

Spin-dependent tunneling in Heusler alloy-based magnetic tunnel junctions

Tolulope Ogunbekun, Kazuki Yonemura, Takayuki Ishikawa, and Masafumi Yamamoto

Division of Electronics for Informatics, Graduate School of Information Science and Technology, Hokkaido University, N14, W9, Kita-Ku, Sapporo 060-0814, Japan.

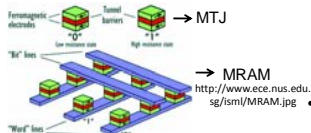
Abstracts

We fabricated epitaxial MTJs with a Heusler alloy thin film of $\text{Co}_2\text{Cr}_{0.6}\text{Fe}_{0.4}\text{Al}$ (CCFA) as a lower electrode, an MgO barrier and a $\text{Co}_{50}\text{Fe}_{50}$ upper electrode. A relatively high TMR ratio, up to 109% at room temperature (RT) (317% at 4.2K) has been achieved for these CCFA/MgO/CoFe MTJs which were *ex situ* post-fabrication annealed at 175°C. The purposes of our present study are to understand the key factors that influence spin dependent tunneling characteristics in these Heusler alloy-based MTJs, and then to further enhance the TMR ratio. Recently, we introduced *in situ* annealing at a temperature T_a , just after deposition of the upper CoFe electrode to investigate how the TMR characteristics vary with T_a . Our results show a significant upward scale in TMR ratios for T_a ranging from RT to 500°C. The TMR ratio increased with increasing T_a from 95% at RT (225% at 4.2K) for T_a of RT to 152% at RT (335% at 4.2K) for T_a of 500°C.

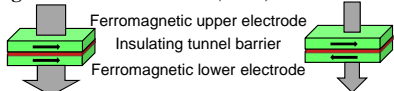
Introduction

MagnetoResistive Random Access Memory (MRAM)

- Non Volatile
- High Speed
- High density
- Unlimited write/read endurance



Magnetic Tunnel Junction (MTJ)



- Parallel orientation
Current High
Resistance Low

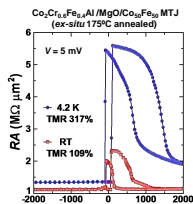
- Antiparallel orientation
Current Low
Resistance High

Tunnel MagnetoResistance (TMR) ratio

$$\text{TMR} = \frac{R_{\text{AP}} - R_{\text{P}}}{R_{\text{P}}} = \frac{2P_1P_2}{1 - P_1P_2}$$

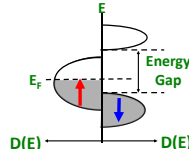
where,
 P_i : spin polarization of electrode
 R_{P} : resistance for parallel orientation
 R_{AP} : resistance for anti-parallel orientation

- TMR ratio – key device parameter of MTJs
- Highly spin-polarized ferromagnetic electrodes are preferable - High TMR ratio.



T. Marukame et al., APL 90, 012508 (2007)

Half-Metallic Ferromagnet (HMF)



- Existence of energy gap at E_F for one spin direction
- Complete spin polarization at E_F resulting in a high TMR ratio
- Highly favorable for ferromagnetic electrodes used in spintronic devices

$$P_i = \frac{\rho_i^\uparrow - \rho_i^\downarrow}{\rho_i^\uparrow + \rho_i^\downarrow}$$

As $\rho_1^\uparrow \& \rho_2^\downarrow \rightarrow 0$; $P_1 \& P_2 \rightarrow 1$; TMR $\rightarrow \infty$

Heusler Alloys

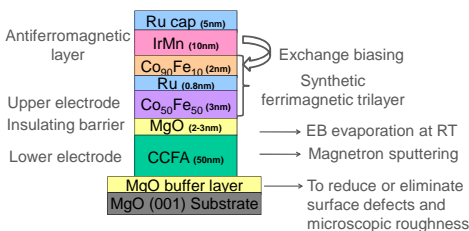
- Half metallic ferromagnetic nature theoretically predicted for many of these alloys
- High Curie temperatures, well above RT
- Examples include : $\text{Co}_2\text{Cr}_{0.6}\text{Fe}_{0.4}\text{Al}$ (CCFA), Co_2MnGe (CMG), Co_2MnSi (CMS)

