DESIGN OF A LOW NOISE LOW POWER FRONT END READOUT CIRCUIT FOR NEUTRON DETECTION USING 130NM CMOS TECHNOLOGY

NUERAIMAITI AIMAIER

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By

NUERAIMAITI AIMAIER

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

May 2015
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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

DESIGN OF A LOW NOISE LOW POWER FRONT END READOUT CIRCUIT FOR NEUTRON DETECTION USING 130NM CMOS TECHNOLOGY

By

NUERAIMAITI AIMAIER

May 2015

Chair: Roslina Mohd Sidek, Associate Professor, PhD

Faculty: Engineering

Neutron detectors are used to detect neutron particles in science, security, and other applications. A typical neutron detection system consists of detector itself and front-end readout electronics. Since neutron detector does not have its operational setting in terms of signal speed and output signal gain, it requires a suitable readout electronics which capable of accepting wide range and fast input signal.

Front-end readout electronics designed in CMOS technology has enabled highly integrated readout channels which increases the resolution of neutron detection. However, due to technology down scaling and the requirements for low power design, the transistor operating region tends to shift from strong inversion to moderate inversion, and the classic MOSFET modelling, also known as “square law” is not applicable anymore. Hence, a more accurate MOSFET modelling is needed in deep submicron CMOS technology to design the front-end readout circuit. Another one significant challenge in designing front-end readout circuit is to design low noise while at the same time minimizing the power consumption. This study presents the design of a low noise and low power front-end readout circuit that is implemented in 130nm CMOS technology. The front-end readout system which has been designed in this study was composed of two parts: (a) pre-amplifier and (b) amplifier pulse shaper.

A simplified Enz Krummenacher Vittoz model or known as EKV model was studied and applied in this work. The model is quite successful in all CMOS operating region, especially in moderate inversion to predict the MOSFET behaviour. The input transistor of front-end system was carefully designed which is critical to readout channel noise performance. A p-channel MOSFET is selected for input transistor due to its lower flicker noise coefficient, and the geometries of all transistors in preamplifier are optimized for minimum noise contribution to the system. The input transistor is made to operate in moderate inversion which is good trade-off between system speed and power consumption. A folded cascode structure is designed for preamplifier to boost the gain and bandwidth. A first order pulse shaper with pole zero cancellation circuit is designed with short peaking time to meet fast counting rate requirements.

A series of simulation including post-layout simulation was carried out to measure front-end system equivalent noise charge, power consumption, charge gain, peaking
time, high counting rate and linearity. Results showed that the front-end readout channel designed in CMOS technology in this work has a good electronic noise performance with only an equivalent noise charge of 183 electrons for a detector capacitance of 1pF. The channel power consumption is only about 0.89mW with a charge gain of 3.6mV/fC. Peaking time is around 104 nanoseconds and it is capable of accepting high count rate input signal of 333 kHz with less than 5% output signal distortion. These results showed that the designed front-end readout circuit implemented in 130nm CMOS technology with input transistor working in moderate inversion has good electronic noise performance, high counting rate while reducing the total power consumption. It also shows that the front-end readout system is suitable for using in neutron particle detection system.
Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia Sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

REKA BENTUK LITAR PEMBACA BERHINGAR DAN BERKUASA RENDAH UNTUK PENGESAN NEUTRON MENGGUNAKAN TEKNOLOGI 130NM CMOS

Oleh

NUERAIMAITI AIMAIER

Mei 2015

Pengersui: Roslina Mohd Sidek, Profesor Madya, PhD

Fakulti: Kejuruteraan

Pengesan neutron digunakan bagi tujuan mengesan zarah neutron dalam bidang sains, keselamatan dan sebagainya. Secara amnya, sistem pengesan zarah neutron adalah terdiri daripada pengesan neutron itu sendiri dan juga litar pembaca bahagian depan. Oleh sebab pengesan neutron tidak memiliki penetapan operasi dari segi kelajuan isyarat dan gandaan isyarat keluaran, ia memerlukan sistem pemproses elektronik yang sesuai dan mampu menerima isyarat kemasukan yang berjulat lebar dan pantas.

