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SUB-6 GHz IP BLOCKS FOR 5G TRANSCEIVERS IN 65 nm CMOS

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This paper presents the development results of a vector modulator, a low-noise amplifier and a power amplifier for the 4.80–4.99 GHz. It is planned to deploy fifth-generation communication systems in this frequency band in the Russian Federation. Circuits, layouts and simulation results of the designed IP blocks are presented and compared with state-of-the-art works. All circuits are inductorless to improve bandwidth and reduce the layout area. Thus, the vector modulator area, which has the largest dimensions, is only 0.4 sq. mm. The use of a vector modulator that combines the functions of an attenuator and a phase shifter in the transceiver modules makes it possible to calibrate the amplitude-phase states to minimize the influence of the technological process parameters variation. According to the simulation results, the designed IP blocks allow implementing the transceiver for the whole sub-6 GHz band (3–5 GHz).

Keywords: vector modulator, power amplifier, low noise amplifier, CMOS, calibration, 5G.

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IP-БЛОКИ ДЛЯ ПРИЁМОПЕРЕДАТЧИКОВ СЕТЕЙ 5G НА ОСНОВЕ 65 нм КМОП-ТЕХНОЛОГИИ

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В статье представлены результаты разработки интегральных схем векторного модулятора, маломощного усилителя и усилителя мощности для приёмопередающих модулей диапазона частот 4,80–4,99 ГГц, в котором планируется развертывание систем связи пятого поколения в Российской Федерации. Представлены принципиальные схемы, топологии и результаты моделирования IP-блоков, проведено сравнение полученных характеристик с аналогичными разработками. Разработанные интегральные схемы не содержат индуктивных элементов, что позволяет значительно расширить полосу рабочих частот и уменьшить площадь топологии. Так, площадь топологии векторного модулятора, имеющего наибольшие габариты, составляет всего 0,4 кв. мм. Использование векторного модулятора, объединяющего в себе функции аттенюатора и фазовращателя, в приёмопередающих модулях позволяет обеспечить возможность калибровки амплитудно-фазовых состояний для минимизации влияния разброса параметров технологического процесса. Согласно результатам моделирования, на основе разработанных IP-блоков можно реализовать универсальный приёмопередатчик для всего диапазона до 6 ГГц (3–5 ГГц) систем 5G.

Ключевые слова: векторный модулятор, усилитель мощности, маломощный усилитель, КМОП-технология, калибровка, 5G.

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Introduction

The fifth generation (5G) communication systems, in comparison with the existing ones, have significant advantages, such as lower latency, higher data rates and connection density, better energy and spectral efficiency [1]. To provide these benefits, multiple frequency bands and electrically scanned antennas are used. According to GSMA information, the frequency spectrum of 5G systems is divided into three bands [2]: sub-1 GHz (~ 600–700 MHz), sub-6 GHz (~ 3–5 GHz) and above 6 GHz (~ 24–29 GHz and higher). However, specific frequency ranges in these bands may differ from country to country. In the Russian Federation the 4.80–4.99 GHz range is allocated for the 5G in the sub-6 GHz band [3], while in most other countries the 3.4–3.8 GHz range will be used.

There are three main electronically scanned antenna architectures [4]: digital, analog and hybrid. The last two use phase shifters (PS) as a key element. A hybrid architecture that combines analog and digital parts is considered by the scientific community and commercial companies as the most promising due to the higher flexibility compared to pure analog architecture and lower power consumption compared to purely digital architecture. Among the possible ways to build hybrid electronically scanned antenna, two approaches can be distinguished:

- based on high power amplifiers with power dividers/adders and phase shifters;
- based on many transceiver modules with low and medium power amplifiers.

The first approach seems promising due to fewer power amplifiers. However, in practical implementation problems associated with high insertion losses of power splitters/combiners and GaAs or GaN phase shifters. The second approach is more complicated, but allows to process low power RF signals by silicon integrated circuits and then amplify them if necessary [5]. Silicon technology makes it possible to integrate RF circuits with mix-mode circuits, such as analog-to-digital converters [6, 7] and digital-to-analog converters [8], and with digital circuits in one die. Digital circuits can also be implemented in GaAs, but with lower energy efficiency [9]. Thus, the development of silicon IP blocks for the 5G transceiver modules in the 4.80–4.99 GHz range is an urgent task, the solution of which is presented in this paper.