Materials and Methods

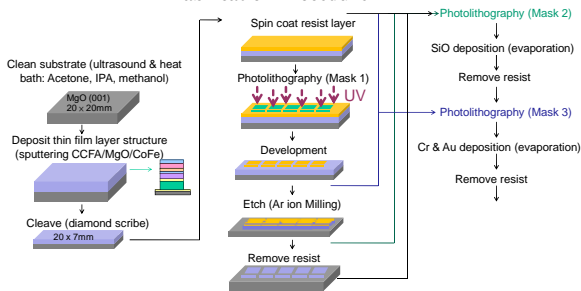
Fabricating MTJ layer structure

MTJ Layer structure:

$\text{Co}_2\text{Cr}_{0.6}\text{Fe}_{0.4}\text{Al}/\text{MgO}/\text{Co}_{50}\text{Fe}_{50}$ (CCFA/MgO/CoFe)
 Sputtering Machine - ultrahigh vacuum chamber (with a base pressure of about 6×10^{-8} Pa)



Fabrication Procedure



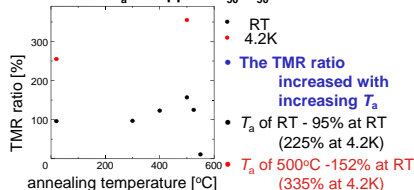
Research Purpose

⊗ To understand the key factors that influence spin dependent tunneling characteristics in these Heusler alloy-based MTJs, and then to further enhance the TMR ratio.

Enhancing the TMR ratio

Introduced *in situ* annealing of upper electrode at a temperature T_a

TMR ratio vs T_a for upper $\text{Co}_{50}\text{Fe}_{50}$

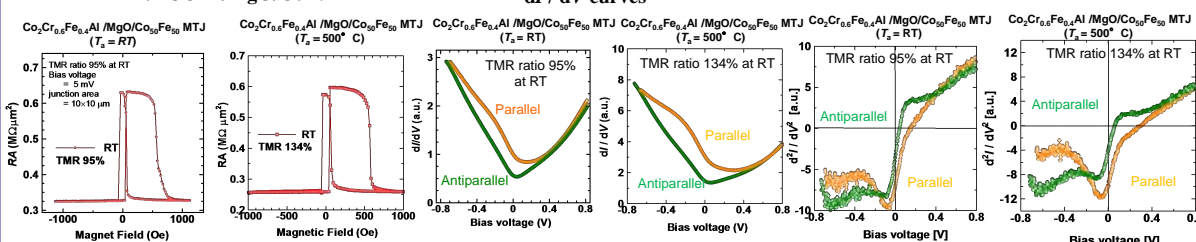


Results, Discussion and Conclusion

TMR for CCFA/MgO/CoFe

dI/dV curves

d^2I/dV^2 curves



⊗ These results indicate that the electronic density of states around the Fermi level for minority spins in interfacial regions of both the lower CCFA and the upper CoFe, both facing the MgO barrier, decreased with increasing T_a from RT to 500°C. ⊗ These led to increased spin polarization of both the CCFA and the CoFe in the interfacial region. ⊗ These findings are consistent with the increased TMR ratios observed for the MTJs with T_a of 500°C.

⊗ To further clarify this dependence of the TMR ratio on T_a , we investigated I vs. V , dI/dV ($=G$) vs. V and d^2I/dV^2 vs. V characteristics. (The bias voltage, V was defined with respect to the lower CCFA electrode).

⊗ In general, the slopes of the G_{AP} and G_{P} were distinctly lower for MTJs with T_a of 500°C than those for MTJs with T_a of RT.
 ⊗ Precisely, the lower slope G_{AP} was observed for both $V > 0$ and $V < 0$, and the lower G_{P} for $V > 0$ in the region from $|V| = 0$ to -0.4 V.