

光学学报

基于塔姆等离激元激发法布里-珀罗谐振的折射率传感器设计

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摘要 在金属光栅覆盖分布式布拉格反射镜(DBR)双层结构中, 利用金属与DBR界面上的塔姆等离激元(TPPs)能够激发金属光栅狭缝内的表面等离激元(SPPs)的法布里-珀罗(F-P)谐振, 由此产生的能量局域有助于感知狭缝内填充介质的折射率参数。为了进一步提升TPPs的激发效率, 实现高灵敏度折射率传感, 本文提出在金属光栅底部引入金属膜层构建金属光栅-金属膜-DBR的三层复合结构, 采用有限元法分析了膜层厚度对复合结构透射谱线的定量影响。仿真结果显示, 随着金属膜层厚度的增加, 透射峰的谱宽单调减小, 而峰值透射率呈现先增大后减小的变化趋势, 在膜厚为12 nm时最大, 相比无膜层结构, 光谱峰值透射率提升约29%。在此基础上通过改变光栅占空比及金属光栅高度, 分析了光栅狭缝中三到五阶类F-P谐振模对应的透射峰的传感性能指标。结果表明, 随着占空比的减小, 各阶谐振模透射峰的灵敏度显著增大。当选择占空比为60%时, 四阶和五阶谐振透射峰的传感灵敏度分别升至171.20 nm/RIU(灵敏度单位)和178.35 nm/RIU。此外, 改变金属光栅的高度可以实现折射率探测区间近乎线性移动, 当光栅高度从900 nm增大到1200 nm时, 基于三到五阶谐振模式的探测区间可以有效覆盖从1.00到2.27的折射率区间。本文的研究结果为利用TPPs进行折射率传感提供了一种有效的设计思路。

关键词 遥感与传感器; 表面等离激元; 塔姆等离激元; 金属光栅; 类法布里-珀罗谐振; 折射率传感器

中图分类号 O436

文献标志码 A

DOI: 10.3788/AOS230518

1 引言

表面等离激元(SPPs)作为一种电磁表面波可以将电磁能量高度局域在金属-电介质界面上, 有效增强了光波与电介质的作用过程, 为设计高灵敏度光学传感器提供了一种有力的工具^[1-4]。然而由于SPPs波的色散曲线位于光锥之外, 其激发过程需要借助棱镜及光栅等独立元件以实现相位匹配, 这阻碍了器件的小型化和集成应用。

2007年, 塔姆等离激元(TPPs)作为一种新颖的表面局域模式被提出并在很快在实验上得到证实^[5-6]。TPPs主要产生在金属膜层与分布式布拉格反射镜(DBR)的界面上, 不仅可以实现能量的高度局域, 而且其色散曲线位于光锥之内, 具备易于激发的优点, 使其成为折射率传感领域备受关注的研究对象。然而典型的TPPs谐振模通常局域在金属与DBR界面上与外界介质隔绝, 降低了其对环境介质的敏感性。为了克服这一限制, Auguié等^[7]利用介质孔多层次材料构造DBR结构并在其与金属层界面上激发TPPs, 通过测量由TPPs产生的透射峰波长位置来反演待测溶

剂性质; 多孔的结构有效提升了TPPs对待测介质的敏感性, 只是结构制作相对复杂且灵敏度较低。Zhang等^[8]利用待测介质填充DBR结构中的低折射率介质层进行折射率传感研究, 该方案有效增强了TPPs对待测介质的响应能力, 只是响应值与待测量之间的线性度有待提升。此外在DBR结构中引入单层待测介质构成缺陷层, 利用缺陷模与TPPs之间的模式耦合效应也可以实现对介质折射率的有效检测^[9-12]。

近年来, 利用TPPs与SPPs耦合产生混合谐振实现折射率传感可以有效增加光场与待测介质的相互作用强度, 逐渐成为一个备受关注的研究方向^[13-15]。相比于采用多孔介质制作DBR结构以增强TPPs模式对探测介质的响应灵敏度^[16-19], 采用金属光栅覆盖DBR结构具有制作简单、能有效提升TPPs与SPPs之间耦合强度的特点, 在设计易于集成的折射率传感器方面更具优势。Das等^[20]提出利用金属光栅狭缝中SPPs模式的类法布里-珀罗(F-P)谐振效应设计折射率传感器, 结果显示, 反射率极小值的波长会随着填充介质折射率变化而移动, 同时减小金属光栅的占空比可以提

收稿日期: 2023-02-06; 修回日期: 2023-03-14; 录用日期: 2023-04-10; 网络首发日期: 2023-05-08

基金项目: 国家自然科学基金(61775102, 61905117)、南京邮电大学科研启动项目(NY220050, NY214058)

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高响应灵敏度。只是减小占空比也降低了TPPs的激发效率,导致信号质量劣化。本文通过在金属光栅与DBR交界面上引入金属膜层有效提升了TPPs的激发效率,增大了透射峰的峰值幅度,同时提高了透射峰中心波长对填充介质折射率的响应灵敏度。仿真结果显示,在金属膜厚为8 nm、光栅占空比为60%的条件下,光栅透射峰的传感灵敏度可达178 nm/RIU(灵敏度单位),品质因数(FOM)值及探测精度分别达到 10.74 RIU^{-1} 与 $60 \mu\text{m}^{-1}$,优于文献[16-20]报道的结果。

