

Gas sensing using an array of polymer-coated quartz crystals strongly driven into non-linear regimes.

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TITLEPAGE

Abstract

abstract

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1 Introduction

In our pocket we carry a device which copies almost all human senses. A camera gives your phone sight, a microphone gives your phone ability to hear, and the touch screen is like our skin, allowing your phone to feel touch. The vestibular system is mimicked by a gyroscope and accelerometer combination, and thermoreceptors by thermometers. Using GPS, your phone has a sense of direction, which is arguably something half of the human population doesn't even have.

Of course our phone doesn't need the ability to discern flavors, since it is a very picky eater anyway. It only likes electrons at a small range of potentials to get its energy from. But the underlying principle of the senses of taste and smell, namely the ability to detect molecules, can have many more uses than to decide which dish is delicious or foul-tasting. Examples of uses for a nose in your phone would be to test whether you are too intoxicated to drive, to warn whenever a dangerous amount of carbon-monoxide is in the air, XXX. Outside of mobile applications there are even more uses, such as XXX.

Many devices already exist which can mimic the function of the nose. Notable technologies are gas chromatography and spectroscopy, however these devices are often clumsy and expensive [XXX]. New methods are needed to decrease the size and cost of an electronic sense of smell. A cheap electric nose which is currently popular is [XXX]. However, it is weak at discerning molecules and requires six connections per sensor, which makes it cumbersome and bulky.

XXX something about how usually we try to be linear but we increase sensitivity and onderscheidend vermogen with non-linearity.

XXX In this paper the possibility of making a cheap, small nose with a

high onderscheidend vermogen XXX is researched. Something about what experiments are described in the paper

2 Theory

2.1 Piezoelectricity

2.2 Non-linear mechanics

2.3 Resonance

2.3.1 Q-factor

The Q-factor characterizes a resonators' bandwidth relative to its center resonant frequency. [1]

2.4 Crystal oscillator

3 Method & Materials

Multiple experiments were conducted with gradually increasing complexity.

3.1 Experimental set-up

The set-up consists of the electrical system to drive the crystals and measure its response, and of the system to bring the coated crystals in contact with gasses. The two systems will be described consecutively in the following sections.

3.1.1 Eletrical system

A schematic overview of the electrical system can be found in Figure 1. A function generator sweeps the desired frequencies, which are amplified before exciting the crystal. The voltage drop over a series shunt resistor is measured using a differential amplifier. This voltage drop, which is linearly proportional to the current that flows through the quartz crystal as described by Ohm's law, is indicative of the changing impedance of the crystal

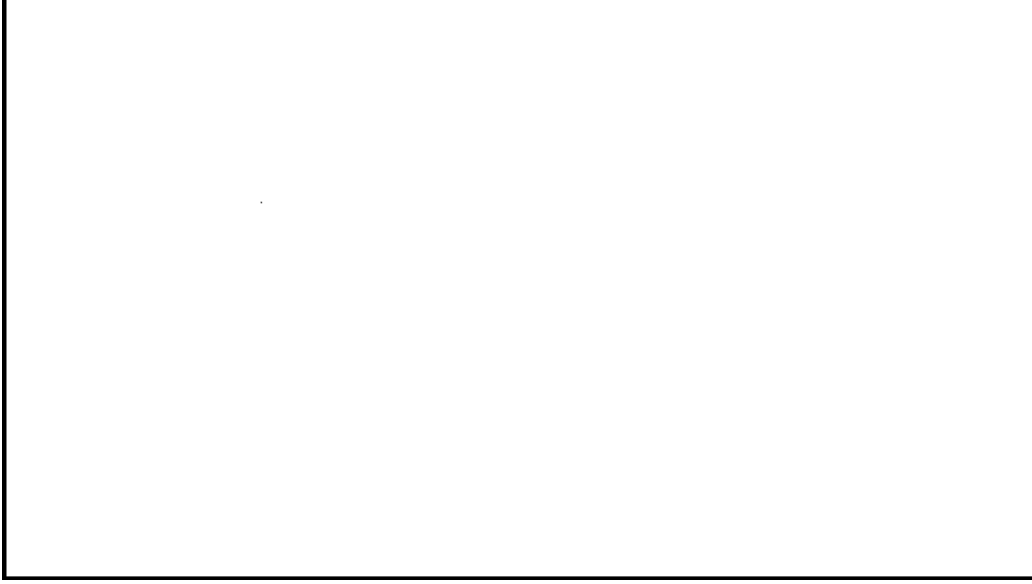


Figure 1: Schematic overview of the electrical system of the experimental set-up.

as a function of frequency. Therefore, this signal can be used to show when the crystal is on resonance.