Rekabentuk litar pembaca bahagian depan dalam mod litar bersepadu dengan menggunakan teknologi CMOS membolehkan sistem pemproses elektronik direkabentuk pada skala yang besar serta dapat membantu meningkatkan resolusi pada sistem pengesan neutron. Walau bagaimanapun, pengecilan skala serta keperluan bagi rekabentuk litar berkuasa rendah menyebabkan kawasan operasi bagi rekabentuk transistor yang akan digunakan beralih daripada penyongsangan kuat ke penyongsangan sederhana, ini menyebabkan pemodelan MOSFET klasik yang juga dikenali sebagai "square law" tidak lagi boleh digunakan. Oleh itu, pemodelan MOSFET yang lebih jitu amat diperlukan dalam teknologi CMOS submikron bagi rekabentuk sistem pemproses elektronik yang akan digunakan dalam litar pembaca bahagian depan. Satu lagi cabaran besar dalam reka bentuk litar pembaca bahagian depan ialah reka bentuk dengan hingar elektronik yang rendah tetapi pada masa masih mengekalkan penggunaan kuasa yang rendah. Kajian ini membentangkan satu cabaran yang amat kritikal bagi menentukan prestasi hingar elektronik yang akan digunakan dalam sistem.

Model Enz Krummenacher Vittoz yang dikenali sebagai model EKV yang dipermudahkan telah dikaji dan diaplikasi dalam kajian ini dan telah menunjukkan prestasi yang agak berjaya dalam semua CMOS kawasan operasi, terutama dalam penyongsangan sederhana, untuk meramalkan tingkah laku laku MOSFET. Bahagian transistor masukkan dalam litar pembaca bahagian depan ini telah direkabentuk dengan teliti kerana ia amat kritikal dalam menentukan prestasi hingar elektronik yang akan dijana oleh litar pembaca bahagian depan tersebut. Transistor MOSFET saluran-p telah dipilih sebagai transistor masukkan kerana ia mempunyai kelebihan yang lebih rendah berbanding saluran-n. Geometri bag sistem pra-amplifier telah dioptimaskan bagi meminimakan hingar elektronik dalam sistem. Transistor masukkan juga direka supaya beroperasi pada rantau penyongsangan sederhana supaya satu keseimbangan yang baik antara...
kelajuan sistem dan penggunaan kuasa dapat diperolehi. Struktur kaskod terlipat telah digunakan bagi rekabentuk bahagian pra-amplifier bagi meningkatkan gandaan dan lebar jalur. Litar pembentuk denyut tertib pertama dengan litar pembatal kutub-sifar telah direka dengan masa puncak yang singkat bagi memenuhi keperluan kadar pembilangan yang pantas.