2 模型建立与仿真分析

本文在文献[20]的基础上提出了一种基于增强型TPPs耦合SPPs模式的高灵敏度折射率传感器结构,如图1所示。图中的金属层包含了厚度为 $h_g=1000 \text{ nm}$ 的金属光栅及其底部厚度为 h_m 的金属膜层,金属光栅的周期为 $p=400 \text{ nm}$,其中金属部分的宽度首先取为 $w=300 \text{ nm}$ 。金属银的介电常数采用Drude-Lorentz模型表示^[21];金属层下方是由高低折射率材料交替分布构成的DBR结构。文中DBR周期数取为10.5,其中高折射率介质为 $\text{TiO}_2(n_h=2.07)$,其厚度 $d_h=121 \text{ nm}$;低折射率介质为 $\text{ZnO}(n_l=1.6)$,其厚度 $d_l=156 \text{ nm}$ 。这样的参数可以保证DBR结构的禁带中心波长为1000 nm。图1所示的模型在y方向呈均匀分布,并且在该方向上没有对入射光场施加任何限制,进而在计算过程中可以将三维模型缩减为x-z平面内的二维平面模型处理。利用二维平面内的周期性结构特征,提取一个周期的平面结构模型结合周期性边界条件,可以完成该结构透射谱线及模场分布的高效计算。

在金属光栅刻蚀之前,完整金属层与DBR形成了典型的TPPs结构,其反射谱及模场分布如图2所示。在波长为1040 nm处,存在一个典型的由TPPs引起的反射率极小值,左侧插图显示在金属层与DBR交界面上产生了强烈的光场局域。右侧插图描绘出了磁场分量 $|H_y|$ 在垂直界面方向上的变化规律,其中竖直虚线代表交界面的位置。当偏离界面进入DBR区域时,磁场分量的振幅将呈衰减型振荡分布;而在金属一侧场量会迅速减小为零。显然在DBR与金属层交界面上产生了典型的TPPs并实现了光场能量的谐振局域,该局域模式有效地抑制了反射过程,从而形成了反射谱中波长位于1040 nm处的反射率极小值。

当金属层被刻蚀成金属光栅结构且底部未引入金属膜层($h_m=0$)时,模型结构与文献[20]一致。透射谱曲线如图3(a)中的实线所示,透射峰中心波长位于1008 nm处,与文献[20]中反射极小值波长位置基本一致,峰值透射率为0.554。图4(a)中左侧的模场图表明,波长位于1008 nm处的透射峰对应于金属光栅

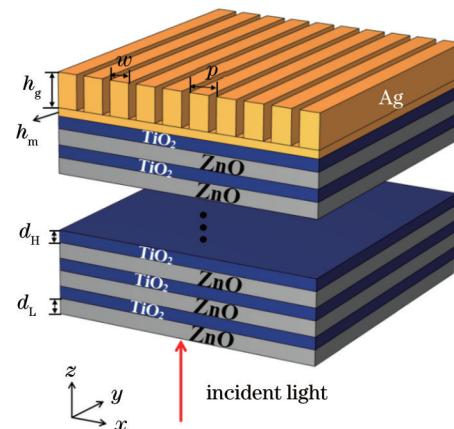


图1 金属光栅覆盖DBR结构示意图

Fig. 1 Structure diagram of DBR coated with metal grating

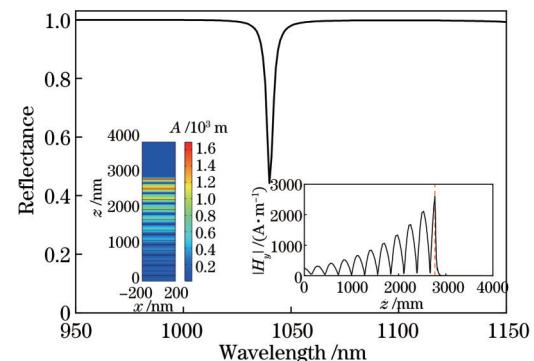


图2 完整金属层与DBR结构产生的反射谱图(左侧插图为反射极小值对应的磁场模值分布,右侧插图为周期单元中垂线上的磁场分量强度分布)

Fig. 2 Reflection spectrum generated in DBR structure coated with complete metal layer (Magnetic field modulus distribution corresponding to reflectance dip is shown in left inset, and intensity distribution of magnetic field components along vertical line of center of periodic element is shown in right inset)