A more detailed schematic can be found in Figure 2. Preliminary tests showed that the peak voltage of about $V_p = 10$ V is needed to see a significant anisochronic effect. The maximum current at this voltage is about $I_p = 200$ mA. A high speed operational amplifier was used in combination with a buffer amplifier in the feedback path to decrease the output impedance and increase the output current capability of the amplifier. The slew rate of the amplifier is also an important parameter, since the signal has both high frequency and high amplitude. The needed slew rate corresponds to the maximum slope of the output signal, which for a sinusoidal signal of the following form:

$$v(t) = V_P \sin 2\pi ft, \quad (1)$$

is given by:

$$\max \left(\left| \frac{dv(t)}{dt} \right| \right) = \frac{\pi f V_P}{2}. \quad (2)$$

Using crystal frequency of $f = 4.606$ MHz and a peak voltage of $V_p = 10$ V, the minimum slew rate of the amplifier should therefore be 425 V/ μ s.

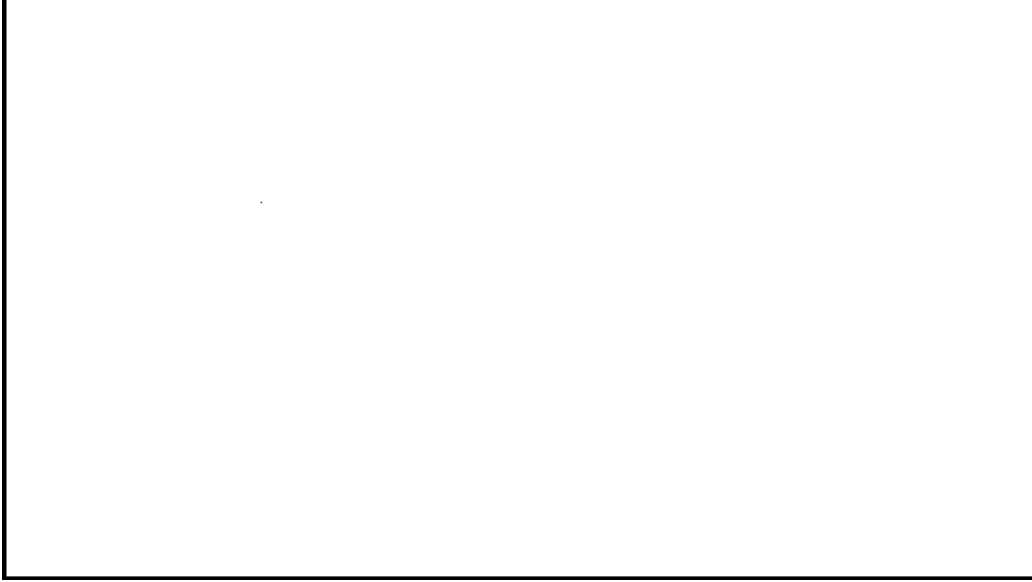


Figure 2: Detailed schematic of the electrical system of the experimental set-up.

3.2 Crystal analysis

The goals of the first phase are to choose a resonator and find benchmark impedance-frequency data of the chosen resonator.

Since a mechanical resonator is needed to react to the change of mass, but it is desirable to drive and analyze the system electronically, a piezoelectric resonator is used as a transformer between the electronic and mechanical signal. Piezoelectric materials exist with a Q-factor up to XXX, but they are very expensive. Ceramic resonators are cheap, but they lack stability and have low Q-factors. A good middle ground is a quartz crystal oscillator, since they have Q-factors up to 10^6 , and are mass-produced because of their use in almost any electronic device on the market.

