma$ of a PANI film casts onto glass using the same dispersion. $V_{OC}$ was almost constant (at $V_{OC}^{sat}=0.52$ V) as the conductivity of the PANI films varied from $10^{-1}$ to $10^2$ S/cm. Below a threshold conductivity $\sigma_c=0.05$ S/cm, the data are fitted satisfactorily by the form

$$V_{OC} = 0.53 + (k_B T/e) \ln(\sigma/\sigma_c),$$

where $k_B T/e=0.025$ V is the ratio of the Boltzmann thermal energy to the electron charge at room temperature. The large range of conductivities—about $10^3$—accessible by fairly modest dilution of emeraldine salt dispersions may be a useful complement to the similarly large effects found in blends of polyaniline with nonconductive (filler) polymers.17,18

For $\sigma < \sigma_c$, the logarithmic dependence of $V_{OC}$ is consistent with the idea that $V_{OC}$ is limited by the built-in potential across the diode,19

$$eV_{OC} = eV_{BI} = E_F^c - E_F^{PANI},$$

where $E_F^c$ is the Fermi level of the (n-type) c-Si and $E_F^{PANI}$ is the Fermi level of the p-type PANI film. Assuming that the conductivities of the PANI films are mainly determined by their Fermi levels (and work functions), we write

$$\sigma = \sigma_{00} \exp[-(E_F^{PANI} - E_F^c)/k_B T],$$

where $E_F^{PANI}$ is the transport energy for holes in the PANI films. We obtain for $V_{OC}$ (in the built-in potential limit) that

$$eV_{OC} = (E_F^c - E_F^{PANI}) - k_B T \ln(\sigma_{00}/\sigma).$$

Equation (4) accounts for measured slope $k_B T/e=0.025$ V of the dependence of $V_{OC}$ on the natural logarithm of the film conductivity.

We now turn to the plateau value for $V_{OC}$ of around 0.5 V that we found (Fig. 2) for PANI conductivities $\sigma > 10^{-1}$ S/cm. This value is of importance for potential applications. $V_{OC}$ is reduced by our use of a metal back contact (instead of a back surface field) and by photon absorption by the top PANI layer; we estimate these reductions to add to about 0.05 V. The main effect reducing the saturated value for $V_{OC}$ appears to be that the built-in potential $V_{BI}$ did not reach the values of 0.74 V or larger that would be inferred from Fig. 2 for the highest conductivity films (from Ormecon GmbH). We determined the built-in potential for the heterojunctions incorporating high conductivity PANI using capacitance-voltage (C-V) measurements and a standard Schottky fitting (1/C$^2$ vs V). We obtained $V_{BI}=0.60$ V, which is substantially lower than the extrapolated $V_{OC}=0.74$ V and indicates that for larger conductivity films, $V_{BI}$ is lower than would be inferred from the conductivity.

We therefore speculate that the Fermi level at the interface of the PANI and the c-Si interface is not as low as would be anticipated for “bulk” PANI, thus leading to reduced values of $V_{BI}$ across the c-Si. Such an effect could be due to a band of surface states that “pin” $E_F$ at the interface for the heavily doped material. Angle-resolved ultra-
violet photoemission measurements do indicate interface-dependent electronic states for PANI on oxidized c-Si surfaces. It is conceivable that these effects could be mitigated by grafting of PANI onto the c-Si surface or other strategies.

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14Three types of (100) oriented n-type silicon crystals were used: (1) Atmospheric Chemetals Corp., Czochralski, 2 Ω cm, 380 μm thick; (2) Topsil Semiconductor Materials A/S, float zone, 0.5–1.5 Ω cm, 205–245 μm thick; and (3) Montco Silicon Technologies, float zone, 2.6 Ω cm, 215 μm thick. Sources 1–3 correspond to the circle, triangle, and inverted triangle symbols in Fig. 2, respectively.
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