狭缝中SPPs模式的三阶类F-P谐振效应^[22],而金属狭缝内的SPPs模式主要由入射光波在DBR与金属光栅交界面上激发出的TPPs模式在狭缝边缘散射产生。

为了进一步提升TPPs的激发效率,本文在金属光栅底部引入金属膜层以实现在膜层与DBR交界面上全域激发TPPs的目的。图3(a)中不同曲线给出了膜层厚度从4 nm增大到20 nm的过程中对应的透射谱线,其中竖直虚线标识出完整金属层覆盖DBR结构中激发出的TPPs的中心波长 $\lambda_T=1040 \text{ nm}$ 。当膜厚 $h_m=4 \text{ nm}$ 时,透射峰中心波长相对于无膜层结构将发生显著红移到达1084 nm,透射率降低为0.435,半峰全宽(FWHM)展宽为32 nm,如图3中虚线所示。这一显著的红移趋势和降低的透射峰值预示了透射峰的产生机理发生了变化,由于4 nm厚的金属膜层小于入射光波的趋肤深度,入射光波可以穿透金属膜层通过

端面耦合方式直接激发金属狭缝内的SPPs模式及其类F-P谐振,进而形成透射峰。入射光波穿过金属膜

层时会引入吸收损耗,进而降低了透射率峰值。

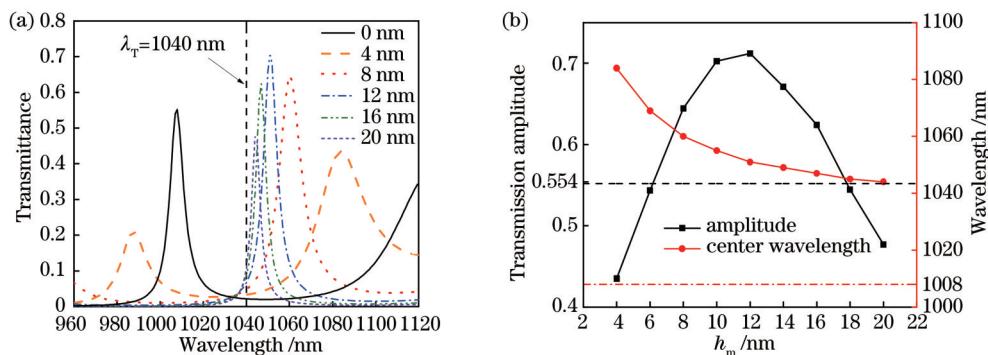


图3 模型的透射谱线图。(a)不同金属膜厚的光栅透射谱图;(b)峰值透射率及中心波长随膜层厚度从4 nm增加到20 nm的变化规律曲线

Fig. 3 Transmission spectrogram of model. (a) Transmission spectra of gratings with different metal film thicknesses; (b) evolution of peak transmittance and center wavelength with varied h_m from 4 to 20 nm

当金属膜厚增加到8 nm时,透射峰中心波长蓝移到1060 nm,且峰值透射率增加为0.644,FWHM收窄为14 nm,如图3(a)中点线所示。此时的透射率已经超过了无膜层结构时的0.554,初步实现了透射增强。在透射峰值处的模场分布如图4(a)中右图所示,在狭缝下方金属膜层与DBR交界面上已有TPPs产生。图4(b)中进一步给出了磁场分量 $|H_y|$ 在模型中心轴线($x=0$)上的分布规律,其中虚线和实线分别代表金属膜厚 h_m 为0和8 nm的场强分布曲线。当 $h_m=0$ 时,在狭缝底部区域没有TPPs产生,场强取到极小值。当 $h_m=8$ nm时,狭缝底部金属膜层下表面出现了明显的光场局域,产生了图4(b)中实线所示的场强尖峰,预示了在金属膜层与DBR交界面上激发出了TPPs。同时基于趋肤效应,膜层下方的TPPs能够穿越金属膜层耦合进入金属光栅狭缝区域,增强狭缝中的SPPs谐振模式,导致透射峰的幅度进一步增大。

当金属膜层厚度进一步增大为12 nm时,透射峰中心波长会蓝移到1051 nm,峰值透射率达到最大值0.712,FWHM减小为10 nm。继续增加膜层厚度,透射峰波长将继续蓝移并逐渐趋近于1040 nm,峰值透射率开始逐渐减小。图3(b)中有正方形标记的曲线描述了峰值透射率随膜厚 h_m 的变化关系,曲线走势表明随着膜厚 h_m 的增加,峰值透射率呈现出先增大后减小的变化趋势,当 $h_m=12$ nm时,峰值透射率达到最大值0.712。峰值透射率先增后减的变化趋势可由金属膜层下方TPPs的激发效率与其穿透膜层进入光栅狭缝过程中引入的吸收损耗之间的竞争过程来加以解释。在光栅底部引入厚度大于8 nm的金属膜层时,入射光波可以在金属膜层的下表面直接激发出TPPs实现光场局域增强,同时该TPPs模式可以穿透金属膜层而进入光栅狭缝产生SPPs模式及其类F-P谐振,进而产生透射峰。随着金属膜厚的增加,TPPs的激发

效率将逐渐提高,导致峰值透射率逐渐上升;与此同时,金属膜层对透射波的吸收也将随膜厚的增加呈指数规律增长。当金属膜厚大于12 nm时,膜层的吸收作用显著增强,导致峰值透射率开始呈现下降趋势。