Quartz crystals come in a variety of fundamental frequencies, shapes and sizes. For this experiment a large crystal is preferred over a small crystal, since it eases polymer coating. The fundamental frequency is preferably small, since it loosens bandwidth requirements of all components in the circuit and reduces crosstalk and phase lag XXX. The most common crystal shapes are a planar shear resonator and a tuning fork. Since the tuning fork has an irregular shape, it is hard to get an even coating. The first tests

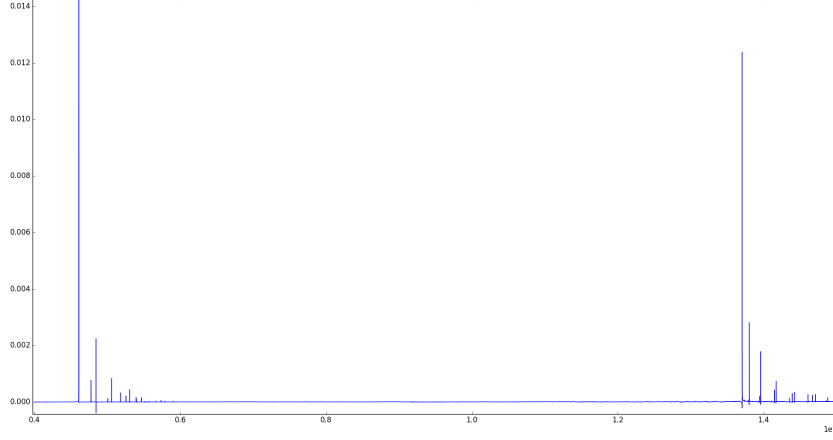


Figure 3: Frequency scan of the crystal.

resulted in a coating which filled up the gap XXX.

The circuit used in the first test is

3.3 Measurement

Since the crystal is driven by a voltage

4 Results & Discussion

4.1 Orientation

The frequency scan in Figure 3 shows that apart from the large resonance peak at the crystal manufacturer's stated resonance frequency of $f_0 = 4.606$ MHz, there are many smaller peaks corresponding to different resonance modes. The largest response is not necessarily the most useful response for this experiment.

First of all, a large response means a high current. Apart from the difficulty of making a high frequency source with high current, this leads to several undesirable effects, such as heating up of the crystal [XXX] and high voltage drops in parasitic inductances. When several crystals are paralleled,

their currents are summed, which further increases the effect of the parasitic inductance.

Secondly, the level of anisochronism seems to be independent of the size of the response. A high level of anisochronism is desirable, since lower amplitudes are needed to reach bistability, which eases the requirements of the driving system. It is also expected that a high level of anisochronism leads to a higher sensitivity to mass.

Finally, not only do the characteristics of the resonance peak itself (i.e. its size and its level of anisochronism) matter, but also how far it is from its other resonance peaks. Since the crystals will be paralleled, a large area without resonance peaks around the peak that is used for measurement is needed to limit the amount of crosstalk.

The resonance peak at $f = 4.8$ MHz [XXX] was selected to use for the rest of this experiment. The peak has a high level of anisochronism, while having an amplitude of about 6 times lower than the large main resonance peak at $f_0 = 4.606$ MHz.

4.2 Amplitude-frequency dependance

A few frequency responses of an uncoated crystal at different driving powers can be found in Figure 4. The crystal shows linear behaviour at low driving amplitudes, but it becomes bistable as the driving amplitude rises. The bistable area in Figure 5 is obtained by subtracting the response of the backward sweep from the response of the forward sweep.

In Figure 6 some frequency sweeps at different driving powers of four identical crystals with different coatings (PDMS, PEG, PEE and PAA) are displayed alongside their responses before coating. The coating has decreased the resonance frequency of the crystal, as was expected due to mass loading. The Q-factor has also decreased, which can be attributed to losses in the coating. A third observation is that the anisochronic effect has decreased. This can be explained by the lower Q-factor. The amplitude of mechanical movement, and therefore the significance of non-linear effects, is smaller due to the higher damping. The new bistable areas can be found in Figure 7, alongside their old bistable areas in dashes.

