

光学学报

基于丝素蛋白的太赫兹超构材料湿度传感器

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摘要 提出一种太赫兹(THz)超构材料的湿度传感器, 可用于测量 4%~76.1% 范围内的空气湿度。该湿度传感器由周期排列的哑铃型不锈钢孔构成, 其工作波段位于太赫兹波段。仿真结果表明, 该传感器具有较高的折射率灵敏度。为进一步提高对湿度的灵敏度, 还选择对水分子较敏感的丝素蛋白作为湿敏材料, 将其涂覆于传感器表面。研究表明, 该传感器的湿度灵敏度仿真和实验结果分别为 0.20 GHz/% 和 0.11 GHz/%, 高于已有报道的一些超构材料湿度传感器。

关键词 材料; 超材料; 湿度传感器; 太赫兹; 丝素蛋白

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1 引言

相对湿度是指空气中水蒸气的含量。该指标对人类具有重要意义, 影响着人类生产生活的方方面面^[1-2]。在工业上, 相对湿度影响汽车制造^[3]; 在医疗保健上, 将快速响应的湿度传感器应用于诊断肺部疾病的医疗微系统^[4]; 在日常生活中, 不同的湿度会影响人体呼吸系统和皮肤健康^[5-6]。对湿度传感器的研究一直备受关注, 其发展对人们的日常生活产生了重要影响, 尤其是高精度的湿度传感器具有良好的应用前景。

超构材料是由亚波长金属或介电阵列结构^[7]组成的人造材料, 其独特的设计可以产生负折射^[8-9]、完美吸收^[10-11]、负介电常数^[12]、电磁隐身^[13]、高灵敏度^[14]等特性。其中, 电磁场的局部增强和对周围环境介电常数的灵敏特性常被用于检测微量分析物的浓度和外部环境的微小变化, 目前已被广泛应用于生物传感领域^[15-18]。

目前, 许多学者已经提出各种各样的超构材料湿度传感器。2005 年, Kim 等^[19]提出一种共面波导-槽线环形谐振器, 该谐振器表面包覆聚酰亚胺(PI)作为湿度敏感材料来测量相对湿度, 结果表明, 该传感器的谐振频率随相对湿度的改变而变化, 但线性度较差, 灵敏度较低。2013 年, Amin 等^[20]提出两种不同的结构, 并选择两种不同的湿敏材料, 即聚乙烯醇(PVA)和聚酰亚胺。实验结果表明, 利用不同湿敏材料获得的灵敏度也不同。在相同条件下, 聚乙烯醇对湿度变化的敏感度大于聚酰亚胺对湿度变化的敏感度, 其敏感度达到 6.75 MHz/%。可见, 选择合适的湿敏材料对实验

结果至关重要。2017 年, Shin 等^[21]将超构材料尺寸减小到 950 μm, 并成功地将谐振频率从 GHz 量级提高到 THz 量级, 使其应用场景更为广泛。本文选择丝素蛋白(SF)溶液, 该溶液被涂覆在超构材料传感器表面后会逐渐干燥, 形成一层薄膜并吸附在超构材料表面。丝素蛋白既是一种天然材料, 又是一种环保可降解材料, 由于其具有优良的生物相容性、较强的力学性能、独特的光电性能和可再生资源丰富等特点, 近年来受到了广泛关注^[22-23]。本文选择丝素蛋白作为湿敏材料, 主要是因为丝素蛋白薄膜对空气中的水分子十分敏感, 外界环境中的水分子会渗透到丝素蛋白膜, 并与丝素纤维相结合, 破坏相对较弱的氢键^[24-25]。在吸收水分子后, 丝素蛋白薄膜的介电常数会发生变化。利用丝素蛋白吸收水分子会引起其介电常数变化的特性, 在某些特定的领域和应用场景中, 丝素蛋白被成功地用于制备湿度传感器, 例如呼吸监测仪^[26-27]。此外, 丝素蛋白在 THz 波段具有较高的透过率^[28], 在特定的条件下, 具有不会吸收入射 THz 波的特点, 是 THz 波段超构材料湿度传感器的理想湿敏材料。

本文采用不锈钢哑铃型超构传感器进行湿度检测, 创新性地将丝素蛋白溶液应用于超构材料传感器的表面。当外部湿度发生变化时, 丝素蛋白薄膜会迅速吸附水分子, 导致其介电常数发生快速变化并引起共振峰频率偏移。实验结果表明, 该传感器的湿度灵敏度为 0.11 GHz/%, 相对于其他已有研究, 该传感器的灵敏度较高。所提出的超构材料湿度传感器能够实时监测空气湿度, 为后续的单片集成湿度传感系统研究夯实了基础。