另一方面,图3(b)中有圆形标记的曲线表明,透射峰中心波长会随着 h_m 的增大逐渐蓝移并趋近于1040 nm。产生这一现象的原因是,随着金属膜层厚度的增加,入射光波直接穿过膜层产生透射的比例在不断缩小,大部分入射光波在金属膜层与DBR交界面上激发出了能量高度局域的TPPs,再由TPPs穿透膜层进入狭缝区域激发SPPs的类F-P谐振。在这一转变过程中,透射峰的中心波长也逐渐趋近于TPPs在金属银与DBR结构中的中心波长1040 nm。这一变化趋势与文献[23]报道的结果相吻合。

3 传感应用性能分析

为了定量描述TPPs激发的类F-P谐振透射峰在折射率传感中的性能指标,图5(a)给出了透射峰的FWHM与Q值随金属膜厚的变化关系曲线,图中水平的上下虚线分别代表未引入金属膜层时金属光栅覆盖DBR结构透射峰的Q值和FWHM值。这里Q值的定义式选取 $Q=\lambda/\Delta\lambda=\lambda/W_{\text{FWHM}}$ 。由图可知,随着膜厚 h_m 的增加,峰值的FWHM单调减小,进而Q值呈现单调递增的上升趋势。当膜厚从4 nm增加到20 nm时,Q值从34上升到177。这是因为随着膜层厚度的增加,膜层对光波的吸收率将以指数趋势增大,只有充分接近TPPs中心波长的谐振能量才有机会穿透金属膜层产生透射。这无疑会导致透射峰的FWHM发生明显收窄,同时峰值波长随膜厚增大而蓝移的幅度较为有限,进而导致Q值显著提升。高Q值的透射峰无疑为折射率传感提供了有利的条件。

通过改变金属光栅狭缝内填充介质的折射率计算

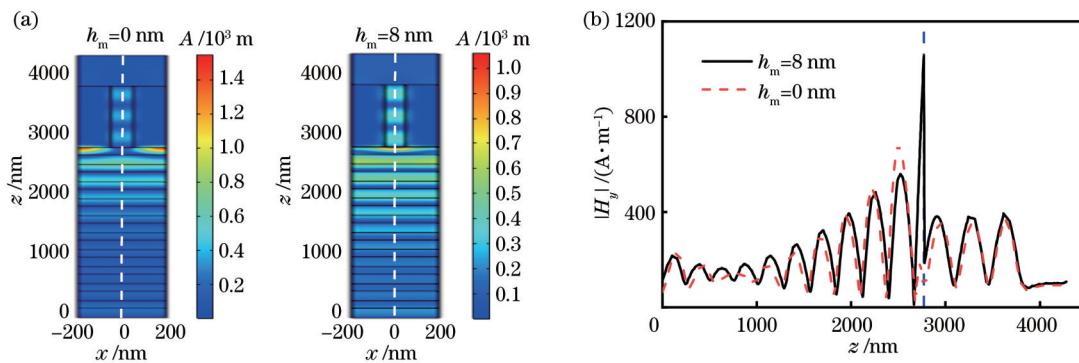


图4 模型的磁场分布图。(a)膜厚 h_m 分别为0与8 nm时磁场分量 $|H_y|$ 的分布图;(b)磁场分量 $|H_y|$ 沿中心轴线的分布图

Fig. 4 Magnetic field distribution of model. (a) Distribution of magnetic field component $|H_y|$ for $h_m=0$ and 8 nm ; (b) profile of magnetic component $|H_y|$ along axis of $x=0$

出了该结构用于折射率传感的灵敏度 S 及FOM值,这里 S 与FOM值的计算公式分别为 $S=d\lambda/dn$ 与 $F_{\text{OM}}=S/W_{\text{FWHM}}$ 。图5(b)中两条实线分别描述了透射峰灵敏度 S 及FOM值随膜厚 h_m 的增加而单调减小的变化趋势,图中水平的上下虚线分别代表无膜层金属光栅覆盖DBR结构的透射峰对应的灵敏度75 nm/RIU及FOM值8.6 RIU $^{-1}$ 。当膜厚 h_m 从4 nm增大到20 nm时,灵敏度 S 从192.50 nm/RIU降低到15.44 nm/RIU, FOM值则从11.40 RIU $^{-1}$ 逐步递减至2.62 RIU $^{-1}$ 。当 $h_m=8 \text{ nm}$ 时,传感灵敏度 S 为111.50 nm/RIU, FOM值为9.00 RIU $^{-1}$,此时灵敏度 S 与FOM值不仅均高于无膜层结构,而且与文献[16-20]相比也具有一定的优势。