Satu siri simulasi termasuk simulasi pasca-persediaan telah dilaksanakan bagi mengukur cas hingga setara, penggunaan kuasa, gandaan, masa puncak denyut, kadar pembilangan serta kelinearan sistem. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa litar pembaca bahagian depan yang direkabentuk dalam kajian ini mempunyai prestasi hingga elektronik yang baik dengan cas hingga setara 183 elektron untuk kemuatan pengesan 1pF. Penggunaan kuasa pula adalah sekitar 0.89mW/saluran dengan gandaan cas sebanyak 3.6mV/fC. Masa puncak denyut yang dihasilkan adalah sekitar 104 ns, ini menunjukkan bahawa ia mampu memproses isyarat kadar tinggi iaitu 333 kHz dengan kurang daripada 5% herotan pada isyarat keluaran. Keputusan ini menunjukkan bahawa reka bentuk litar yang telah direkabentuk dengan menggunakan teknologi 130 nm CMOS dengan transistor masukkan yang beroperasi pada rantau penyongsang sederhana mempunyai prestasi hingar elektronik yang baik, kadar pembilangan yang tinggi disamping mengurangkan jumlah penggunaan kuasa. Ini juga menunjukkan bahawa litar pembaca bahagian depan ini adalah sesuai untuk digunakan dalam sistem pengesanan zarah neutron.
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To begin with, all praise and thanks is due to almighty God who gives me the blessing, good health and wisdom to complete my Master research.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 29 May 2015 to conduct the final examination of Nueraimaiti Aimaier on his thesis entitled "Design of A Low Noise Low Power Front End Readout Circuit for Neutron Detection Using 130nm CMOS Technology" in accordance with the 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 Master of Science.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABSTRACT</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRAK</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research background 1
1.2 Neutron detection system 2
1.3 Problem statement and motivation 2
1.4 Research objectives 2
1.5 Research methodology 3
1.6 Scope of work 5
1.7 Outline of thesis 5

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction 6
2.2 Neutron detectors 6
2.3 Architecture of readout electronics for neutron detection system 8
2.4 Signal formation in a detector 9
2.5 Charge sensitive amplifier 10
2.5.1 Input characteristic of charge sensitive amplifier 10
2.5.2 Output characteristics of charge sensitive amplifier 11
2.5.3 Preamplifier structure for charge sensitive amplifier 12
2.5.4 Reset network implementation for charge sensitive amplifier 13
2.6 Pulse shaper 16
2.6.1 Pole-zero cancellation 17
2.6.2 Properties and characterization of pulse shaper output signal 19
2.7 Electronic noise 20
2.7.1 Noise sources in front-end readout channel 21
2.7.2 Equivalent noise charge (ENC) 23
2.7.3 Classic ENC optimization methodology 24
2.7.4 ENC optimization for deep-submicron technologies 27
2.8 Review of related works 28
2.9 Summary 30

## 3 CHARGE SENSITIVE AMPLIFIER

3.1 Noise optimization of charge sensitive amplifier 31
3.1.1 Input transistor selection for CSA 31
3.1.2 Noise optimization using the EKV transistor model 33
3.1.3 Secondary noise source optimization 35
3.2 Preamplifier design 36
3.2.1 Large signal and small signal analysis 37
3.2.2 Transistor sizing for preamplifier 40
3.3 The CSA reset network and feedback capacitor design 44
3.4 Performance of charge sensitive amplifier 45
3.5 Summary 47

4 PULSE SHAPER DESIGN 48
4.1 CR-RC pulse shaper 48
4.2 Pole-zero cancellation circuit design 49
4.3 Shaper amplifier design 51
4.4 CMOS implementation for passive components in the pulse shaper 52
4.5 Summary 53

5 SIMULATION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION 54
5.1 Simulation of complete front-end readout channel 54
5.1.1 Power characteristics 57
5.1.2 Transient simulation for charge conversion gain 57
5.1.3 High counting rate simulation 58
5.1.4 Linearity 60
5.1.5 Noise simulation 61
5.2 Layout design 63
5.2.1 Layout of each component 65
5.2.2 Post-layout simulation 66
5.3 Performance of FER circuit and comparison to other published works 71
5.4 Summary 72

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE WORKS 73
6.1 Conclusion 73
6.2 Recommendation for future works 73