CMOS RF IP blocks: circuits, layouts, simulation and comparison

The designed low noise amplifier (LNA) circuit is shown in Fig. 1a and consists of an input amplifier based on a feedback inverter, an active balanced-to-unbalanced signal converter, and a common-source output stage. The LNA is implemented on the basis of the noise canceling technique [10] to ensure low noise figure in a wide frequency range. The dimensions of the LNA layout are 150 x 335 μm (Fig. 1b).

The results of computer simulation after parasitic parameters extraction are shown in Fig. 1c. Taking into account the influence of the input bonding wire, the developed low-noise amplifier in the frequency band of 1.1–7.7 GHz provides a gain of 12.2–15.2 dB, a noise figure (NF) of 2.45–2.80 dB, an input and output return losses better than -10 dB.

In the 4.80–4.99 GHz range, the forward transmission coefficient S_{21} is more than 13.8 dB, the noise figure is below 2.53 dB, the input and output return losses are below -20.4 dB and -13.4 dB consequently. The power consumption of the circuit is about 14.4 mW with the input 1 dB compression point -21.4 dBm. The performance comparison of the designed low-noise amplifier with similar solutions is presented in Table 1.

The designed two-stage power amplifier circuit is shown in Fig. 2a. Each stage is based on a pair of N -transistors in a cascode connection to double the circuit supply voltage and increase the output power

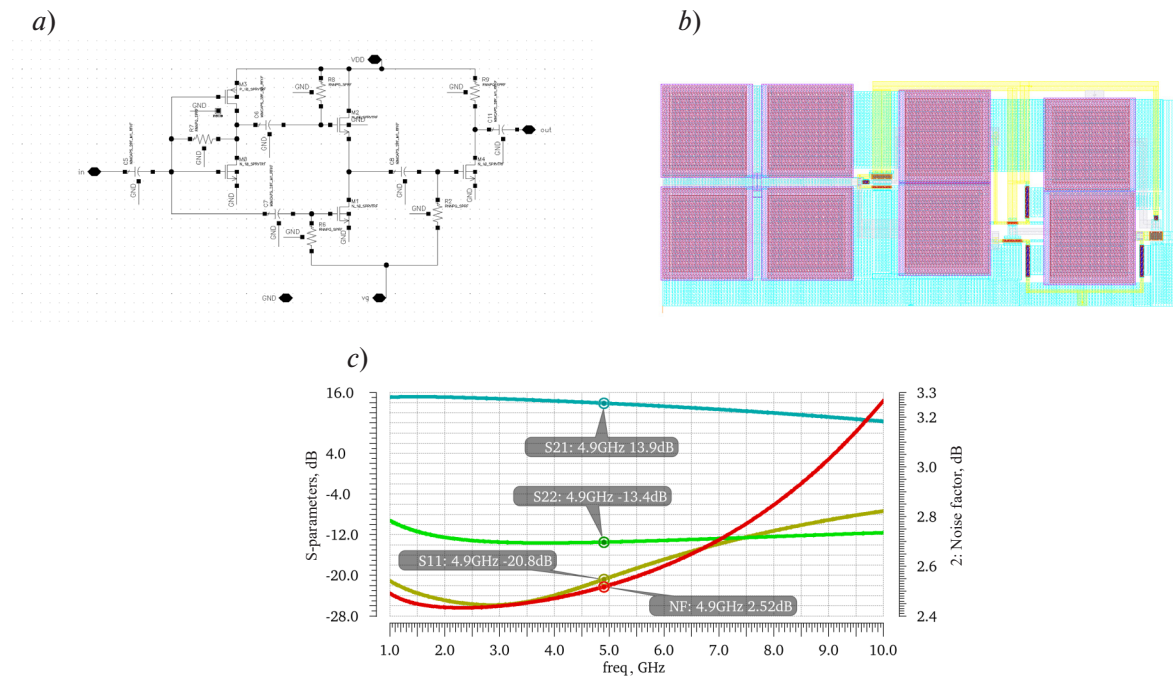


Fig. 1. Low noise amplifier schematic (a), layout (b), S-parameters and NF versus frequency (c)

