

Design Framework for Reliable, Energy Efficient Cross-Point based Resistive Memory

Abstract—Since the conventional memory technologies approaching their scaling limit, the non-volatile memory technologies, such as Phase Change RAM (PCRAM), Magnetoresistive RAM (STT-RAM) and Resistive Memory (ReRAM) have attached much attention because their non-volatility, high speed, low power consumption and good scalability. Among these emerging memory technologies, the ReRAM has shown great potentials as one of the most promising candidates for future universal memory. The ReRAM, due to its simple structure, small cell size and potential for 3D stacking. Besides, the unique non-linearity of ReRAM provides the possibility to build a cross-point structure based ReRAM without CMOS access device, with the smallest cell size of $4F^2$. However, the cross-point structure also suffers from its inherent disadvantages and brings in extra design challenges. In this work, the design challenges of cross-point structure based ReRAM are comprehensively analyzed. In addition to the cell-level analysis, a precise mathematical model is built to perform Based on the study, a detailed design methodology is developed. With the proposed methodology, designers can explore the most energy/area efficient ReRAM design with different design constraints.

I. INTRODUCTION

The scaling of traditional memory technologies, such as SRAM and DRAM, is approaching a technological and physical limit. In order to effectively follow the Moore's Law [1] in the near future, new memory technologies are desired. In the past few years, the non-volatile technologies, including Phase Change RAM (PCRAM), Magnetoresistive RAM (STT-RAM) and Resistive Memory (ReRAM) have been widely accepted as the candidates for next generation memory to meet the need of higher density, faster access time, and lower power consumption. Among all of these emerging memory technologies, ReRAM has many unique characteristics, including simple structure, non-linearity and high resistance ratio, making it be considered as the most promising technology. Researchers have shown that the state-of-art single-level-cell ReRAM can achieve sub-8ns random access time for both read and write operation with resistance ratio > 100 [2]. Also, HP labs and Hynix have already announced that they are going to commercialize the memristor-based ReRAM and predicted that ReRAM could eventually replace the traditional memory technologies [3].

Different from other non-volatile memory technologies, ReRAM can be implemented in a cross-point style structure. Generally speaking, in a nano cross-point array, the bistable ReRAM cell is sandwiched by two layers, orthogonal nanowires, without any access device. Therefore, the cell size of ReRAM can be further reduced to $4F^2$ per bit. However, the simplicity of cross-point structure without access cell also brings in additional challenges on the peripheral circuit design as well as memory organization. There are many literatures that analyzed the design challenges of the cross-point ReRAM array. Nevertheless, all of these researches focus on the cross-point memory array itself but do not take into account the peripheral circuitry and different programming methods. Besides, the analysis of energy consumption is also lacking. In this work, we carefully analyzed the design challenges of cross-point structure based ReRAM. A precise mathematical model is built to evaluate the reliability, energy

consumption and area of different design schemes and various cell parameters. Based on the study, a detailed design framework is developed. With the proposed methodology, designers can explore the most energy/area efficient ReRAM design with different design constraints and cell parameters at the very beginning of the design stage. On the other hand, the system designers can also leverage the proposed framework to provide valuable feedback to device researchers to adjust their experiments and offer more useful ReRAM cells. We believe that this kind of two-way communications will be very helpful to accelerate speed-to-market of ReRAM memory.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. In Section II, the memristor based memory and the basic concept of ECC are introduced. Section III discusses the mathematical model used in this paper and evaluates various ECC designs for memristor-based ReRAM architecture. Section IV shows results of the experiment conducted in this study. Finally, the conclusion is presented in Section V.

II. PRELIMINARIES AND MOTIVATIONS

This section provides some preliminaries on ReRAM technology and cross-point architecture. Then the limitations of cross-point architecture are demonstrated by a series of simple examples, which motivates the work in this paper.

