LIFT front-contact metallization of silicon solar cells

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A B S T R A C T

Laser-Induced Forward Transfer (LIFT) is a very versatile technique, allowing the selective transfer of a wide range of materials with no contact and high accuracy. This work includes the analysis of heterojunction silicon solar cells with the frontal grid deposited by LIFT, and the electric characterization of the deposited lines.

Keywords: Laser-Induced Forward Transfer (LIFT); Silver paste; Solar cell metallization.

Introduction

Laser-induced forward transfer (LIFT) is a promising printing and metallization method for the PV industry, where screen printing, being the standard method, is the most expensive of the fabrication steps. In this work, a commercial high viscosity silver paste is used to deposit lines by LIFT. The study focusses on the electrical properties of the cured lines, and the characterization of metallized silicon heterojunction solar cells, quite sensible to processing steps with temperatures over 200 ºC.

Experimental procedure

We used a commercial micro-sized silver paste (DuPont PV19B) with the viscosity adjusted to 11.8 Pa·s by adding thinner (DuPont 9450). The thickness of the donor paste film was 70 μm, with a gap distance between the donor and the acceptor around 40 μm. The laser source used was a ns-pulsed, solid-state Nd:YVO_4 DPSS laser emitting at 532 nm. Lines were printed using a pulse energy of about 25 μJ, and a pitch between adjacent pulses about 100 μm. Details on the LIFT experimental set-up can be found elsewhere [1].

The morphology and dimensions of the transferred lines were measured by confocal microscopy. To study the effect of the curing temperature on the electric resistivity, lines deposited on crystalline silicon with an alumina layer on top and cured at different temperatures were analyzed. The contact resistance, the sheet resistance, and the transfer length were determined by the TLM method, using lines deposited on a crystalline silicon substrate with an indium-tin-oxide (ITO) film as a top layer [2].The temperature used for this characterization was 300ºC, the same as used for the curing of the cells' frontal grid.

To check the viability of the LIFT metallization process, we deposited the front-contact grid on 1 cm^2 heterojunction silicon solar cells. The grid used had six fingers and a bus of decreasing width from 450 μm to 250 μm. To cure the silver paste without thermal deterioration of the cells, a non-contact thermal process was used, maintaining the cell at less than 1 mm from a surface of controlled temperature. The temperature and time of the curing process were adjusted to 300 ºC and 9 minutes, respectively. The JV and pseudo-JV curves of the cells were measured and analyzed.

Results and discussion

The deposited lines present a homogeneous and smooth line profile, with around 140 microns in width and 40 microns high, with a section about 2800 μm^2. Left image in Figure 1 shows the drop on the resistivity of the deposited lines with the curing temperature from almost non-conductive as-deposited paste to only some tens of μΩ·cm. The analysis of lines cured at 300ºC lead to a resistivity value of about 40±5 μΩ·cm (See the center image in Figure 1). This value is about one order of magnitude higher than the resistivity values obtained by thermal evaporation of pure silver. However, the much higher line section ensures a low series resistance for a metalized solar cell.

The analysis by the TLM method of the paste lines over Si/ITO samples (Right image in Figure 1), led to a contact resistance value around 1 Ω, a transfer length of about 100 μm, a sheet resistance for the substrate layer about 100

Ω/□, and values for the specific contact resistance around $5 \cdot 10^{-3}$ $\Omega \cdot cm^2$. This specific contact resistance is high compared with that of Ag metallic contacts deposited on Si/ITO by screen-printing, about 10^{-5} $\Omega \cdot cm^2$ [3], probably because the curing temperature is not enough to completely melt the silver particles. Although, due to the non-contact curing process, the solar cells surely not reach 300ºC, the values of length resistance and contact resistance at 300 ºC presented in this paper are considered as the better values we could have, being the real ones probably higher.

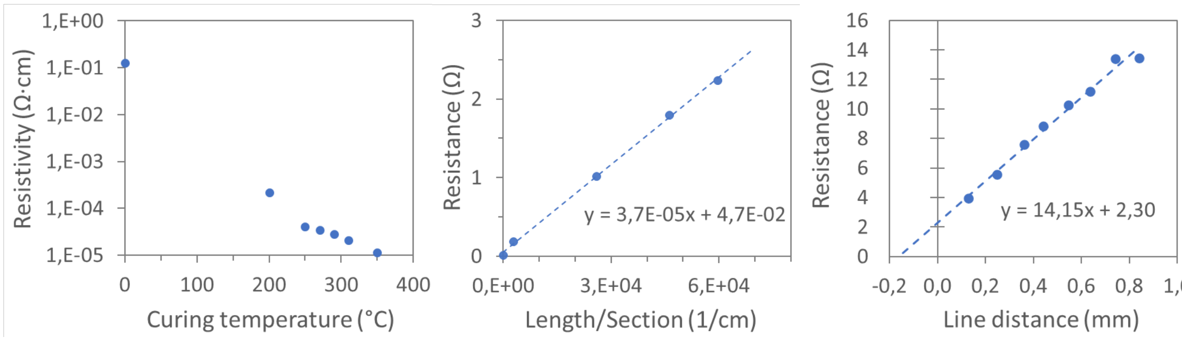

Figure 1. Left: Resistivity of silver paste lines deposited by LIFT cured at different temperatures. Centre: Resistance vs line length/section for different series of lines. The resistivity of the silver paste is the slope of the curve. Right: TLM measurement for 8 mm long Ag paste lines deposited on ITO films.