Table 1

Performance Comparison of the LNAs

	[11]	[12]	[13]	[14]	[15]	[16]	This work
Technology, nm	180	130	180	350	130	180	65
Frequency, GHz	3–10	0.2–3.3	3.4–3.8	3.3–3.8	2.3–2.7	2.0–5.0	1.1–7.7
Gain, dB	11	13.8	15.3	23.1	18.7	14.9	15.2
Input CP1dB, dBm	-15	-19.6*	-13.5	-18	-17.2	-12.0	-21.4
Power consumption, mW	11.5	19.0	9.3	27.6	9.4	14.0	14.4
NF, dB	3.2	3.4	1.35	2.5	0.85	3.2	2.8
Area, sq. mm	N/A	0.15	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.35	0.05

*Estimated

level. The dimensions of the power amplifier layout are 280 x 190 μm (Fig. 2b). The results of computer simulation after parasitic parameters extraction are shown in Fig. 2c and Fig. 2d. Taking into account the influence of the output bonding wire, the power amplifier in the 2.0–15.9 GHz frequency range provides 24.1–24.7 dB gain with the input and output return losses better than -10 dB. In the frequency range of 4.80–4.99 GHz, the input 1 dB compression point is better than -10.0 dBm, while the output power is 13.9 dBm with 13.3% power-added efficiency (PAE). The state-of-the-art linear power amplifiers characteristics comparison is given in Table 2.

The block diagram of the developed vector modulator is shown in Fig. 3a and consists of an input active balun (UnBal) that converts an unbalanced signal to a balanced form, a second-order passive polyphase

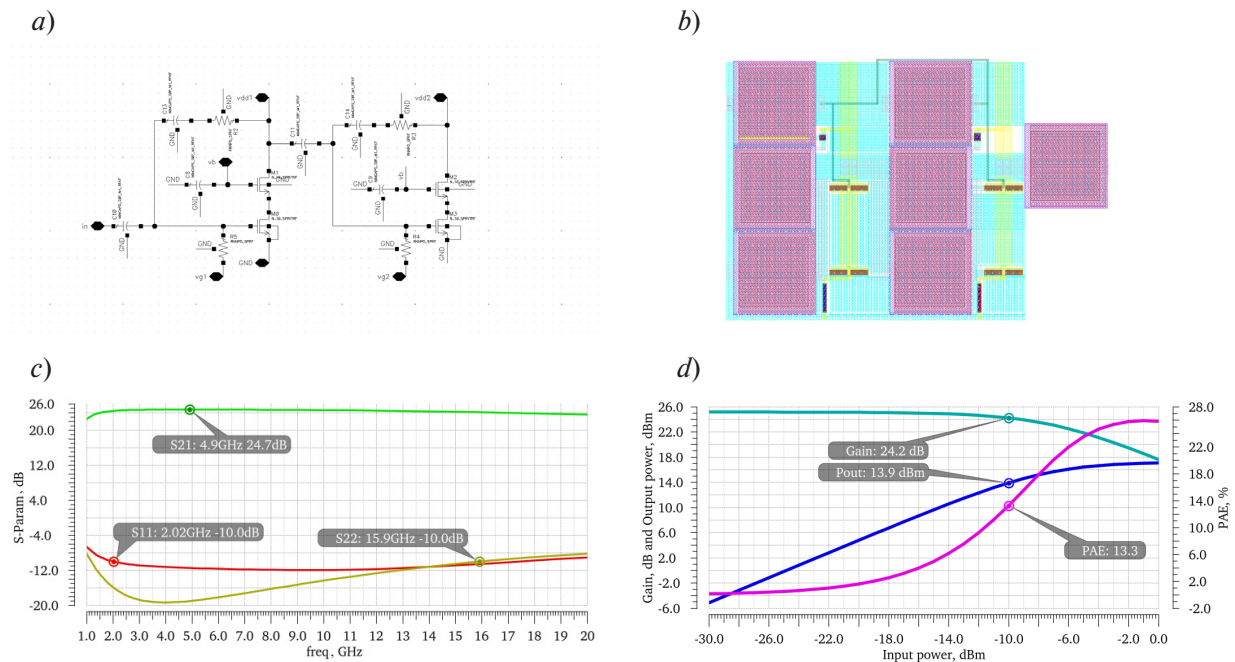


Fig. 2. Power amplifier schematic (a), layout (b), S -parameters versus frequency (c), gain, output power and PAE versus input power (d)