A. Background of ReRAM technology

Table I compares the state-of-art non-volatile memory technologies. Obviously, the ReRAM and STT-RAM are the most promising technologies because they have faster access time than PCM and FeRAM with reasonable endurance. However, although the STT-RAM shows the fastest read/write latency among all non-volatile memory technologies, the structure of the memory cell is complex and it has large cell size. On the other hand, the ReRAM has very simple cell structure and can be implemented as a cross point structure, which can work without access devices. The easy structure provides the possibility of high density integration and 3-D stackability to ReRAM based memory. Besides, the ReRAM also has much higher ON-OFF resistance ratio than STT-RAM. Therefore, with all of these advantages, ReRAM based memory is a highly competitive technology compared to all of the emerging non-volatile memory technologies.

As implied by the name, the ReRAM uses its resistance to represent the stored information. The resistance of a ReRAM cell can be switched between high resistance state (HRS) and low resistance state (LRS) by applying an external voltage across the cell. The

TABLE I
COMPARISON OF NON-VOLATILE MEMORY TECHNOLOGIES

Metric	STT-RAM	PCM	FeRAM	ReRAM
Cell Size(F^2)	6 – 20	4 – 8	15	4
Read Latency(ns)	1-10	20-50	20-80	5-50
Write Latency(ns)	2-20	150	100	5-50
Endurance	10^{15}	10^8	10^{12}	10^{8-10}

resistance switching behavior of the metal oxides have been noticed for several years and attracted great research interest recently for the potential application as next generation non-volatile memory technology. A ReRAM memory cell is usually built on a Metal-Insulator-Metal (MIM) structure. The resistance switching behaviors have been observed in many MIM nanodevice with different metal oxide materials. For example, a TiO_2 based MIM structure ReRAM was proposed by HP Labs in 2008 [4]. The proposed ReRAM is considered as the first experimental realization and a theoretical model of the fourth fundamental circuit elements, which is predicted by Chua [5] about 40 years ago. The memristor-based ReRAM has a very small cell size of $50 \times 50 nm^2$ with access time less than 50ns. Another HfO_2 -based bipolar ReRAM is implemented by ITRI this year with as small as 7.2ns access time [2].

Although there are several different ReRAM proposed by researchers, all of them can be divided into two classes: the unipolar ReRAM and the bipolar ReRAM. For a unipolar ReRAM cell, the resistance switching behaviors do not depend on the polarity of the voltage input across the cell and only relate to magnitude and latency of the voltage input. However, for a bipolar ReRAM, the voltage polarity for a ON-to-OFF switching (RESET operation) is different from a OFF-to-ON switching (SET operation). A unipolar ReRAM can be easily stacked on top of diodes to build a one diode one resistor (1D1R) ReRAM. However, as mentioned, the SET and the RESET operation have different latency and therefore the performance is mainly determined by the long voltage pulse. Besides, the control of SET, RESET and read operation without any disturbance is another crucial design challenge, especially in the high speed ReRAM design. Therefore, the reported state-of-art high performance ReRAM technologies are dominated by bipolar ReRAM [? Added reference here].

B. Cross-Point Architecture

There are two possible memory structures for ReRAM implementation: the traditional MOSFET-accessed structure and the cross-point structure. For the one cell one access device structure. In the MOS-accessed memory array, the conventional memory cell is substituted by the ReRAM cell where the access device remains to be the MOSFET. In this structure, each ReRAM cell has to be accompanied with a MOSFET access device, whose size is much larger than the ReRAM cell. In this case, the area of the memory array is mainly dominated by MOSFET access device rather than the actual ReRAM cell. Therefore, the ReRAM's advantage of ultra small cell size will be eliminated.

On the contrary, the cross-point structure is more area-efficient for the ReRAM based memory array [6]. A schematic view of typical cross-point memory array is shown in Figure. 1(a). It can be seen that in the cross-point array, the only item at each crossing point is the ReRAM cell. Therefore, the area of the array is significantly reduced since the large MOSFET access part is removed. Figure. 1(b) shows that the cell size of the cross point memory can achieve $4F^2$, the theoretical minimum size for a single layer single level memory cell. Besides, as aforementioned, the good stackability and the high resistance ratio provide the capability of building multi-layer multi-level cross-point ReRAM array, which can further increase the area efficiency of the ReRAM array [2] [7].