金属光栅覆盖DBR结构产生的透射峰中心波长取决于金属膜层下方的TPPs与金属光栅狭缝中

SPPs模式的有效耦合以及狭缝中SPPs模式的类F-P谐振效应。根据F-P谐振条件^[22],金属狭缝中类F-P谐振模的中心波长将随填充介质折射率的不同而变化。在能够有效激发TPPs的波长范围内,折射率在较大范围内变化将会导致金属狭缝内F-P谐振模式的阶次发生改变。为明确填充介质折射率的有效探测区间以及线性度指标,本文数值计算了狭缝内填充介质折射率在1.0到2.3范围内变化时光栅结构的透射谱分布,结果如图6(a)所示。图中白色虚线表示完整金属层覆盖DBR结构中典型TPPs的激发波长1040 nm。图中由下而上顺次标注的A、B、C三点分别对应光栅狭缝内SPPs模式的三阶、四阶、五阶类F-P谐振模,其相应的模场分布如图6(b)所示,图中膜层下方的深色区域显示出了TPPs引起的场量增强效应。

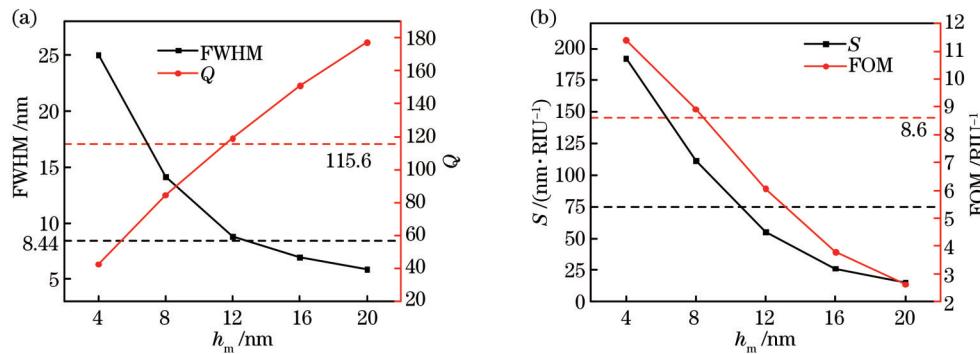


图5 透射峰特征参数随金属膜厚 h_m 的变化关系。(a) FWHM和Q值的变化;(b)灵敏度 S 和FOM值的变化

Fig. 5 Relationship between characteristic constants of transmission peak and metal film thickness h_m . (a) Evolution of FWHM and Q ; (b) evolution of sensitivity S and FOM

图6(a)中显示了三到五阶类F-P谐振模式产生的透射峰中心波长都在一定范围内随填充介质折射率改变而呈现的近乎线性变化的趋势,其斜率的倒数正好表征了折射率传感灵敏度 S 。透射峰的FWHM的倒数对应着传感器探测精度(DA);峰值波长的线性变化区间可以确定折射率传感的有效探测范围。表1给出

了在金属狭缝高度 $h_g=1000 \text{ nm}$ 、光栅占空比为75%的条件下,三阶、四阶及五阶谐振模式对应的传感灵敏度 S 、DA、FOM值、探测范围、线性度等参数的取值。表中DA及FOM值都将随着谐振阶次的升高而逐渐增大,这是由于随着阶次的升高,类F-P谐振透射峰的FWHM将逐渐减小。此外三个谐振阶次的折射率探

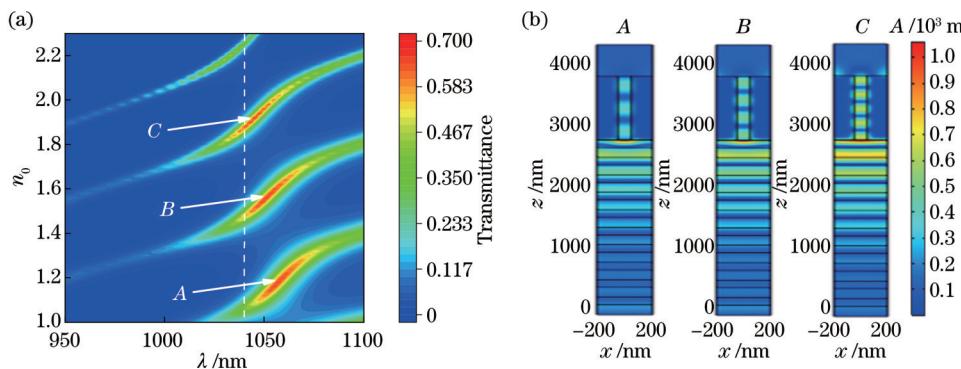


图6 模型的等值线图。(a)透射率随填充介质及入射波长的变化趋势;(b)图(a)中A、B、C三点对应的模场图

Fig. 6 Contour map of model. (a) Variation trend of transmittance with medium index and incident wavelength; (b) distributions of magnetic field component $|H_y|$ at points A, B, and C depicted in (a)