REFERENCES 75
APPENDICES 81
BIODATA OF STUDENT 90
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>The design specifications for the front-end readout channel</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>130nm CMOS technology parameters with their specifications</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>The CSA performances</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>The values of capacitors and resistors in the pulse shaper</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Power characteristics of complete front-end readout channel</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The front-end readout system performances and comparison with previous published works</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Helium-3 gas filled proportional counter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>The research methodology for this work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>The neutron detection system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>A neutron interacts with helium nucleus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>A set of individual gas tubes (left) and multi-wire proportional chamber (right)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Two dimensional multi-wire proportional neutron gas chambers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Neutron detection system including front-end and back-end readout electronics block diagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Front-end readout electronics for neutron detector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Detector signal formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>A current pulse equivalent to 3fC input charge (Q_in)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>The miller effect and preamplifier input impedance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>Output of the charge sensitive amplifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>Preamplifier structure with PMOS input transistor: (a) folded cascode amplifier, (b) telescopic amplifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>Preamplifier structure with NMOS input transistor: (a) folded cascode amplifier, (b) telescopic amplifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>Reset techniques in charge sensitive amplifier feedback system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>Biasing for feedback resistor of charge sensitive amplifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>Pulse pile-up effect at the out of charge sensitive amplifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>Diagram of CR-RC^n shaping filter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>Voltage pulse at the shaper output for different cases: (a) without PZC circuit, (b) with PZC circuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>The idea of using PZC circuit after CSA stage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.19 The resistor ($R_{pz}$) implementation in MOS transistor in pole zero cancellation circuit

2.20 MOSFET input-referred channel thermal noise

2.21 Noise sources in a detector readout system

3.1 NMOS 1/f and thermal noise voltage spectrum in 130nm CMOS technology

3.2 PMOS 1/f and thermal noise voltage spectrum in 130nm CMOS technology

3.3 Transconductance efficiency in different inversion levels

3.4 Targeted values of the detector capacitance ($C_{det}$), the feedback capacitance ($C_f$), the feedback resistance ($R_f$), and the shaper peaking time ($T_p$)