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2 结构设计与仿真优化

2.1 结构设计

图1(a)为THz超构材料传感器的结构示意图,其由周期性的多个单元结构组成。如图1(b)所示,该超构材料传感器的单元结构由哑铃型孔构成,每个单元结构的周期 p 为500 μm。整个传感器由50 μm厚的不锈钢板制成,所需的周期性哑铃型孔状结构通过常规激光钻孔工艺得到。其他结构参数如下:不锈钢厚度 h 为50 μm,周期 p 为500 μm,宽度 l 为300 μm,哑铃型两圆半径 r 均为60 μm,哑铃长度 a 为294 μm,中间宽度 b 为60 μm。

如图1(c)所示,在进行湿度传感实验之前,需要将丝素蛋白溶液涂覆在制备好的超构材料传感器表

面,形成厚度 $t=15 \mu\text{m}$ 的丝素蛋白膜作为湿敏材料。当外界湿度变化时,丝素蛋白纤维能很好地捕捉水分子。干燥时丝素蛋白的介电常数为3.6486^[28],而水在THz波段的介电常数为4.9^[29],远高于丝素蛋白的介电常数。因此,丝素蛋白吸收水分子后,它的介电常数会逐渐接近于水的介电常数,换句话说,丝素蛋白膜的介电常数将逐渐增大,且空气湿度越大,丝素蛋白膜的介电常数越大。因此,本文利用这一特性,将该溶液涂覆在超构材料传感器表面使其干燥,形成一层薄膜并吸附在超构材料传感器的表面。当外界环境湿度发生变化时,丝素蛋白的介电常数随之变化,导致超构材料传感器的共振峰频率发生偏移。通过检测频率偏移,即可实现对外界环境湿度的精确测量。

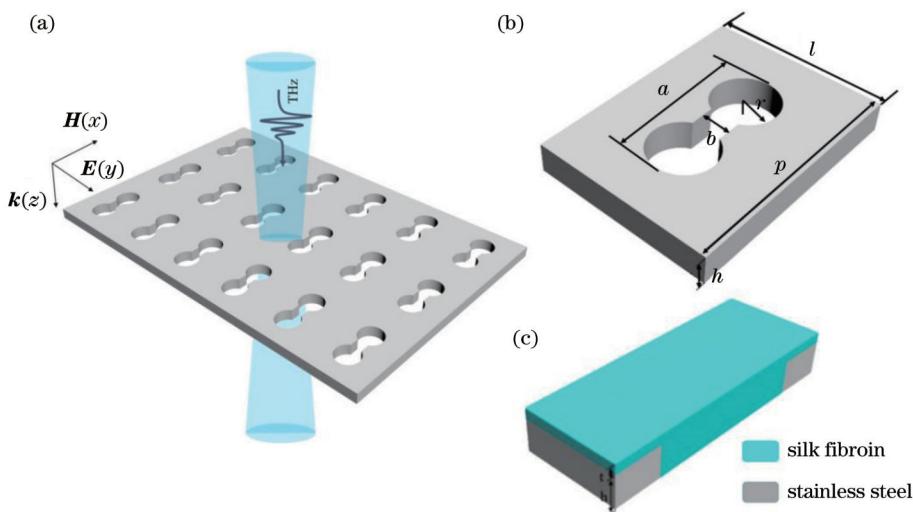


图1 超构材料传感器的结构示意图。(a)三维阵列图;(b)单元结构图($h=50 \mu\text{m}$ 、 $p=500 \mu\text{m}$ 、 $l=300 \mu\text{m}$ 、 $r=60 \mu\text{m}$ 、 $a=294 \mu\text{m}$ 、 $b=60 \mu\text{m}$);(c)涂覆丝素蛋白后的单元结构横断面图,其中丝素蛋白薄膜厚度 $t=15 \mu\text{m}$

Fig. 1 Structure diagrams of proposed metamaterial sensor. (a) 3D array diagram ; (b) unit structure diagram ($h=50 \mu\text{m}$, $p=500 \mu\text{m}$, $l=300 \mu\text{m}$, $r=60 \mu\text{m}$, $a=294 \mu\text{m}$, and $b=60 \mu\text{m}$); (c) cross sectional view of the unit structure filled with silk fibroin , and the thickness of silk fibroin film is 15 μm

2.2 仿真优化

当超构材料传感器的结构尺寸及参数不同时,器件的性能会发生变化,因此在进行制作加工之前需要进行参数优化。为了得到最优的透射谱,利用仿真软件CST Studio Suite对不锈钢板的厚度 h 、宽度 l 、周期 p 、哑铃型孔的总长度 a 和哑铃型孔两圆半径 r 等结构参数进行扫描优化,所选频率为0~0.8 THz。仿真结果如图2所示。

