



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**CMOS VARIABLE GAIN LOW NOISE AMPLIFIER FOR RADIO FREQUENCY  
APPLICATIONS**

**LEE LINI @ LINI LEE**

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**CMOS VARIABLE GAIN LOW NOISE AMPLIFIER FOR  
RADIO FREQUENCY APPLICATIONS**

By

**LEE LINI @ LINI LEE**

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in  
Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 2008



## DEDICATIONS

*“To my family members especially my beloved husband and my ever-encouraging parents for their love and support.”*



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**CMOS VARIABLE GAIN LOW NOISE AMPLIFIER FOR  
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**November 2008**

**Chairman: Roslina Mohd Sidek, PhD**

**Faculty: Engineering**

The evolution of wireless telecommunication systems is expanding in an unprecedented way and such developments have prompted many design challenges specifically for low cost and low power System-on-Chip (SoC). In order to fulfill these needs, the design challenges need to be seen from all levels of the wireless system design from architecture, circuit and the process technology. The first stage of a receiver is the radio frequency (RF) input with low noise amplifier (LNA) as the first building block. Hence, it dominates the performance of the receiver system especially in noise and sensitivity. An LNA which incorporates a variable gain stage is useful in the receiver system in order to achieve continuous gain controllability which can be used to prevent saturation in the receiver when the input signal becomes relatively large compared to the power supply. Thus, circuit solutions of current mirror, gain control loop, capacitively coupled scheme and parallel inter-stage resonance are proposed. On-chip inductors are needed in a LNA to fulfill its requirements of noise and input matching. Therefore, spiral inductors are designed, analyzed and implemented according to the specifications.



The main key part of this thesis describes the designs of the variable gain LNA (VGLNA) for low power consumption, continuous gain control and high selectivity over a wide frequency band with the target applications of frequency band at 2.0, 2.4, 5.0, 5.7 and 8 GHz. The VGLNA utilizes current mirror which allows precise copying of the current independent of temperature. With an adequate biased voltage applied, continuous gain control of approximately 28 dB is achieved at low current without degrading the noise performance of the VGLNA significantly, maintaining it below 2 dB. Second approach proposes the capacitively coupled LNA which ensures that the minimum required voltage supply for this topology is only one threshold voltage and not doubled the amount though it is a cascode transistors structure. Hence with these two innovative approaches, the power dissipation of the LNA would be minimal. Continuous gain control is achieved with the gain control loop and current mirror methods. By introducing a simple gain control loop composed of a gain control transistor and a capacitor, a wide continuous gain tuning range is achieved and with the current mirror, the VGLNA has continuous controllability of the gain. A new circuit structure named parallel inter-stage resonance LNA is proposed and it offers high selectivity of gain over the 5 GHz frequency band while keeping the noise figure below 2 dB.

The simulation results meet the desired specifications and the measurement results of transistors and inductors are shown to be comparable with the analytical results. Finally, it can be concluded that the VGLNA designs have shown continuous controllable gain and low noise with low power consumption, not forgetting high selectivity over a wide frequency band.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PENGUAT BOLEHUBAH GANDAAN CMOS BERHINGAR RENDAH UNTUK  
APLIKASI BERFREKUENSI RADIO**

Oleh

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**November 2008**

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Evolusi bagi sistem telekomunikasi wayarles sedang berkembang dengan cara yang tidak pernah berlaku dahulu dan perkembangan seperti ini telah membangkitkan pelbagai cabaran rekabentuk terutamanya bagi Sistem-dalam-Cip (SoC) yang berkos dan berkuasa rendah. Demi memenuhi keperluan ini, cabaran untuk rekabentuk perlu dicungkil daripada semua tahap rekabentuk sistem wayarles, umumnya daripada seni bina, litar dan teknologi proses. Peringkat pertama di dalam satu penerima adalah input berfrekuensi rendah dengan penguat berhingar rendah (LNA) sebagai blok pembinaan pertama. Oleh itu, ia menguasai prestasi sistem penerima tersebut terutamanya dalam bidang hingar dan kepekaan. Satu LNA yang merangkumi peringkat bolehubah gandaan adalah amat berguna di dalam sistem penerima demi mencapai kawalan gandaan berterusan yang boleh digunakan untuk mengelak ketepuan di dalam penerima apabila isyarat input menjadi terlalu besar berbanding dengan bekalan kuasa. Oleh itu, penyelesaian litar yang dicadangkan adalah arus cermin, gelung kawalan gandaan, skema tergendang berkemuatan dan salunan selari antara peringkat. Induktor dalam cip