Figure 8 shows the frequency response at a constant driving amplitude of four crystals with closely spaced resonance frequencies placed in parallel, alongside the four individual responses of the crystals. The jump points of the parallel response are to the jump points of the individual crystals, but

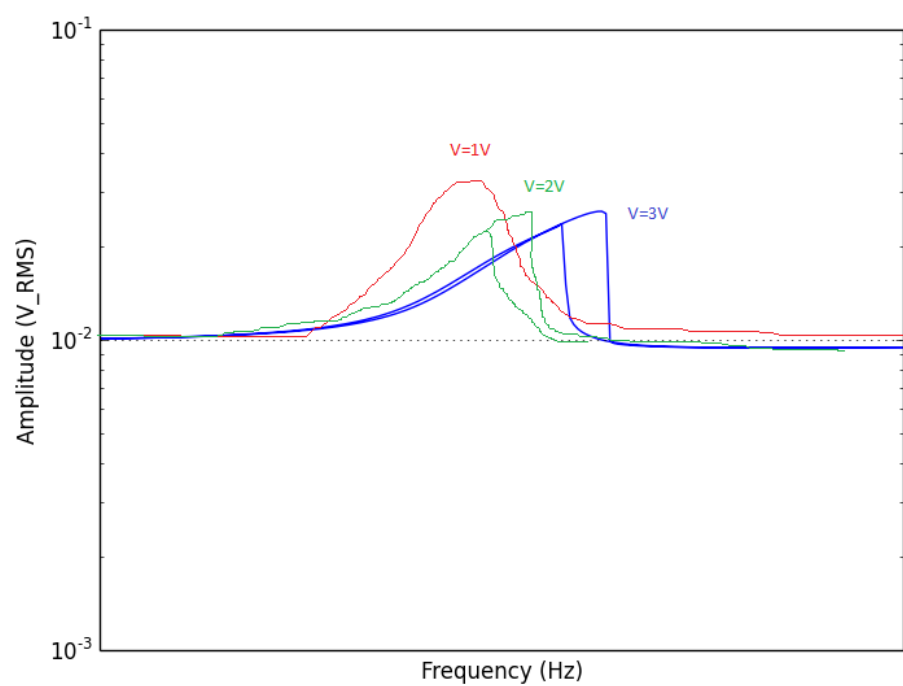


Figure 4: Some sweeps at different power XXX

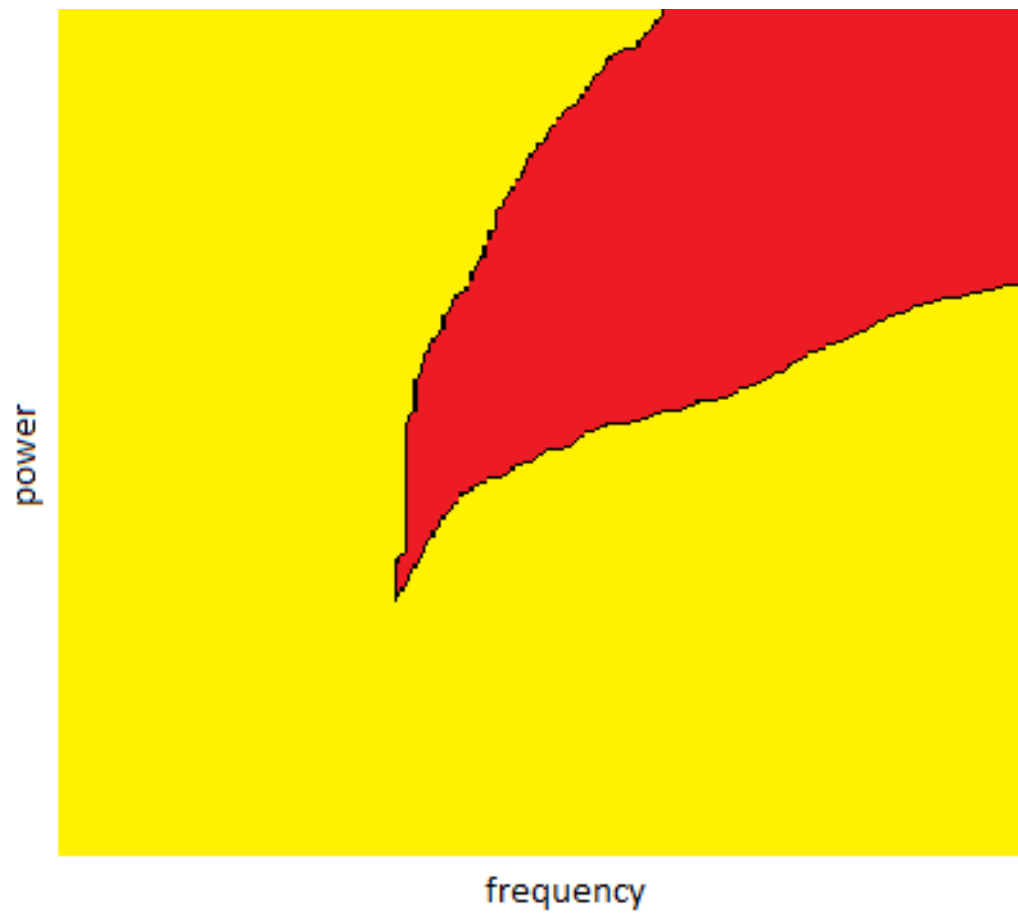
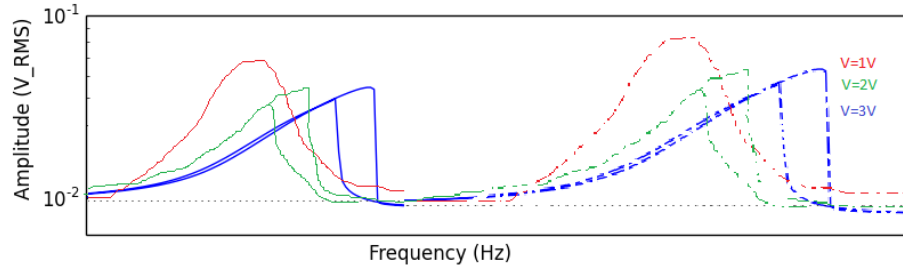
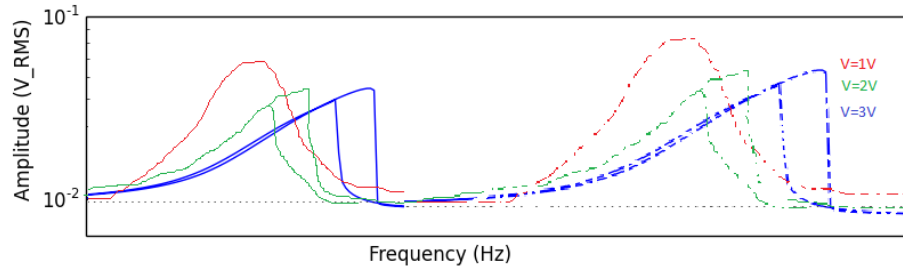