For the cross-point structure, a two-step writing methodology, ERASE-before-RESET, is used to prevent the unintended writing. In read operation two ways are exhibited for preventing a read failure: the first is to supply the same voltage to the unselected row and selected column. In this way, only the data on the select row is read

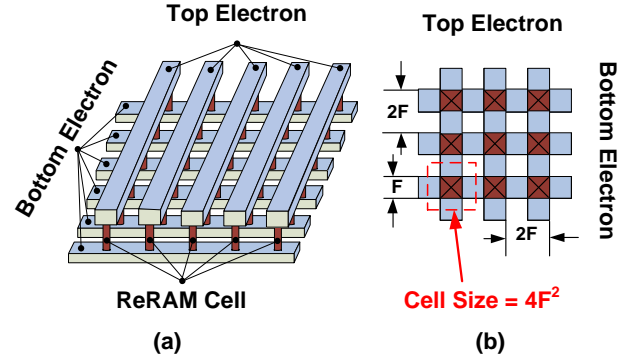


Fig. 1. A schematic view of typical cross point architecture.

from the selected column. The disadvantage of this method is the voltage drop on the crossing points of the unselected row and the selected column may not be ideal zero because of variations, and this imposes a limitation on the array size. The second way is a two-step write operation. The disturbance current of the partial selected cell on the selected column will be read out beforehand as a background current. Later the total current, comprised of both partial selected cell and full selected cell, will be read out. The state of the selected cell can then be determined by computing the difference between the total current and background current.

Sneak Path.

C. Motivations

As aforementioned, although the cross-point structure can provide the fabricate simplicity and area efficiency, it also incur lots of design challenges. Following cases show some examples to demonstrate the disadvantages of the cross-point structure, which motivates the work in this paper.

- 1) **Reliable Write Operation**
In order to
 - 2) **Read Margin Disturbance**
123
 - 3) **Energy Waste Due to Sneak Pass**
123
- [8] [9] [1]

III. RELATED WORK

IV. MODELING OF THE CROSS-POINT MEMORY

In this section, a detailed mathematical model of cross-point memory array is built. By using the proposed model with specific parameters and boundary conditions, different read/write schemes can be easily evaluated at the very early stage of the design.

A. Basic model of Cross-Point Memory

Figure. 3 shows the circuit model of the M by N cross point ReRAM array. The horizontal lines are word line and vertical lines represent the bit line. The ReRAM cells are located at each cross point of one word line and one bit line. The resistance of the ReRAM cell at the cross point of the i^{th} word line and j^{th} bit line is indicated as $R_{i,j}$. We assume the resistance of the interconnect nanowires between two adjacent cross point has the same value of R_{line} . The input resistance of each word line and bit line is R_v and the resistance of sense amplifier is R_s . In order to set up the Kirchhoff's Current

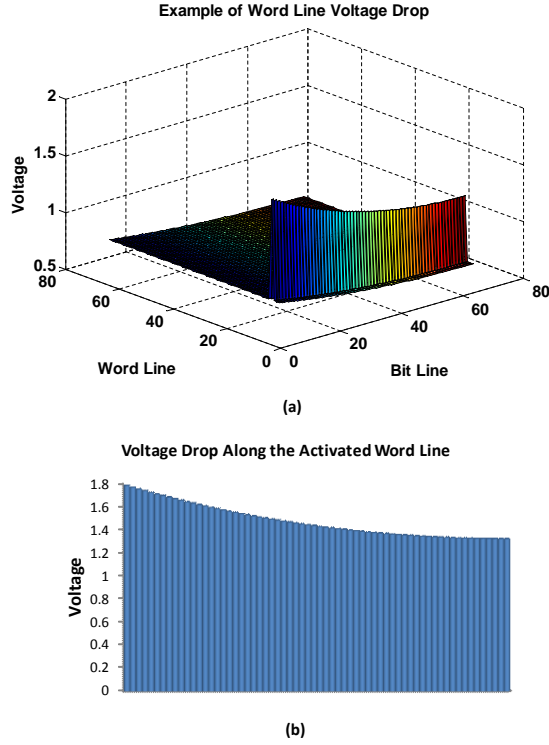


Fig. 2. Case 1: Voltage Drop Along the Word Line during Write Operation.