adalah diperlukan di dalam satu LNA untuk memenuhi keperluan hingar dan padanan input. Oleh itu, induktor pilin telah direkabentuk, dianalisa dan dilaksanakan mengikut spesifikasi.

Bahagian terpenting di dalam tesis ini menghuraikan rekabentuk LNA bolehubah gandaan (VGLNA) untuk penggunaan kuasa rendah, kawalan gandaan berterusan dan pemilihan tinggi pada jalur frekuensi yang lebar serta juga dengan sasaran aplikasi pada jalur frekuensi 2.0, 2.4, 5.0, 5.7 dan 8.0 GHz. VGLNA menggunakan arus cermin bagi salinan tepat untuk arus tanpa dipengaruhi oleh suhu. Beserta dengan nilai voltan terpincang yang sesuai, kawalan gandaan berterusan bernilai lebih kurang 28 dB boleh diperolehi pada arus yang rendah tanpa merendahkan prestasi hingar VGLNA secara nyata sekali dengan mengekalkan nilai hingar di bawah 2 dB. Cara kedua mencadangkan LNA terganggu berkemampuan yang memastikan bahawa bekalan voltan minima yang diperlukan bagi topologi ini hanyalah satu voltan ambang dan bukannya dua walaupun ia merupakan satu struktur transistor kaskod. Dengan dua cara inovatif ini, pelepasan kuasa pada LNA adalah minima. Kawalan gandaan berterusan boleh dicapai melalui gelung kawalan gandaan dan arus cermin. Melalui gelung kawalan gandaan yang dibina daripada satu transistor kawalan gandaan dan juga satu pemuat, satu julat penalaan gandaan berterusan yang lebar boleh diperolehi. Tambahan pula, dengan menggunakan arus cermin, litar VGLNA akan mempunyai pengawalan gandaan yang berterusan. Satu struktur litar yang baru bernama salunan selari antara peringkat telah dicadangkan dan ia memberi pemilihan yang tinggi bagi gandaan pada jalur frekuensi 5 GHz serta mengekalkan hingar pada nilai kurang daripada 2 dB.

Keputusan simulasi menunjukkan bahawa VGLNA memenuhi spesifikasi yang dikehendaki dan keputusan ukuran bagi transistor dan inductor menunjukkan hasil yang setara dengan keputusan analitikal. Akhirnya, ini boleh disimpulkan bahawa rekabentuk VGLNA telah menunjukkan kawalan gandaan berterusan dan hingar rendah dengan penggunaan kuasa rendah, serta memberi pemilihan yang tinggi pada satu jalur frekuensi yang lebar.



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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2008 to conduct the final examination of Lee Lini @ Lini Lee on her thesis entitled “CMOS Variable Gain Low Noise Amplifier For Radio Frequency Applications” in accordance with Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U (A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