测的线性度都大于0.99,表明该结构用于折射率传感具有较强的可靠性。

为了进一步研究金属光栅占空比对折射率传感性能的影响,图7(a)给出了三阶、四阶与五阶谐振透射峰的传感灵敏度随占空比的变化规律。随着占空比的增加,三个谐振阶次的折射率传感灵敏度S均呈现单调递减趋势,这是因为占空比增大意味着狭缝宽度w减小,SPPs模式中电磁场将更多地渗入金属区域,进而对狭缝内部介质折射率的敏感性降低^[22]。当占空比低于70%的时候,在同一占空比下,灵敏度随谐振阶次的升高而增大,其原因可以归结为高阶谐振的模场在狭缝内的局域性更强,如图6(b)所示,进而高阶谐振模对狭缝内填充介质的折射率更为敏感。当占空比大于70%以后,狭缝区域宽度的减小虽然会进一步增加导模电磁场的局域程度,但同时也会促使更多的电磁场能量渗入到狭缝两侧金属区域,增强金属材料对狭缝内SPPs模式有效折射率的影响。进而随着占空比增加,三个谐振阶次之间的响应灵敏度的差别在逐渐减小,其中四阶与五阶模式的灵敏度几乎相同,这可以解释为两者渗入金属区域的能量占比相对接近。图7(b)给出了FOM值随占空比的变化规律,在同一占

空比条件下,FOM值则会随着谐振阶次的上升而呈现单调递增的趋势。这不仅因为高阶谐振将产生更大的灵敏度,同时也因为F-P谐振透射峰的FWHM会随着谐振阶次的增大而减小。

当金属光栅占空比为75%时,表1中数据显示,三个谐振阶次对应的探测范围是不连续的,存在着无法探测的盲区。为了进一步拓展折射率探测区间,本文计算了占空比从60%增大到85%的过程中,三个谐振阶次对应的折射率探测区间,结果如图7(c)所示。图中从下到上的粗实线分别代表三阶、四阶和五阶谐振模式的线性探测区间。在同一占空比条件下,随着谐振阶次的升高,探测范围会移向高折射率方向。这一趋势可由金属狭缝内的类F-P谐振条件来解释,阶次越高,必然要求模式有效折射率增加,而在狭缝宽度不变的前提下,只有通过增大填充介质的折射率来实现。对于同一谐振阶次,随着占空比的增加(狭缝宽度减小),模式有效折射率会增加,为了维持谐振条件,只有降低填充介质折射率,进而折射率探测范围将会向低折射率方向偏移。由图7(c)可以发现,在占空比从65%到85%的范围内通过改变谐振阶次,可以实现折射率从1.00到2.11的全范围探测。

表1 不同谐振阶次下的折射率传感性能指标

Table 1 Performance indicators of refractive index sensing under different resonant orders

Resonance order	Sensitivity /($\text{nm} \cdot \text{RIU}^{-1}$)	DA / μm^{-1}	FOM / RIU^{-1}	Detection range	Linearity
3rd	111.5	80.00	8.92	1.10—1.26	0.997
4th	118.7	87.95	10.58	1.49—1.65	0.998
5th	119.1	121.40	14.42	1.86—1.99	0.996

由于传感灵敏度会随着光栅占空比的增大而单调降低,通过改变占空比来调整探测范围会出现高占空比下的灵敏度较低的问题。根据F-P谐振理论,占空比一定时增加金属光栅层的高度 h_g 也可以实现探测范围的调节。因此,本文进一步研究了光栅高度 h_g 对传感性能的影响。图8(a)显示,当选择占空比为60%时,随着 h_g 的增大,三个谐振模透射峰的灵敏度均呈

现单调递增的趋势,其中四阶与五阶谐振模的增长趋势尤为明显。当 h_g 由900 nm增大到1200 nm时,四阶模式灵敏度可由140.2 nm/RIU增大到171.2 nm/RIU,五阶模式可由147.28 nm/RIU增大到178.35 nm/RIU。与文献[19-20]相比灵敏度已具有显著的优势。图8(b)给出了其FOM值随光栅高度 h_g 的变化规律,结果表明,光栅厚度从900 nm增大到