Figure 2 includes the JV curves (solid lines) and pseudo-JV curves (dotted lines) of three solar cells with the frontal grid deposited by LIFT, and a reference solar cell metallized by thermal evaporation. Table 2 show the main parameters of the cells. As it can be seen the LIFT metallization process almost does not affect the cell behavior: The Voc and Jsc values are the same in all the solar cells. Furthermore, the series resistance of solar cells metallized by LIFT is similar to that in the reference solar cell, around 2.5 $\Omega \cdot cm^2$. There is a slightly drop in the fill factor, about 2-3%, due to some shunt of around 1 mA/cm^2 near the cell's point of maximum power. A possible explanation for this drop in the FF could be some Ag paste passing through the ITO and a-Si layers (just 80 nm + 15 nm thick).

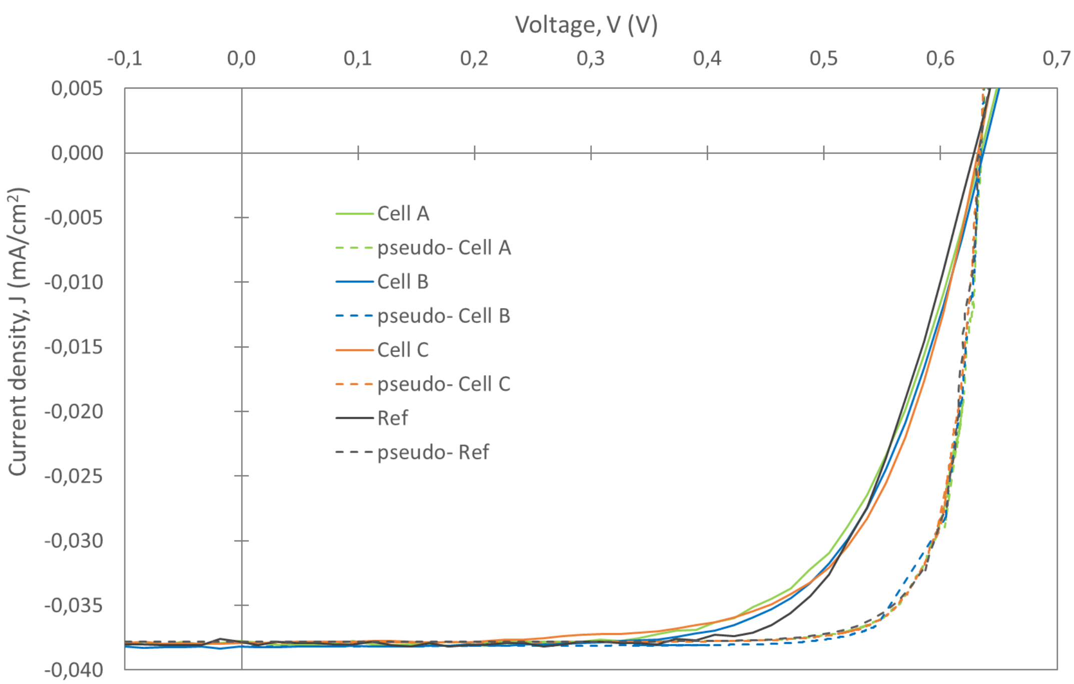

Figure 2. JV curves (solid lines) and pseudo-JV curves (dotted lines) of heterojunction solar cells with the front grid deposited by LIFT and reference cell.

Table 1. Main parameters of the different cells presented in Figure 2.

Cell	Jsc (A)	Voc (V)	FF (%)	Eff (%)
A	$3.79\cdot10^{-2}$	0.635	66.0	15.88
B	$3.82\cdot10^{-2}$	0.635	66.9	16.23
C	$3.79\cdot10^{-2}$	0.635	67.4	16.22
Ref.	$3.78\cdot10^{-2}$	0.635	69.9	16.78

Conclusion

Lines deposited by LIFT and cured by a thermal step present higher line resistance and contact resistance values than lines deposited by evaporation, but the much higher section of the lines allow a good electrical behavior of the cells, proving that LIFT is a valid metallization process. The solar cells do not suffer from the curing process, although a slight drop of 2-3% in the FF points out that more work should be done to optimize the metallization process. LIFT metallization can significantly reduce the cost for electrode fabrication, since the expensive silver pastes are more efficiently used in this technique.

Acknowledgments

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