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**LEE LINI @ LINI LEE**

Date: 2 December 2008



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>APPROVAL</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>DECLARATION</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	<b>xiv</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>xv</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>xxi</b>
<b>LIST OF NOTATIONS</b>	<b>xxv</b>
<b>CHAPTER</b>	
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 The Telecommunication Era	1
1.2 Motivation and Problem Statements	4
1.3 Aim and Objectives	6
1.4 Research Scopes	8
1.5 Organization of the thesis	11
<b>2 VARIABLE GAIN LOW NOISE AMPLIFIERS IN WIRELESS COMMUNICATIONS</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Receiver Architectures	13
2.1.1 Heterodyne architecture	13
2.1.2 Direct-conversion architecture	15
2.1.3 Other architectures	18
2.1.4 Receiver architectures – Summary and Trends	20
2.2 Wireless Telecommunication Systems	21
2.3 Low Noise Amplifier Requirements and Performance Merits	23
2.3.1 Input Matching	25
2.3.2 Voltage Gain	26
2.3.3 Input Referred Third Order Intercept Point	28
2.3.4 Noise Figure	29
2.4 Design Parameters for a Variable Gain Low Noise Amplifier	35
2.4.1 Sensitivity and Noise	35
2.4.2 Linearity	37
2.5 Design Challenges of VGLNA	40
2.6 Summary	48
<b>3 DESIGN OF LOW NOISE AMPLIFIER</b>	<b>50</b>
3.1 Cascode Transistor / Inductively degenerated LNA	50
3.2 Capacitively Coupled LNA	53
3.3 Parallel Inter-stage Resonance LNA	56

3.4	Summary	61
<b>4</b>	<b>DESIGN OF ON-CHIP INDUCTORS</b>	<b>62</b>
4.1	On-Chip Inductors in Silicon Technology	62
4.2	Optimization of Inductors using ASITIC	68
4.3	Measurement and Analysis	74
4.4	Summary	82
<b>5</b>	<b>DESIGN OF VARIABLE GAIN LOW NOISE AMPLIFIERS (VGLNA)</b>	<b>83</b>
5.1	Gain Control in Variable Gain Low Noise Amplifier	83
5.1.1	Inductor Degeneration with Current Mirror	84
5.1.2	Capacitively Coupled with Current Mirror	93
5.1.3	Inductor Degeneration with Gain Control Loop	97
5.1.4	Parallel Inter-stage Resonance with a Varactor	103
5.2	Implementation of VGLNA	107
5.3	Experimental Results	111
5.4	Analysis of Gain Control Methods	129
5.5	Summary	131
<b>6</b>	<b>CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORKS</b>	<b>132</b>
6.1	Conclusions	132
6.2	Research Contributions	134
6.2.1	Low Power Consumption and Single-chip Integration	134
6.2.2	Continuous Controllable Gain	135
6.2.3	Wideband Matching and High Selectivity	135
6.2.4	Giga Hertz Applications	135
6.2.5	Implementation of On-chip Inductors	136
6.2.6	VGLNA Implementation	136
6.3	Future Works	136
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>138</b>
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>147</b>
	<b>BIODATA OF STUDENT</b>	<b>157</b>
	<b>LIST OF PUBLICATIONS</b>	<b>158</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>		<b>Page</b>
2.1	Wireless telecommunication systems.	22
2.2	Performance of various VGLNAs for radio receivers.	48
2.3	Performance comparison for different structures of LNA.	49
4.1	Different geometrical parameters used to design the inductors.	72
5.1	Comparison of Current Mirror VGLNA with published VGLNAs.	93
5.2	Comparison of VGLNAs performances.	103
5.3	Targeted specifications for a VGLNA constructed from inductively source degenerated LNA with a current mirror.	108
5.4	Summary of gain control methods for VGLNA.	129