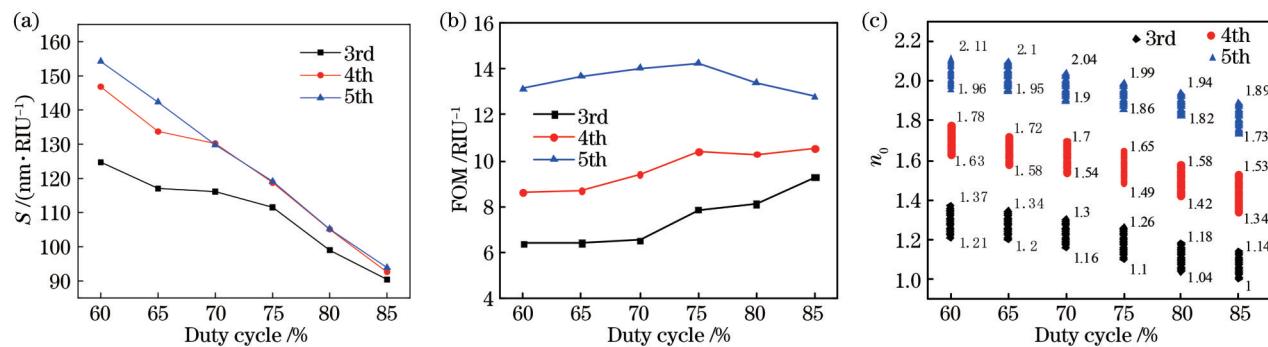


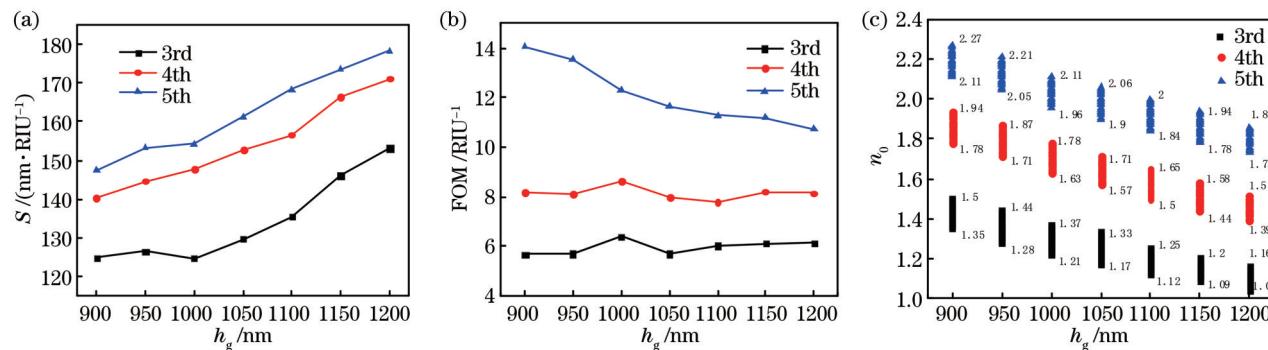
图7 不同占空比下光栅狭缝内三到五阶谐振模的透射峰的性能指标。(a)灵敏度;(b)FOM值;(c)探测范围

Fig. 7 Performance indicators of transmission peaks of 3-5 order resonant modes in grating slots under different duty ratios.

(a) Sensitivity; (b) FOM value; (c) detection range

1200 nm的过程中,四阶与五阶透射峰的FOM值可以保证分别高于8.10与10.74。这一取值高于文献[16-18, 20]中报道的结果。图8(c)显示出折射率探测范围随 h_g 的变化规律。随着 h_g 的增长,三个阶次探测范

围都将向低折射率偏移。当 h_g 从900 nm增大到1200 nm的过程中,五阶谐振透射峰可以实现折射率从1.72到2.27的全范围探测;利用四阶谐振模式可以实现折射率从1.39到1.94的探测。

图8 不同光栅厚度 h_g 产生三到五阶谐振模的透射峰的性能指标。(a)灵敏度;(b)FOM值;(c)探测范围Fig. 8 Performance indicators of transmission peaks of 3-5 order resonant modes generated by different grating thicknesses h_g .

(a) Sensitivity; (b) FOM value; (c) detection range

4 结 论

本文提出了一种在金属光栅底部引入金属膜层实现“金属银光栅-金属银膜-DBR”的三层复合结构,采用有限元法分析了银膜层厚度对透射谱峰中心波长及峰值透射率的定量影响。仿真结果显示,在金属光栅底部引入金属膜层可以在金属-DBR交界面上全域激发TPPs,有效提升了TPPs的激发效率;同时随着膜厚的增加,峰值透射率呈现先增大后减小的变化趋势。通过选择合适的银膜厚度能够有效提升金属光栅结构透射峰的峰值幅度。当膜厚为8 nm、金属光栅的高度及占空比分别为1000 nm和75%时,通过改变光栅狭缝区域内填充介质的折射率参数,计算了在TPPs的中心波长附近光栅狭缝中产生的三到五阶类F-P谐振模式及其相应的透射峰,结果表明,折射率传感灵敏度及FOM值会随着谐振阶次的上升而增大。在此基础上数值分析了金属占空比及光栅高度对传感性能参数的影响,结果表明,减小金属光栅占空比与增大光栅

度,都可以有效提高折射率传感灵敏度。在占空比为60%、光栅高度为1200 nm时,四阶和五阶谐振模式的灵敏度分别为171.20 nm/RIU和178.35 nm/RIU,且FOM值分别高于8.10 RIU $^{-1}$ 与10.74 RIU $^{-1}$ 。在光栅高度从900 nm到1200 nm的范围内,采用三到五阶谐振模式可以实现折射率从1.00到2.27的全范围有效探测。

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Design of Refractive Index Sensor Based on Fabry-Perot Resonance Induced by Tamm Plasmon Polaritons

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Abstract

Objective As a novel surface mode, Tamm plasmon polaritons (TPPs) can be directly generated by the incident light with any polarization on the interface between metal and a distributed Bragg reflector (DBR) because its dispersion curve lies inside the light cone. Significantly enhanced energy distribution on the metal-DBR interface makes TPPs a potential candidate for nanoscale sensor devices. However, highly localized energy also prevents TPPs from touching the outside medium. In order to improve the sensing sensitivity of TPPs to the ambient medium, a triple-layer combinative structure has been proposed in this study, which is constituted by a metal film sandwiched between a metal grating and a DBR section. In this configuration, TPPs can be effectively excited on the interface between DBR and the metal film with a proper thickness, and a fraction of the localized energy induced by TPPs can penetrate the metal film into the grating slits to produce the surface plasmon polariton (SPP) modes supported by the metal slits. A quasi-Fabry-Perot (F-P) resonance of SPPs can be generated by a proper incident wavelength, and the highly localized energy accumulated through the F-P resonance can be employed to sense the refractive index of the ambient medium.