图2(a)展示了哑铃型孔总长度 a 的变化对透射曲线的影响。随着总长度 a 的增大,透射曲线开始有规律地向低频移动,但透射幅值和曲线形状没有出现显著变化。根据制作工艺的要求,优化后的哑铃型孔总长度取 $a=294 \mu\text{m}$ 。从图2(b)~(d)可以看出,不锈钢板的厚度 h 、周期 p 和宽度 l 的变化对透射曲线几乎没有影响,透射峰值几乎没有移动,并且透过率几乎没有

变化。因此,经过优化后得到的结构参数为:不锈钢板厚度 $h=50 \mu\text{m}$,周期 $p=500 \mu\text{m}$,宽度 $l=300 \mu\text{m}$ 。图2(e)显示,通过改变哑铃型孔内的圆半径 r ,可以调整共振峰的位置和大小。随着半径 r 的增大,共振峰向低频移动并逐渐增大。当半径 r 从40 μm增加到60 μm时,透射曲线的峰值也增大;当半径 r 大于60 μm时,由于结构尺寸限制,透射曲线峰值不再出现明显变化。因此,哑铃型孔的两圆半径确定为 $r=60 \mu\text{m}$ 。

经仿真优化后得到的不锈钢板最佳结构参数如下:长度 $a=294 \mu\text{m}$,厚度 $h=50 \mu\text{m}$,周期 $p=500 \mu\text{m}$,宽度 $l=300 \mu\text{m}$,圆半径 $r=60 \mu\text{m}$,中间宽度 $b=60 \mu\text{m}$ 。确定以上最佳结构参数后,对该超构材料传感器进行仿真分析。图3为最优参数下仿真得到的不锈钢超构材料传感器的透射曲线,其共振峰值位于