3.5 Preamplifier structure with its biasing network

3.6 Noise performance of CSA versus input transistor transconductance

3.7 PMOS effective voltage versus overdrive voltage in four different channel lengths in 130nm CMOS technology

3.8 Small-signal equivalent circuit of the preamplifier

3.9 The flowchart of design procedures for preamplifier

3.10 Designed geometries of transistors in the preamplifier and the biasing network

3.11 Magnitude and phase response of the open loop preamplifier

3.12 The implementation of reset network for CSA

3.13 The complete designed CSA with its biasing network

3.14 Response of charge sensitive amplifier to the 10fC input charge

4.1 The first order CR-RC pulse shaper implemented in the front-end readout electronics

4.2 The pole-zero cancellation circuit implemented in MOS transistors

4.3 Sizing the transistors for pole-zero cancellation circuit
4.4 Shaper amplifier with its biasing network 73
4.5 The shaper amplifier magnitude and phase response 73
4.6 Shaper resistor ($R_i$) and capacitor ($C_i$) implementation in MOS transistors 74
5.1 The front-end readout channel integration 77
5.2 Transient response of the complete front-end readout channel 78
5.3 The floor plan for 32 channels 78
5.4 The current pulse which is equal to 10fC input charge 80
5.5 The shaper output response to the 10fC input charge 80
5.6 The shaper output response for input pulse frequency of 100 kHz 81
5.7 The shaper output response for input pulse frequency of 333 kHz 82
5.8 The shaper output response for input pulse frequency of 500 kHz 82
5.9 The shaper output response to different input charges 83
5.10 Shaper output peak voltage as a function of input charge 84
5.11 The signal and noise at the output of the complete circuit 85
5.12 Noise versus detector capacitance 86
5.13 The front-end readout channel that transistors are folded into multi-fingers (n represents the number of fingers) 87
5.14 The complete layout of one channel 88
5.15 The layout of preamplifier with its biasing network and feedback capacitor 88
5.16 The layout of adaptive continues reset with charge sensitive amplifier feedback resistor 89
5.17 The layout of first order CR-RC pulse shaper 89
5.18 Shaper output response to 10fC input charge for post-layout simulation 90
5.19 The shaper output response for input current pulse frequency of 100 kHz after post-layout simulation 91
| 5.20 | The shaper output response for input current pulse frequency of 333 kHz after post-layout simulation |
| 5.21 | The shaper output response for input current pulse frequency of 500 kHz after post-layout simulation |
| 5.22 | The shaper output responses to different input charges after post-layout simulation |
| 5.23 | Shaper output peak voltage as a function of input charge after post-layout simulation |
| 5.24 | The signal at the output of the complete circuit and its corresponding noise after post-layout simulation |
| 5.25 | Noise versus detector capacitance for post-layout simulation |
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FER</td>
<td>Front-end readout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSA</td>
<td>Charge sensitive amplifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADC</td>
<td>Analog to digital converter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMOS</td>
<td>Complementary metal-oxide semiconductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOS</td>
<td>Metal-oxide semiconductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EKV</td>
<td>Enz, Krummenacher, Vittoz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNR</td>
<td>Signal to noise ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSP</td>
<td>Digital signal processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>Direct current</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMOS</td>
<td>N-type metal-oxide semiconductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIC</td>
<td>Application specific integrated circuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMOS</td>
<td>P-type metal-oxide semiconductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR-RC&lt;sup&gt;n&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>High pass filter followed by n order low pass filter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPF</td>
<td>Band pass filter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPF</td>
<td>High pass filter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPF</td>
<td>Low pass filter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZC</td>
<td>Pole-zero cancellation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOSFET</td>
<td>Metal-oxide semiconductor field effective transistor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si-SiO&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>Silicon and silicon-dioxide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENC</td>
<td>Equivalent noise charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENC&lt;sub&gt;th&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>Equivalent noise charge for thermal noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENC&lt;sub&gt;1/f&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>Equivalent noise charge for flicker noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENC&lt;sub&gt;d&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>Equivalent noise charge for shot noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMS</td>
<td>Root mean square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBW</td>
<td>Gain bandwidth product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Alternating current</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research background

The discovery of neutron particle in 1932 was a significant breakthrough in science history, since then neutron science has been developing rapidly all around the world (Bennington, 2014). One of the most significant applications of neutron science is material testing and investigation. The way neutron scattering off gases, liquids and solid matters give scientists information about the structure and composition of these materials which may be widely used in medicine, mining, transportation, building, engineering, food processing and scientific research. In addition, neutrons serve as the complementary probe to X-rays. While X-rays only penetrate materials near surface, neutrons can penetrate most of the materials to depths of several centimetres, which makes it more effective than X-rays (Schaefer & Agamalian, 2004), (Rubio & Gilbert, 2009), (Oed, 2004).

Generally, neutrons can be detected by using helium-3 ($^{3}$He) filled gas proportional counter. A nuclear reactor ionize the gas inside the detector and generate charged particles. These charged particles are collected by the anode and cathode inside the detector to form a small quantity of current which will be measured by front-end readout circuit as electrical pulses with the amplitude proportional to the neutron energy (Langford, et al., 2013).

1.2 Neutron detection system

Since generated electrical signal in the radiation detector is extremely small, in addition to the detector itself does not have its intrinsic amplification stage, a suitable electrical signal processing channel is required to convert this small charges into a voltage pulse large enough to be processed by next subsequent electronic circuits.

A typical neutron detection system consists of three major blocks: gas filled detector, low noise analog front-end readout (FER) channel, and signal extraction as shown in Figure 1.1. The major function of the detector is to convert the energy released by nuclear reaction to detectable electrical signal.

Figure 1.1. The neutron detection system
The FER channel consisting of a charge sensitive amplifier (CSA) and a pulse shaper which convert input charges into voltage pulse then produce a Gaussian-like pulse that carries the information of energy spectroscopy and timing. The signal extraction block may consist of mixed mode circuits such as analog-to-digital converter (ADC), comparator or discriminator, etc. to process the Gaussian-like pulse for peak amplitude and time measurements, and counting rate which is manipulated by computer post-processing (Spieler, 2005).