Table 2

Performance Comparison of the Power Amplifiers

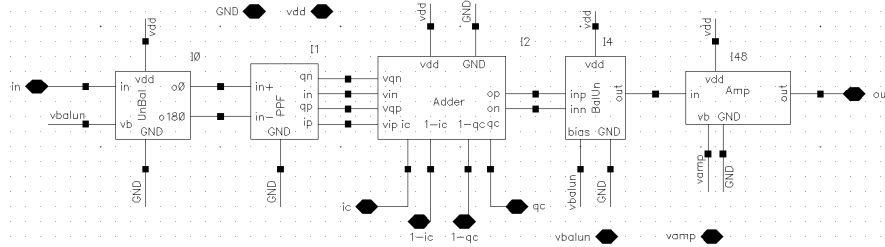
	[17]	[18]	[19]	[20]	[21]	[22]	This work
Technology, nm	180	65	65	180	130	180	65
Frequency, GHz	3.1–10.6	2.5–2.6	2.4	1.8–2.6	6.0–9.0	3.0–10.6	2.0–15.9
Gain, dB	15	30	13.5	22	8	11.5	24
Output CP1dB, dBm	4.3	22*	6	21*	7	9	14
Power consumption, mW	14.4	1250	171	818	22	34	189
PAE, %	18	12.6	2.4	15.4	22.7	23.5	13.3
Area, sq. mm	0,53	2.98	1.7	1.33	0.86	0.81	0.05

*Estimated

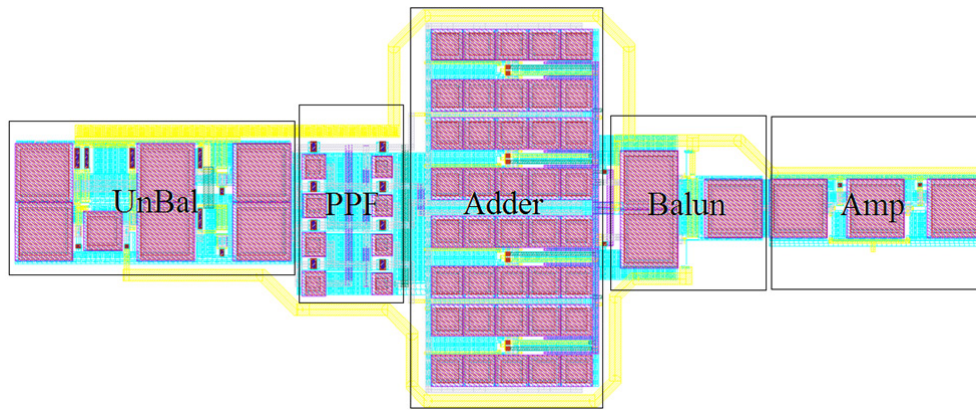
RC filter (PPF), an adder based on Hilbert cells, an output active converter from a balanced signal to an unbalanced signal (Balun) and an output amplifier. Schematics of the listed circuits are presented in [23]. The dimensions of the vector modulator layout are $1050 \times 410 \mu\text{m}$ (Fig. 3b).