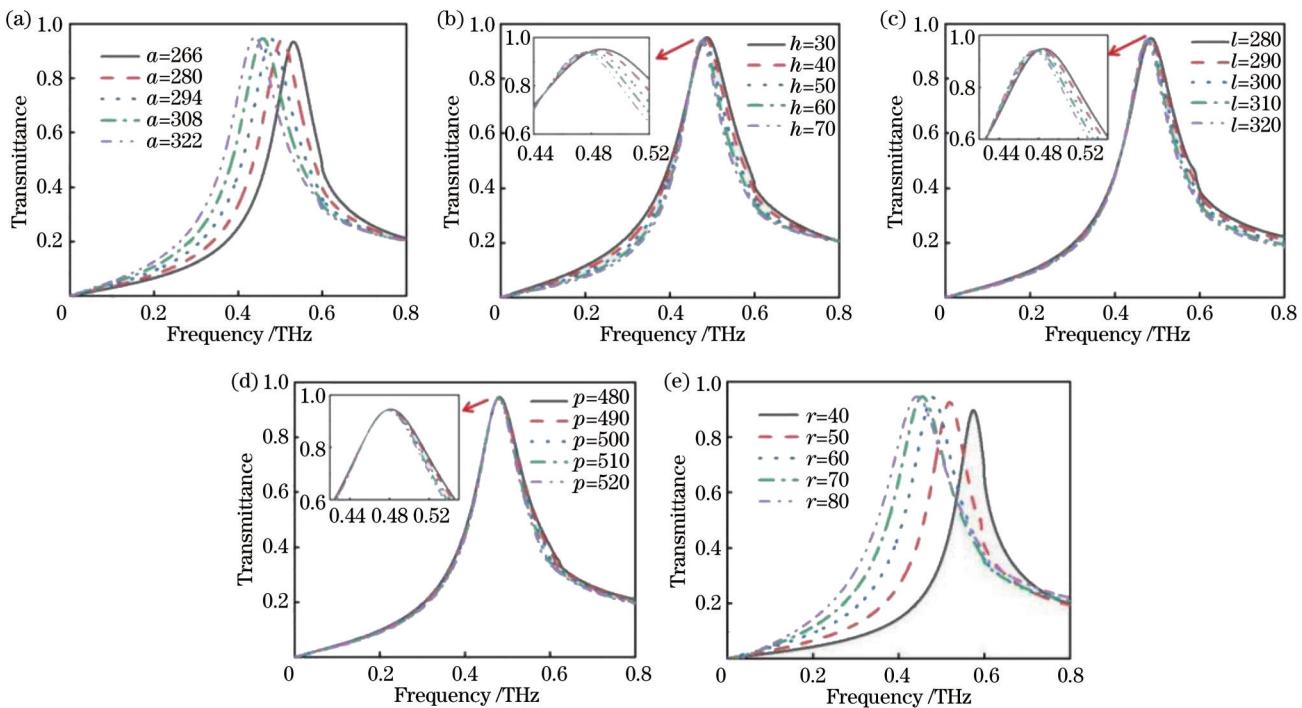


图2 利用仿真软件在0~0.8 THz波段对不同结构参数进行扫描优化时得到的透射光谱。(a)哑铃型孔的总长度 a ;(b)不锈钢板的厚度 h ;(c)不锈钢板的宽度 l ;(d)不锈钢板的周期 p ;(e)哑铃型孔的两个圆的半径 r

Fig. 2 Transmission spectra obtained by scanning different structure parameters via the simulation software in the 0~0.8 THz band.
(a) Total length a of the dumbbell shaped hole; (b) thickness h of the stainless-steel plate; (c) width l of the stainless-steel plate;
(d) period p of the stainless-steel plate; (e) radius r of the two circles of the dumbbell shaped hole

0.47 THz处,归一化透过率为0.96。

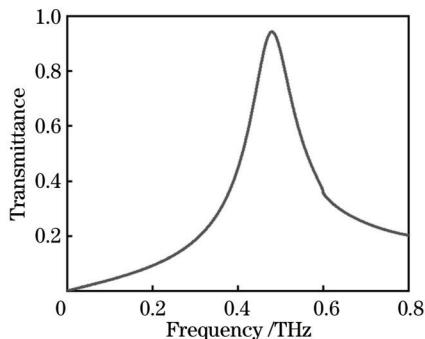


图3 最优结构参数(长度 $a=294$ μm、厚度 $h=50$ μm、周期 $p=500$ μm、宽度 $l=300$ μm、圆半径 $r=60$ μm、中间宽度 $b=60$ μm)下的超构材料传感器透射曲线

Fig. 3 Transmission curve of proposed metamaterial sensor with optimized structural parameters (total length $a=294$ μm, thickness $h=50$ μm, period $p=500$ μm, width $l=300$ μm, circle radius $r=60$ μm, and middle width $b=60$ μm)

进一步地,为了研究该超构材料传感器透射峰产生的物理机制,对0.47 THz频率下的表面电流和磁场分布进行仿真。图4(a)为仿真得到的表面电流俯视图。可以看出,在哑铃型孔周围,电流方向呈现两个方向相反的圆,并在开口处引起电荷振荡,这是一种电偶极子谐振^[30]。同时,哑铃的两个圆孔边缘的反向旋转

电流产生了一对方向相反的平面外磁偶极子。图4(b)为 xoz 平面上的磁场分布,在哑铃孔的中间形成环形磁场。这是因为一对方向相反的磁偶极子端对端在 z 轴上首尾相连,形成环状偶极子^[31]。因此,该超构材料传感器的响应主要由电偶极子和环偶极子共同控制。

为了实现湿度检测,需要将湿敏材料丝素蛋白涂覆在该超构材料传感器的表面,如图1(c)所示。丝素蛋白在不同湿度下的介电常数^[22]如表1所示。通过改变丝素蛋白薄膜的介电常数,可以仿真出不同湿度下该超构材料传感器的透射曲线,如图5(a)所示。透射峰的位置相较于图3发生了变化,这是因为涂覆的丝素蛋白对超构材料传感器的谐振产生了影响。图5(a)中横坐标为频率,纵坐标为对应的透过率,总共模拟计算出相对湿度从0到100%且间隔为20%的6个湿度值对应的透射曲线。如图5(a)所示,该传感器的透射曲线随着湿度的增加而产生红移,峰值频率向低频方向移动,这主要是由丝素蛋白的介电常数随着湿度升高而增大导致的。图5(b)展示了根据图5(a)所示的谐振峰的峰值与相对湿度的关系进行线性拟合所得到的曲线,横轴为相对湿度,纵轴为该湿度条件下透射峰的峰值频率。如图5(b)所示,谐振峰的峰值频率与相对湿度呈良好的线性关系,频率偏移量与相对湿度成正比。经线性拟合后,拟合度达到0.99。