1.3 Problem statement and motivation

To detect the neutron which is captured in $^3\text{He}$ gas filled detector, specific readout electronics is needed. Existing FER electronics are mostly implemented using off-the-shelf op amps (operational amplifiers) and discrete passive components suffers from high power consumption and occupy large area which limits the number of readout channels.

Analog FER electronics based on CMOS technology has power efficiency, occupy only micrometres square area, and is inexpensive. CMOS technology has been adopted to FER circuit since decades though, most of them still limited by noise performance and power consumption. As CMOS technology experiences continues down scaling, accurate MOS transistor modelling is required. This puts challenges to front-end designers to use low power while achieving high signal-to-noise ratio (SNR). Low FER channel power consumption in the range of a few mW is required to minimize the total detector system power consumption.

An efficient CMOS analog circuit design methodology which is using EKV model based on a unified treatment of all the regions of operation of the MOS transistor can be quite successful in terms of low power circuit design where the moderate inversion region is often used because it provides a good trade-off between speed and power consumption. In order to achieve better signal resolution, the signal-to-noise ratio above 125:1 is recommended. Since the time between nuclear radiation events is short, in high counting rate applications, it requires a short peaking time for pulse shaper in the range of a few hundred nanoseconds. Compare to some recent published works (Lombigit, Hamidon, Khalid, & Sulaiman, 2012), (Fang, Hu-Guo, Brasse, & Hu, 2011) and (Noulis, Siskos, Sarrabayrouse, & Bary, 2008) some better design specifications are targeted in this work which are given in Table 1.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signal-to-noise ratio</th>
<th>Power per channel</th>
<th>Shaper peaking time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>125:1</td>
<td>&lt;1 mW</td>
<td>100 ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.4 Research objectives

The aim of the research is to design low power consumption and low noise CMOS readout circuits for neutron detectors. The main objectives of this research are:
- To investigate and develop methodologies for optimizing noise in CMOS analog FER circuit
- To design a low noise, low power analog FER circuit with short peaking time using commercial 130nm CMOS technology
• To evaluate the characteristics and performance of the circuit in terms of output gain, electronic noise and dynamic range

The expected major contribution of this thesis is development of a methodology to investigate and optimize noise sources of analog FER circuit to achieve low noise performance while keeping the power consumption as small as possible in deep submicron CMOS technology.

1.5 Research methodology

The research methodology for this work is shown in Figure 1.2. From design specifications the architectures of the FER circuit which consists of charge sensitive amplifier and pulse shaper have been designed. Then schematic captures and simulation (DC, AC, transit, noise) for each block (charge sensitive amplifier and pulse shaper) have been done. After passing the simulations results of each block, the CSA and pulse shaper are integrated to form a FER circuit and a variety of simulations are done to validate the performances of circuit, and redesign has been done if targeted performances are not achieved. The layout of the circuit has been done in IC station and validations of the layout have been done such as design rules check (DRC) and layout versus schematic (LVS). After passing these validation processes, parasitic extraction (PEX) and post-layout simulations have been conducted to ensure the pre-targeted specifications for the FER system are achieved.
Figure 1.2. The research methodology for this work
1.6 Scope of work

This thesis presents a readout integrated circuit for neutron detector system based on 130nm CMOS technology. The focus of this work is noise optimization for FER circuit. The key tasks are design of low power, low noise, and short peaking time analog FER circuit which consists of charge sensitive amplifier and pulse shaper, evaluate performance of the circuit, and finally design of the CMOS integrated circuit layout.

1.7 Outline of thesis

The thesis is structured in six chapters. Chapter 1 is introduction to research background. Chapter 2 presents a review of literatures of neutron detectors, analog FER electronics and its each component. The detailed design procedure of the charge sensitive amplifier is presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 covers design of the pulse shaper. The simulation results, layout design and discussions are presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 covers the conclusion of the work and future recommendation.
REFERENCES


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