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1.1	Block diagram of a generic wireless transceiver	3
1.2	Block diagram of a simplified receiver.	4
1.3	Study module showing the flow of the proposed work in grayed boxes.	10
2.1	Block diagram of a Heterodyne Receiver.	14
2.2	Block diagram of a Direct Conversion Receiver.	16
2.3	Hartley image-reject receiver.	19
2.4	Weaver image-reject receiver.	19
2.5	Block diagram of a general low-IF receiver.	20
2.6	Common LNA architectures, (a) resistive termination, (b) $1/g_m$ termination, (c) shunt-series feedback and (d) inductive degeneration.	24
2.7	The standard CMOS noise model.	31
2.8	Revised gate circuit model including induced effects.	31
2.9	Revised small-signal model for LNA noise calculations.	34
2.10	Cascaded receiver stages.	37
2.11	Definition of 1-dB compression point (CP).	38
2.12	Definition of input-referred 3 <sup>rd</sup> order intercept point (IIP3).	39
2.13	Circuit schematic diagram of the folded cascode VGLNA.	41
2.14	Schematic of the VGLNA with gain control circuit.	41
2.15	Schematic of the switched-gain CMOS LNA.	42
2.16	Schematic of the current-splitting CMOS LNA.	43
2.17	Current-splitting gain control technique.	43
2.18	Schematic of a fully differential dual gain mode CMOS LNA.	45



2.19	Inductorless wideband LNA.	45
2.20	Circuit diagram of the wideband LNA.	45
2.21	Stagger tuning UWB CMOS LNA.	46
2.22	Capacitive cross-coupling CG LNA.	47
3.1	The inductively degenerated LNA.	51
3.2	The proposed capacitively coupled LNA.	54
3.3	(a) Small-signal circuit of the coupling elements, and (b) the circuit at resonance.	55
3.4	The proposed parallel inter-stage resonance LNA.	57
3.5	The simplified small-signal equivalent representation of the proposed LNA in Figure 3.4 from node X to node Y.	59
3.6	Simulated power gain with two different biased currents of (a) 0.81 mA and (b) 0.19 mA.	60
3.7	Simulated NF of the parallel inter-stage resonance LNA.	60
4.1	A typical integrated inductor.	63
4.2	Layout of a circular spiral inductor.	64
4.3	The inductor $\Pi$ model.	67
4.4	The inductor narrowband model.	68
4.5	Layer parameters used by ASITIC.	69
4.6	ASITIC sample technology file.	70
4.7	Snapshot of ASITIC with inductor spi_c.	71
4.8	The 1.4 nH inductor with 1.5 turns.	72
4.9	The 2.0 nH inductor with 2.5 turns.	73
4.10	The 3.7 nH inductor with 4.5 turns.	73
4.11	The 15.6 nH inductor with 7.5 turns.	73
4.12	Microphotograph of inductor with GSS probe during measurement.	74

4.13	Comparison between simulated (straight line) and measured (crossed) data for 7.5 turns 15.6 nH inductor with (a) Smith Chart of $S_{11}$ , (b) rectangular plot of $S_{11}$ (dB), and (c) rectangular plot of $S_{21}$ (dB).	75
4.14	Comparison between simulated (straight line) and measured (crossed) data for 2.5 turns 2.02 nH inductor with (a) Smith Chart of $S_{11}$ , (b) rectangular plot of $S_{11}$ (dB), and (c) rectangular plot of $S_{21}$ (dB).	76
4.15	Comparison between simulated (straight line) and measured (crossed) data for 4.5 turns 3.7 nH inductor with (a) Smith Chart of $S_{11}$ , (b) rectangular plot of $S_{11}$ (dB), and (c) rectangular plot of $S_{21}$ (dB).	77
4.16	Measured and simulated inductance values for 7.5 turns of 15.6 nH inductor.	80
4.17	Measured and simulated Q factor for 7.5 turns of 15.6 nH inductor.	80
4.18	Measured and simulated inductance values for 2.5 turns of 2.02 nH inductor.	80
4.19	Measured and simulated Q factor for 2.5 turns of 2.02 nH inductor.	81
4.20	Measured and simulated inductance values for 4.5 turns of 3.7 nH inductor.	81
4.21	Measured and simulated Q factor for 4.5 turns of 3.7 nH inductor.	81
5.1	Gain of an RF front-end using analog gain control of voltage (solid line) and current (dashed line).	84
5.2	Gain adjustment by changing the load or input $G_m$ of an inductively degenerated LNA.	85
5.3	The LNA using current mirror for variable gain.	86
5.4	Gain, $S_{21}$ and NF with changes of $W_3$ .	89
5.5	Effect of current $I_3$ on the gain $S_{21}$ .	89
5.6	$S_{11}$ and $S_{22}$ of the proposed VGLNA.	90
5.7	Effect of temperature on the gain, $S_{21}$ and NF.	90
5.8	The gain $S_{21}$ at both HGM and LGM of the proposed 5.7 GHz VGLNA.	91
5.9	NF of the proposed 5.7 GHz VGLNA.	91