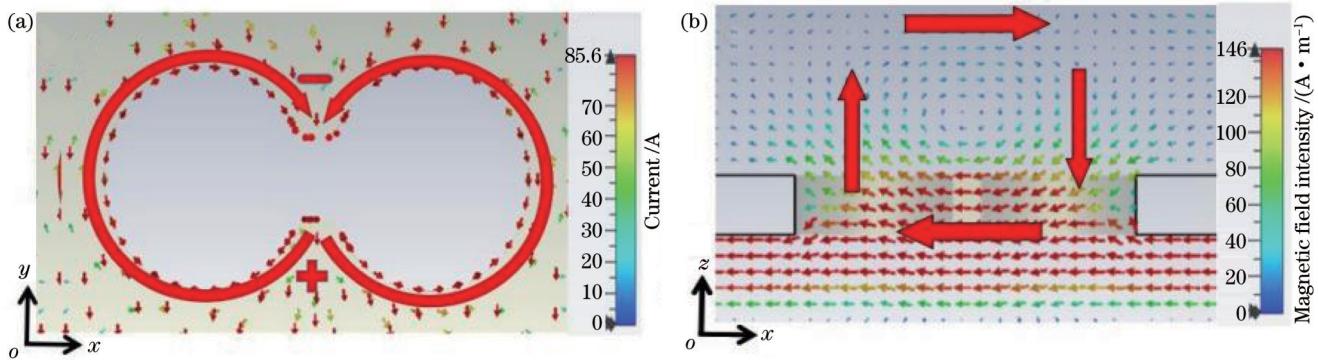


图4 当频率为0.47 THz时,所设计超构材料传感器的表面电流和磁场分布。(a)表面电流分布俯视图;(b) xoz 平面上的磁场强度分布

Fig. 4 Surface current distribution and magnetic field intensity distribution at the frequency of 0.47 THz. (a) Top view of surface current distribution; (b) magnetic field intensity distribution in the xoz plane

表1 不同相对湿度下丝素蛋白的介电常数

Table 1 Dielectric constant of silk fibroin at different relative humidity

Relative humidity /%	0	20	40	60	80	100
Dielectric constant	4.23075	4.36635	4.50195	4.63755	4.77315	4.90875

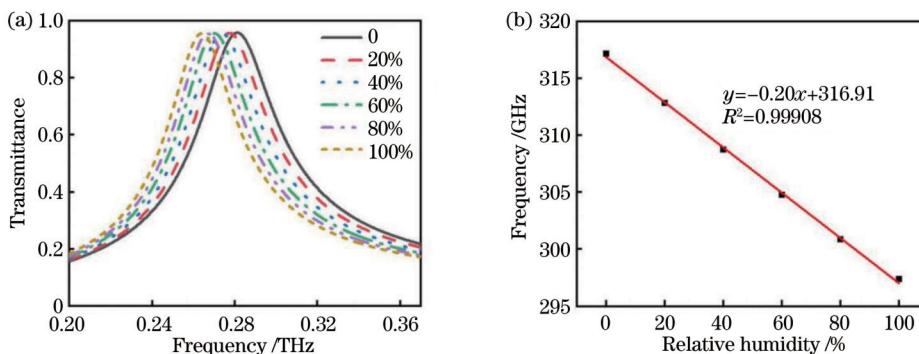


图5 所提超构材料湿度传感器的透射曲线仿真结果与透射峰的峰值频率和相对湿度的线性拟合曲线。(a)透射曲线;(b)线性拟合曲线

Fig. 5 Simulation results of transmission spectra and linear fitting curve of the relationship between transmission frequency of resonance peak and relative humidity for proposed metamaterial sensor. (a) Transmission spectra; (b) linear fitting curve

通过计算传感器的相对湿度灵敏度 S 、品质因数 Q_{FOM} 和品质因子 Q ,可以更直观地展现出传感器的性能。这些性能指标的计算公式^[32]为

$$S = \frac{\Delta f}{\Delta_{\text{RH}}}, \quad (1)$$

式中: Δf 为湿度变化时透射峰峰值频率的变化值; Δ_{RH} 为外界空气相对湿度变化量。根据图5(b)可以计算得到 $S=0.20 \text{ GHz}/\%$,与其他已有报道的湿度传感器相比,其灵敏度已达到较高水平。良好的仿真结果为后续的实验提供了理论支持。

$$Q_{\text{FOM}} = \frac{S}{d_{\text{FWHM}}}, \quad (2)$$

式中: d_{FWHM} 为透射峰的半峰全宽。

$$Q = \frac{f_0}{d_{\text{FWHM}}}, \quad (3)$$

式中: f_0 为透射峰的中心频率。通过计算可以得到,

Q_{FOM} 值为3.8, Q 值为5.1。**表2**为所提超构材料湿度传感器的 Q_{FOM} 以及 Q 值与其他文献中相应参数的数值对比。如**表2**所示,所提传感器的 Q_{FOM} 处于相对较高的水平, Q 值也处于中上水平,由此可证明该传感器