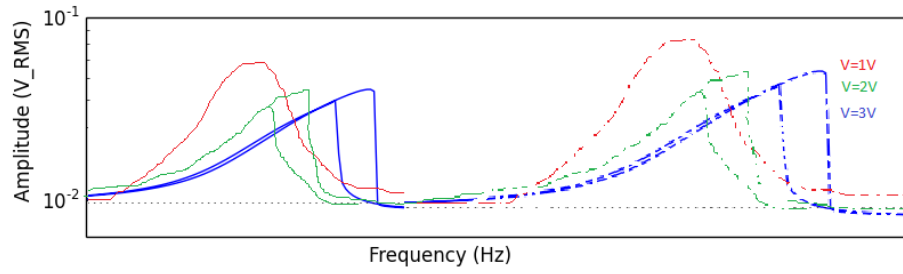
Figure 5: Hysteresis plot of XXX



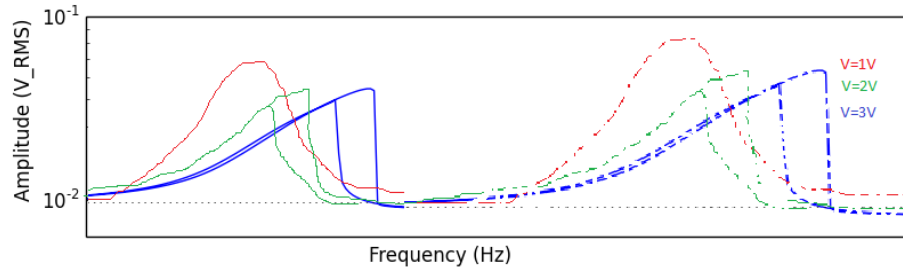
(a) PDMA



(b) PEG



(c) PEE



(d) PAA

Figure 6: A few frequency responses of four identical crystals with different coatings alongside their original responses before coating (dashed).