5.10	$S_{11}$ of the proposed 5.7 GHz VGLNA.	92
5.11	$S_{22}$ of the proposed 5.7 GHz VGLNA.	92
5.12	The proposed VGLNA, combining capacitively coupled LNA and current mirror.	95
5.13	NF of the VGLNA.	95
5.14	Highest and lowest gain of the VGLNA.	96
5.15	$S_{11}$ and $S_{22}$ of the VGLNA.	96
5.16	The proposed gain control loop for the LNA.	98
5.17	The complete schematic of the proposed gain control loop for VGLNA.	100
5.18	$S_{21}$ of the VGLNA at low and high gain mode.	101
5.19	$S_{11}$ of the VGLNA at low and high gain mode.	101
5.20	NF of the VGLNA at low and high gain mode.	102
5.21	Influences of $V_c$ on gain and NF of the VGLNA.	102
5.22	Schematic of the proposed wideband LNA.	105
5.23	Simulated gain, $S_{21}$ of the proposed wideband LNA.	105
5.24	Effect of the gain with $V_{\text{varact}}$ being swept from 0.8 to 1.3 V for lower and middle U-NII band from 5.15 – 5.35 GHz.	106
5.25	Effect of the gain with $V_{\text{varact}}$ being swept from 0.8 to 1.3 V for lower and middle U-NII band from 5.725 – 5.825 GHz.	106
5.26	Effect of output matching $S_{22}$ with $V_{\text{varact}}$ being swept from 0.8 to 1.3 V.	106
5.27	Simulated NF of the proposed wideband LNA.	106
5.28	Effect of the NF with $V_{\text{varact}}$ being swept from 0.8 to 1.3 V.	107
5.29	Some of the NMOS transistors layouts for the VGLNA implementation.	109
5.30	Floorplan of the VGLNA chip layout.	110
5.31	Basic elements involved in the measurement.	112

5.32	The probe station places inside a micro chamber for shielding.	113
5.33	The co-planar probes touching the die on probe station.	113
5.34	Physical contact of probes on the DUT.	113
5.35	SMUs for DC measurement.	114
5.36	DC measurement ( $I_d$ vs $V_{ds}$ and $V_{gs}$ ) and RF measurement (s-parameter) for 30 $\mu\text{m}$ NMOS transistor.	115
5.37	DC measurement ( $I_d$ vs $V_{ds}$ and $V_{gs}$ ) and RF measurement (s-parameter) for 44 $\mu\text{m}$ NMOS transistor.	116
5.38	DC measurement ( $I_d$ vs $V_{ds}$ and $V_{gs}$ ) and RF measurement (s-parameter) for 60 $\mu\text{m}$ NMOS transistor.	117
5.39	DC measurement ( $I_d$ vs $V_{ds}$ and $V_{gs}$ ) and RF measurement (s-parameter) for 110 $\mu\text{m}$ NMOS transistor.	118
5.40	DC measurement ( $I_d$ vs $V_{ds}$ and $V_{gs}$ ) and RF measurement (s-parameter) for 176 $\mu\text{m}$ NMOS transistor.	119
5.41	DC measurement ( $I_d$ vs $V_{ds}$ and $V_{gs}$ ) and RF measurement (s-parameter) for 180 $\mu\text{m}$ NMOS transistor.	120
5.42	DC measurement ( $I_d$ vs $V_{ds}$ and $V_{gs}$ ) and RF measurement (s-parameter) for 220 $\mu\text{m}$ NMOS transistor.	121
5.43	DC measurement ( $I_d$ vs $V_{ds}$ and $V_{gs}$ ) and RF measurement (s-parameter) for 400 $\mu\text{m}$ NMOS transistor.	122
5.44	DC measurement ( $I_d$ vs $V_{ds}$ and $V_{gs}$ ) and RF measurement (s-parameter) for 440 $\mu\text{m}$ NMOS transistor.	123
5.45	DC measurement ( $I_d$ vs $V_{ds}$ and $V_{gs}$ ) and RF measurement (s-parameter) for 550 $\mu\text{m}$ NMOS transistor.	124
5.46	Performance of five transistors $S_{21}$ against frequency.	128
5.47	Microphotograph of the DUT for measurement.	128
B.1	The extracted $\Pi$ model of 1.4 nH circular spiral inductor.	151
B.2	The extracted $\Pi$ model of 2.0 nH circular spiral inductor.	151
B.3	The extracted $\Pi$ model of 3.7 nH circular spiral inductor.	152