表2 所提超构材料湿度传感器的 Q_{FOM} 以及 Q 值与其他已发表文献相应数值的对比

Table 2 Comparison of Q_{FOM} and Q values of proposed metamaterial humidity sensor with other published results

Frequency band / THz	Q_{FOM}	Q	Ref.
0.4-1.2	1.67	/	[33]
0.2-2.0	0.38 and 0.13	3.6 and 1.37	[34]
0.5-1.5	3.3	14.2	[35]
0.2-1.0	1.23	/	[36]
0.2-0.4	3.8	5.1	This work

具有较优越的性能。

3 实验结果及分析

在实验中,首先使用激光微加工钻孔技术在不锈钢层上制作了空心哑铃孔结构。得到的超构材料传感器如图6(a)所示。为了用于湿度传感,需要在其表面涂覆一层丝素蛋白薄膜。丝素蛋白可通过从蚕茧中提取获得^[24],通常的方法是将蚕茧放入碳酸钠溶液中煮沸30 min去除丝胶,然后将其干燥并在溴化锂溶液中重新溶解以去除残留物。透析后得到质量浓度为72 mg /mL的丝素蛋白溶液。本实验所使用的丝素蛋白为可溶性冻干丝素蛋白,购自苏州丝美特生物科技有限公司,可直接溶解使用。将可溶性冻干丝蛋白溶解在去离子水中,制备成质量浓度为72 mg/mL的丝素蛋白溶液,再取200 μL溶液滴至超材料表面,在40 °C下加热1 h,则可以获得均匀的丝素蛋白膜。图6(b)所示为显微镜下的超构材料湿度传感器的单元结

构,其中未填充丝素蛋白的孔为黑色,而填充丝素蛋白并形成膜的孔为浅黄色。因此,图6(b)可以清楚地展示不锈钢气孔中是否填充了丝素蛋白溶液以及丝素蛋白薄膜是否有效形成。

接着,进行湿度传感实验。实验中,采用自制的湿度控制装置来实现不同湿度环境的变化,实验装置的示意图和实物图如图7(a)、(b)所示。该实验装置采用两台功率可调的气泵,分别吹送干空气和湿空气。通过调节两台气泵的功率来调节干湿空气的比例,最终可实现湿度在4%~76.1%范围内变化。湿度箱所采用的材料为聚四氟乙烯,在太赫兹波段具有非常小的吸收系数^[37],因此不会影响太赫兹波的透过率。湿度计购自山东仁科测控技术有限公司,其具有精度高、响应快等优点。实验中所有光谱测量都使用连续波太赫兹光谱系统,该系统由双激光控制智能电子器件、两个分布式反馈激光器和两个快速扫描模式组成,以缩短扫描时间。

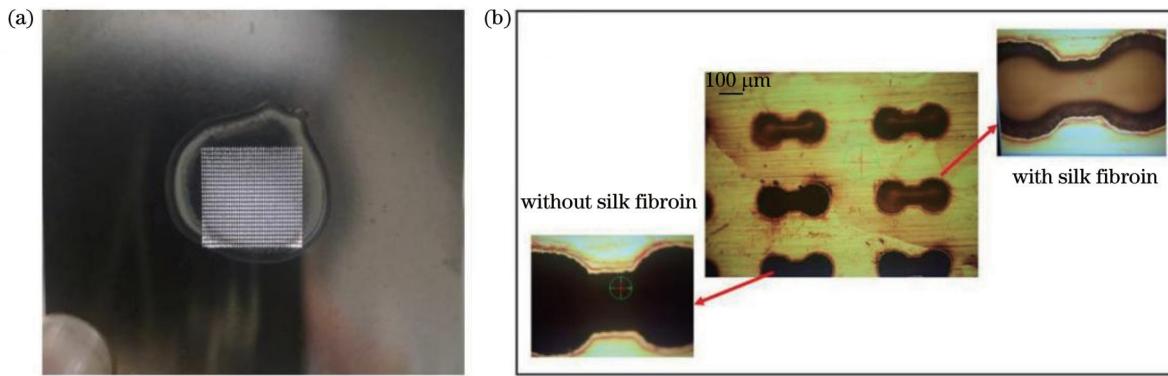


图6 传感器实物图。(a)制作完成的超构材料湿度传感器;(b)显微镜下观察到的传感器的单元结构

Fig. 6 Physical photos of proposed sensor. (a) Fabricated metamaterial humidity sensor; (b) microscopy pictures of the unit cell