Methods The DBR section in this study is formed by the alternating dielectric layers of TiO_2 with a thickness of 121 nm and ZnO with a thickness of 156 nm, which ensure a Bragg wavelength to be 1 μm . Meantime, the metal gratings and film are made of silver, and the corresponding frequency-dependent complex relative permittivity is described by the Drude-Lorentz model. Due to the periodicity of metal gratings and the uniform distribution of the proposed structure along the slit direction, the three-dimensional triple-layer structure can be simplified to a two-dimensional plane unit cell model combined with the periodic boundary condition. The modal distribution and transmission characteristics of the cell model have been calculated numerically by the finite element method. The transmittance spectra of the proposed model have been obtained by changing the incident wavelength successively. The influence of the film thickness on the peak transmittance, peak wavelength, and transmission bandwidth has been analyzed in detail by varying the film thickness from 4 to 20 nm. In addition, by changing the refractive index of the medium filled in the grating slits, the sensing performance of the proposed structure has been evaluated by calculating the transmittance spectra of the triple-layer structure with different structural parameters, such as film thickness, duty cycle, and grating height.

Results and Discussions At first, the transmittance spectra of the triple-layer structure with varied film thickness have been analyzed in detail by employing the finite element method. The numerical results demonstrate that the peak transmittance first increases for small values of the film thickness and then decreases when the film thickness is greater than 12 nm. As a result, a maximum transmittance of 0.712 is obtained when the film thickness equals 12 nm, which represents an improvement of nearly 29% in the peak transmittance compared with the filmless case [Fig. 3(a)]. Meantime, the full width at half maximum (FWHM) of transmission peak decreases monotonously with increasing film thickness, and the peak wavelength gradually approaches to the fixed value of 1040 nm, which is the central wavelength of the typical TPPs in the interface between the semi-infinite silver layer and DBR [Fig. 3(b)]. In addition, the sensitivity of the refractive index sensing has been calculated by changing the refractive index of the medium filled in the metal slits, and it is found that the sensitivity decreases monotonously with the increase in film thickness (Fig. 5). Therefore, a film thickness of 8 nm provides the most balanced performance in the transmittance enhancement and highly sensitive refractive index sensing, which can increase the peak transmittance by about 16% and the sensitive by nearly 50% compared with the filmless case. When the ambient media refractive index changes continuously from 1.0 to 2.2, the resonance order of the FP resonances occurring in the grating slits can be changed from third to fifth order (Fig. 6). Numerical results demonstrate that the detection range of the third, fourth, and fifth order resonances are 1.10–1.26, 1.49–1.65, and 1.86–1.99, respectively, and the sensitivity and FOM values associated with three resonant modes are monotonically increasing with the resonant order (Table 1). On this basis, by changing the duty cycle and height of the metal grating, the refractive index sensing performance of the transmission peaks corresponding to the third, fourth, and fifth-order F-P resonances in the grating slits is analyzed in detail. The results show that as the duty cycle decreases, the sensitivity will increase significantly, and the sensing sensitivities of the transmission peaks induced by the fourth and fifth-order resonances occurring in the grating slits are 171.2 nm/RIU and 178.35 nm/RIU, respectively, when the duty cycle of grating equals 0.6 (Fig. 7). Meantime, the refractive index detection range can be shifted by a nearly linear manner by adjusting the grating height. According to third, fourth, and fifth-order resonant modes in the grating slits, the detection range of the proposed structure can effectively cover the values ranging from 1.00 to 2.27 by tuning the height of metal grating from 900 nm to 1200 nm (Fig. 8).

Conclusions In this study, a triple-layer composite structure has been proposed to detect the refractive index of the ambient medium based on the F-P resonance induced by the TPPs. Research results indicate that introducing a silver film between the metal grating and DBR can effectively improve the excitation efficiency of TPPs, thereby enhancing the field intensity of SPP modes within the grating slits and the amplitude of the transmittance peak. Especially when the duty cycle is reduced to improve the sensitivity, the introduction of silver films can avoid the signal degradation induced by the lower duty cycle. This configuration can thus assure the high sensitivity to the refractive index of the filling medium in the gratings slits and the satisfied excitation efficiency of TPPs in the metal film-DBR interface. Moreover, the proposed structure can adjust the detection range in a nearly linear manner by changing the grating height. In this study, the detection range of the refractive index can be extended from 1.00 to 2.27 by adjusting the grating height from 900 nm to 1200 nm. The research results of this study provide an effective design idea for the TPPs-based refractive index sensor.

Key words remote sensing and sensors; surface plasmon polaritons; Tamm plasmon polaritons; metal grating; quasi Fabry-Perot resonance; refractive index sensor