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### Abbreviations

3G	Third Generation
4G	Forth Generation
AC	Alternating current
ADC	Analog-to-digital converter
ADS	Agilent's Advanced Design System program
AGC	Automatic gain control
AM	Amplitude modulation
ASITIC	Analysis and Simulation of Spiral Inductors and Transformers for ICs
BB	Baseband
BER	Bit error rate
CMOS	Complementary Metal Oxide Semiconductor
CG	Common-gate
CP	Compression point
DAC	Digital-to-analog converter
DC	Direct Current
DCR	Direct Conversion Receiver
DCS	Digital Communication System
DECT	Digital Enhanced Cordless Telecommunications
DRC	Design Rule Check
DS-CDMA	Direct Sequence Code Division Multiple Access
DSP	Digital Signal Processing
DUT	Die Under Test

EDGE	Enhanced Data rates for GSM Evolution
ESD	Electrostatic Discharge
F	Noise factor
FM	Frequency modulation
GDSII	Gerber Data Stream Information Interchange
GPRS	General Packet Radio Service
GPS	Global Positioning System
GSG	Ground-Signal-Ground
GSM	Global System for Mobile Communications
HGM	High gain mode
IC	Integrated Circuit
IEEE	Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
IEEE-ISA	Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers – International Standards Association
IF	Intermediate Frequency
IIP3	Input-referred third order intercept point
IM3	Third order intermodulation
IMT-2000	International Mobile Telecommunications in the year 2000
IP3	Third order intercepts point
ISM	Industrial, Scientific and Medical
ISS	Impedance Standard Substrate
LC-tank	A parallel circuit consists of an inductor and a capacitor
LGM	Low gain mode
LNA	Low noise amplifier
LO	Local oscillator
LPF	Low pass filter

LVS	Layout versus schematic
MIMO	Multiple Input – Multiple Output
NF	Noise Figure
NFA	Noise Figure Analyzer
OFDM	Orthogonal Frequency-division Multiplexing
P1dB	1-dB Gain Compression Measurement
PCN	Personal Communication Network
PCS	Personal Communication Services
PDA	Personal Digital Assistance
PSS	Periodic Steady-State
RC-CR	Resistive and capacitive
RF	Radio Frequency
SA	Spectrum Analyzer
SAW	Surface Acoustic Wave
SDF	Spectral Density Function
SMU	Source measure unit
SNR	Signal-to-Noise Ratio
SoC	System-on-Chip
SOLT	Short-Open-Load-Through
U-NII	Unlicensed National Information Infrastructure
UMTS	Universal Mobile Telecommunications System
USB	Universal Serial Bus
UWB	Ultra Wide Band
VCO	Voltage Controlled Oscillator
VGA	Variable Gain Amplifier



VGLNA	Variable gain low noise amplifier
VNA	Vector Network Analyzer
WCDMA	Wideband Code Division Multiple Access
WLAN	Wireless Local Area Network
WPAN	Wireless Personal Area Networks