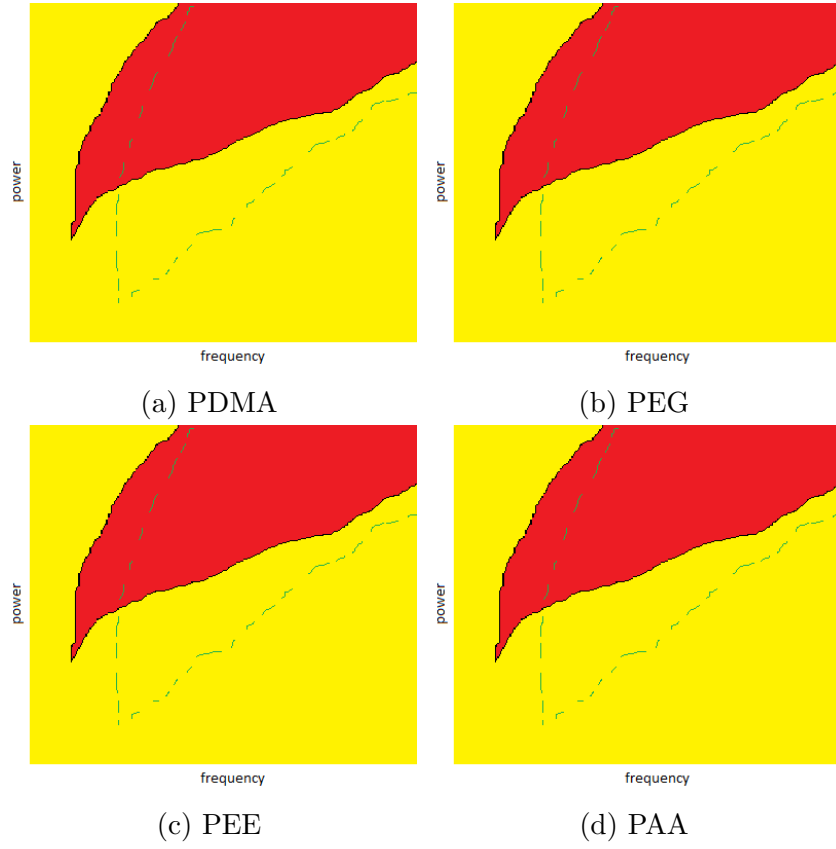


Figure 7: Bistable regime before (dashed) and after coating for four identical crystals with different coatings.

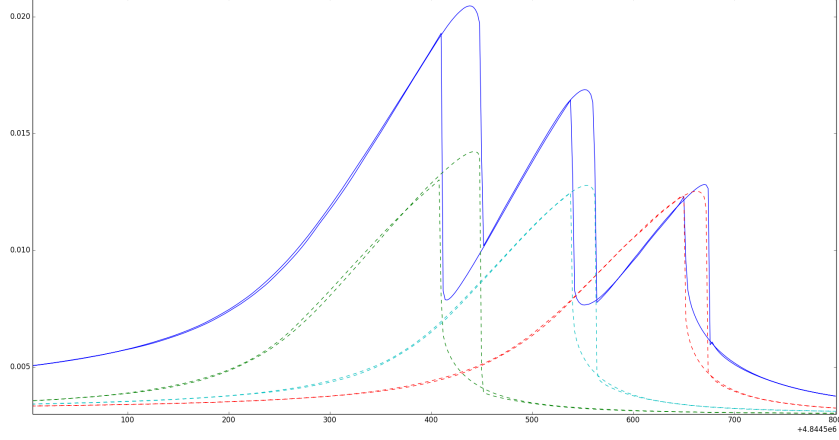


Figure 8: The frequency response of three parallel uncoated crystals with closely spaced resonance frequencies. The driving amplitude is $V_p = 3.25$ V. The frequency responses of the individual crystals are dashed.

not quite identical. There are two factors which give rise to this behaviour. Firstly there will always be some crosstalk between the crystals, since the driving circuit is not a perfect voltage source. Secondly, since this experiment is conducted in open air, fluctuations in temperature and humidity are responsible for a different outcome of each measurement.

As the jump points of the frequency response will shift when a gas is sensed, the crosstalk will manifest itself differently for different mixtures of gasses, so it will always degrade the measurement in an unpredictable way. The error due to fluctuations in temperature and humidity can be minimized by repeating the measurement and averaging the results.

4.3 Gas sensing

5 Conclusion

References

- [1] Michael H. Tooley. *Electronic circuits: fundamentals and applications*. Elsevier, 2006.

A Temperature-based quartz crystal relaxation oscillator