Law (KCL) equations, the voltage at each cross point is indicated as $V_{i,j}$ for word line and $V'_{i,j}$ for bit line. A detailed cross point is also shown in Figure. 3. Besides, the input voltage for the i^{th} word line is V_{Wi} and for the i^{th} bit line is V_{Bi} . In the case of two side voltage input of word line, the voltage at the other end of the i^{th} word line is denoted as V_{W1} . Finally, the voltage at the sense amplifier is V'_{Bi} during the read operation.

B. Edge Conditions for Different Write/Read Schemes

Based on the circuit model, the current equation for each cross point can be built following the KCL:

$$\sum_{I=1}^k I_k = 0. \quad (1)$$

All of the cross points have similar structure and therefore it is easy to set up the KCL equation for each cross point. However, the cross point at the edge of the array may have different condition for different write/read schemes. For example, the unselected word line for write operation can be either half biased or left floating. Thus, the

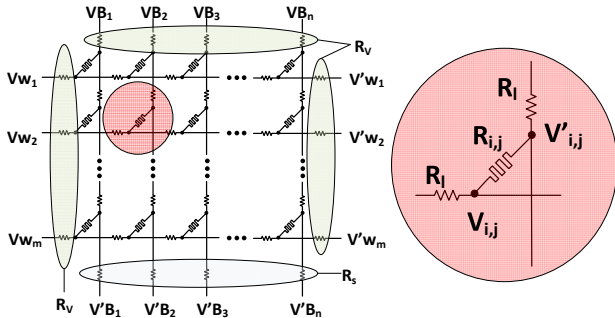


Fig. 3. The basic model of typical cross point array.

edge conditions should be carefully considered for each write/read schemes. However, generally speaking, all of the cross points can be classified into three major categories: Normal point, Activated point and Floating point.

The normal point located inside the memory array. In other words, for all of the nodes with $1 < i < m$ and $1 < j < n$, the KCL equations take the form of

$$R_l^{-1} V_{i,j-1} - (2R_l^{-1} + R_{i,j}^{-1}) V_{i,j} + R_l^{-1} V_{i,j+1} + R_{i,j}^{-1} V'_{i,j} = 0, \quad (2)$$

for the node at word line layer and

$$R_l^{-1} V'_{i-1,j} - (2R_l^{-1} + R_{i,j}^{-1}) V'_{i,j} + R_l^{-1} V'_{i,j+1} + R_{i,j}^{-1} V_{i,j} = 0, \quad (3)$$

for the node at bit line layer.

Besides, the activated point and floating point represent the node at the edge of cross point array with different conditions: a edge point, which have been directly connected to the voltage input or the ground, can be considered as a activated mode. Otherwise, it is floating node. Take the point located at the intersection of i^{th} word line and 1^{st} bit line for example. If the i^{th} word line is activated by a voltage input of V_{Wi} , then this cross point is activated point, and the KCL equation for this point is:

$$-(R_v^{-1} + R_l^{-1} + R_{i,1}^{-1}) V_{i,1} + R_l^{-1} V_{i,2} + R_{i,1}^{-1} V'_{i,1} = -R_v^{-1} V_{Wi}, \quad (4)$$

otherwise, it is left floating and has the KCL equation take the form of

$$-(R_l^{-1} + R_{i,1}^{-1}) V_{i,1} + R_l^{-1} V_{i,2} + R_{i,1}^{-1} V'_{i,1} = 0. \quad (5)$$

C. Analysis of the Computing Complexity

V. ANALYSIS OF DESIGN CONSTRAINTS

A. Overview

B. Write Operation

1. Only consider the one-side scheme Consider 1/2 1/3 and floating? Energy Issue? Define Energy Efficient Parameter? Reliable Issue: Any possibility of write disturbance
2. Present the voltage drop problem Reliability Issue
3. Two Way Scheme

C. Read Operation

D. Framework

E. Experimental Results

F. Conclusion

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