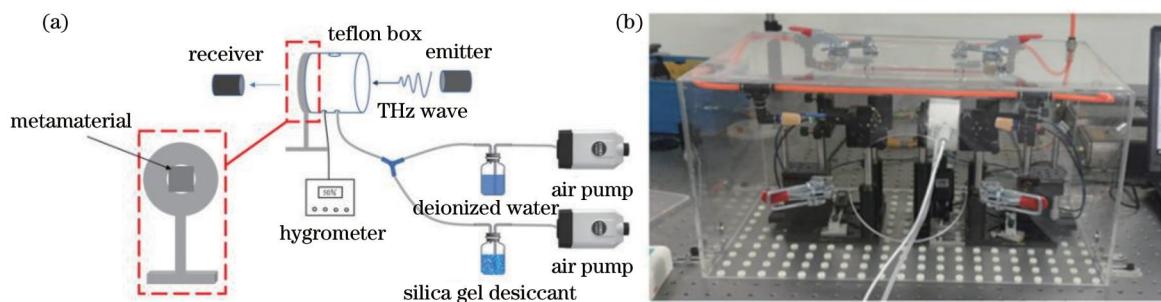


图7 湿度控制装置的示意图和实物装置图。(a)示意图;(b)实物装置图

Fig. 7 Schematic and physical device diagram of humidity control system. (a) Schematic; (b) physical device diagram

通过调节湿度箱内的相对湿度,进行了4组实验,实验结果如图8(a)所示。随着湿度的增加,透射峰逐渐红移,即向低频偏移,这与仿真结果一致,主要是丝素蛋白薄膜对水分子的吸收增大了其介电常数。除了频移外,透过率也出现相应的变化。随着湿度的增加,透过率逐渐降低,这是因为湿度箱中的水分子逐渐增加,而水对太赫兹波具有较强的吸收作用,因此透

过率逐渐降低。提取透射峰所在的峰值频率,将其与相对湿度绘制成散点图,如图8(b)所示,并进行线性拟合。根据线性拟合结果可计算出拟合度为0.97,符合线性要求。超构材料湿度传感器的灵敏度 $S=0.11 \text{ GHz}/\%$,略低于仿真结果。通过对比可以看出,模拟仿真数据与实验数据基本一致,验证了透射峰的峰值频率与相对湿度呈线性关系的基本规律。然而,

实验数据与仿真数据之间存在一定的误差,可能原因是:1)在实验过程中水对THz光谱的吸收导致实验结

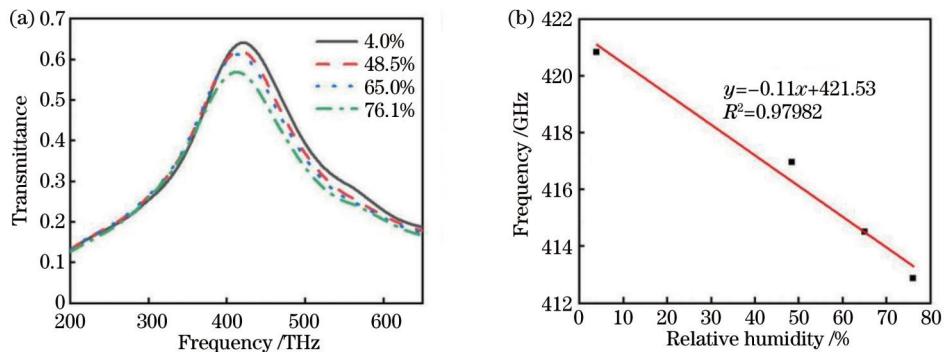


图8 所提超构材料湿度传感器的透射曲线实测结果与透射峰的峰值频率和相对湿度的线性拟合曲线。(a)透射曲线;(b)线性拟合曲线

Fig. 8 Measurement results of transmission spectra and linear fitting curve of the relationship between transmission frequency of resonance peak and relative humidity for proposed metamaterial sensor. (a) Transmission spectra; (b) linear fitting curve

表3给出了所提超构材料湿度传感器与其他超构材料湿度传感器的比较,可以看到,所提超构材料湿度传感器的湿度灵敏度高于大部分结果。所提超构材料

果存在偏差;2)不锈钢和丝素蛋白的实际材料参数与仿真时的数值存在偏差。

湿度传感器是由单一不锈钢材料构成的,并且采用常规的激光钻孔技术制作,具有制备简易、成本低、体积小、适合批量生产等优点。

表3 所提超构材料湿度传感器与其他传感器的对比

Table 3 Comparison of proposed metamaterial sensor with other reported sensors

Type	Humidity-sensitive material	Frequency / GHz	Sensitivity / (GHz·% ⁻¹)	Range of relative humidity / %
CPW-to-slot line ring resonator ^[19]	PI	0~10	/	30~90
Coupled inductor capacitor resonator ^[20]	PVA+PI	0.8~7	0.00675	35~85
Guided-mode resonance structure ^[21]	PVA	210~270	~0.0035	0~70
This work	SF	200~700	0.11	4~76.1