The developed vector modulator has a maximum gain of 10.7 dB. In the frequency range of 4.80–4.99 GHz, the transmission coefficient of the circuit varies from minus 0.1 dB to plus 0.5 dB. The input 1 dB compression point is about -5 dBm while the power consumption of the circuit is less than 40 mW. The calibration procedure [24] has been performed to obtain 6 bit phase resolution and 5 bit amplitude resolution. The designed modulator controls gain from 0 dB to -8 dB with 0.5 dB steps. Simulation results of the vector modulator gain and phase versus frequency are presented in Fig. 3c and Fig. 3d respectively. The maximum amplitude and RMS phase errors calculated from the simulation

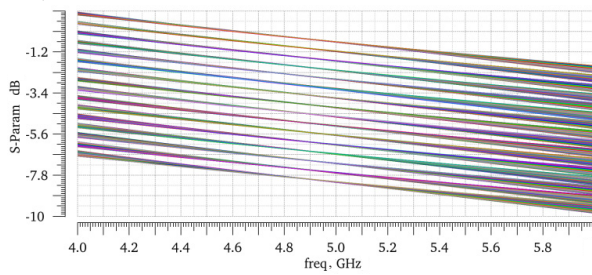
a)



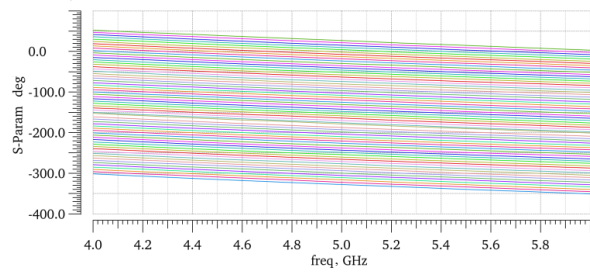
b)



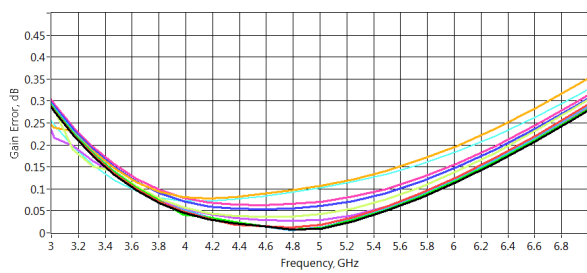
c)



d)



e)



f)

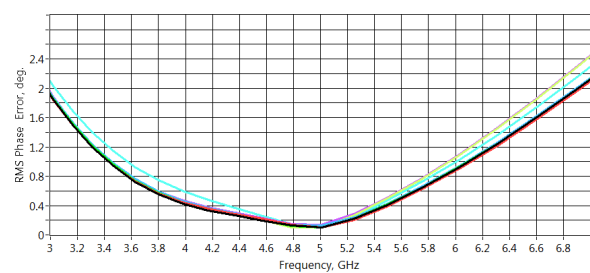


Fig. 3. Vector modulator block diagram (a), layout (b), simulated gain (c) and phase (d) versus frequency, calculated gain (e) and phase (f) errors versus frequency

Table 3

Performance Comparison of the PSs and VMs

	[25]	[26]	[27]	[28]	[29]	[30]	[31]	This work
Technology, nm	130	180	180	180	180	180	180	65
Frequency, GHz	0.5–6.0	1.0–2.1	2.3–4.8	0.8–2.7	2–3	2.2–3.2	2.8–3.2	3.2–5.0
Phase error, deg.	7.0	N/A	1.4	7.2	5.0	4.5	1.0	2.2
Gain error, dB	1.0	1.5	1.1	0.8	1.5	1.1	0.4	0.4
Gain, dB	8.0	4.8	–3.0	–17.4	0	–6	1.7	~ 0
Power consumption, mW	28	5	19	21	24	95	99	40
Input CP1dB, dBm	–22	–2	0.6	N/A	–14	4	4	–5.2
Area, sq. mm	1.3	0.3	0.9	0.9	0.4	6.0	5.3	0.4

results are presented in Fig. 3e and Fig. 3f. As can be seen from the data the designed circuit can be used in the whole sub-6 GHz band if it will be calibrated in the middle of this band. Table 3 summarizes the performance of the designed vector modulator and presents a comparison with similar solutions.

Conclusion

This paper presents a low noise amplifier, power amplifier and vector modulator for sub-6 GHz 5G systems in 65 nm CMOS technology. Due to inductorless structure, the designed blocks are broadband and occupy small silicon area (0.05–0.4 sq. mm) while providing competitive characteristics. Based on the proposed IP blocks, the universal transceiver module for sub-6 GHz 5G band (3–5 GHz) can be designed.

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