4 结 论

提出一种基于不锈钢哑铃型空心槽的太赫兹超构材料传感器,并在其表面涂覆湿敏材料丝素蛋白,从而实现高灵敏的湿度检测。在采用仿真软件对多个结构参数进行优化后,对该传感器进行了实际制作和湿度测量。实验测得的湿度灵敏度为0.11 GHz/%,且线性度高。所提出的湿度传感器具有灵敏度高、结构简单、体积小、成本低、适合大批量生产和可单片集成等优点,预期可在环境监测、工业生产等领域得到广泛应用,发展潜力巨大。

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A Terahertz Metamaterial Humidity Sensor Based on Silk Fibroin

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Abstract

Objective Relative humidity refers to the amount of water vapor in the air, which has a wide-ranging influence on human production and daily life. For example, in the industrial sector, relative humidity significantly affects automotive manufacturing. In the healthcare field, humidity sensors that can respond quickly are used in micro-medical systems to diagnose lung diseases. In daily life, different humidity levels can affect respiratory and skin health. Therefore, the study on humidity sensors has attracted widespread attention, especially high-precision humidity sensors that have broad

applications. However, the existing available air humidity sensors have drawbacks such as poor electromagnetic interference resistance and large size. Therefore, we propose a new terahertz metamaterial humidity sensor that can achieve high-precision, high-sensitivity, and real-time air humidity monitoring and can be widely used in various fields such as industry, healthcare, and daily life.

Methods In this study, we use a combination of finite element analysis and experimental verification to investigate the feasibility of metamaterial humidity sensors. Firstly, we design a metamaterial made of stainless steel and perform electromagnetic field simulation calculations by using CST Studio Suite simulation software. We optimize the structure of the stainless-steel plate through simulation and obtain the optimal structural parameters. We also simulate and verify that the metamaterial sensor is highly sensitive to air humidity. Furthermore, we use laser micro-drilling technology to fabricate the metamaterial sensor and perform humidity sensing experiments to evaluate its humidity sensitivity performance. In the experiment, we use a homemade humidity control device to enable changes in different humidity environments. The device uses two adjustable power air pumps to blow dry and humid air, and by adjusting the power of the two air pumps, the ratio of dry to humid air can be adjusted, achieving a humidity variation between 4% and 76.1%. Finally, we compare the simulation results with the experimental results to verify the rationality and correctness of the metamaterial humidity sensor.

Results and Discussions We use a stainless-steel dumbbell-shaped metamaterial sensor for humidity detection and propose the application of silk fibroin solution on the surface of the metamaterial sensor (Fig. 1). The simulation results show that with an increase in humidity, the transmission peak exhibits significant redshift, indicating that the sensor is highly sensitive to air humidity. Additionally, the peak frequency of the resonance peak exhibits an excellent linear relationship with relative humidity, and the frequency shift is directly proportional to the change in relative humidity (Fig. 5). The calculated figure of merit (Q_{FOM}) value of the sensor is 3.8, and the Q value is 5.1, which is considered a good level. The experimental results show that the humidity sensitivity of the sensor is 0.11 GHz/% (Fig. 8), which is higher than that of other similar research. By comparing the simulation and experimental data, it shows that they are consistent, which verifies the basic law that the transmission peak frequency is linearly related to relative humidity.

Conclusions In this study, we propose a terahertz metamaterial humidity sensor for measuring air humidity in the range of 4%–76.1%. The sensor's unit cell is composed of dumbbell-shaped holes on a stainless-steel plate, and it operates in the terahertz frequency band. The simulation results show that the sensor has high refractive index sensitivity, laying the foundation for subsequent humidity sensing experiments. Additionally, silk fibroin is chosen as the humidity-sensitive material, which is sensitive to water molecules. Both simulation and experimental results show that the humidity sensitivity of the sensor is 0.20 GHz/% and 0.11 GHz/%, respectively. These values are higher than those of other reported similar metamaterial humidity sensors. Furthermore, the metamaterial humidity sensor proposed in this study is made of a single stainless-steel material and can be fabricated by using conventional laser drilling techniques, which has the advantages of simple preparation, low cost, small size, and suitability for mass production. Moreover, the sensor is passive and wireless, and it has a wide range of applications. In the future, it can be integrated with on-chip light sources and spectrometers to realize a single-chip integrated humidity sensing system with enormous development potential.

Key words materials; metamaterials; humidity sensor; terahertz; silk fibroin