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Mode transition timing and energy overhead analysis in noise-aware MTCMOS circuits

Hailong Jiao, Volkan Kursun

Abstract

Multi-threshold CMOS (MTCMOS) is commonly utilized for suppressing leakage currents in idle integrated circuits. The deactivation/reactivation energy consumption however degrades the effectiveness of the MTCMOS technique for providing significant savings in total energy consumption in CMOS integrated circuits. The sources of mode transition energy consumption in noise-aware MTCMOS circuits are investigated in this paper. The mode transition energy overheads of various recently published low-noise ground-gated MTCMOS circuits are characterized. With a digital triple-phase sleep signal slew rate modulated MTCMOS circuit, the overall mode transition energy consumption is reduced by up to 45.31% as compared to the other MTCMOS circuits that are evaluated in this paper in a UMC 80 nm CMOS technology. Furthermore, digital triple-phase sleep signal slew rate modulation shortens the mode transition timing overhead by up to 65.26% as compared with the other MTCMOS noise suppression techniques that are evaluated in this paper.

1. Introduction

With CMOS technology scaling, leakage currents have become important sources of power consumption in nanoscale integrated circuits [1–16]. Power/ground gating with a multi-threshold CMOS (MTCMOS) technology is the most widely used leakage power suppression technique in idle integrated circuits [1–12,15,16]. In an MTCMOS circuit, high threshold voltage (high-Vth) sleep transistors (header and/or footer) are used to cut off the power supply and/or the ground connections to an idle low threshold voltage (low-Vth) circuit block. A ground-gated MTCMOS circuit is shown in Fig. 1. An MTCMOS circuit consumes significant energy during transitions from ACTIVE mode to SLEEP mode and from SLEEP mode to ACTIVE mode. Lower energy consumption during mode transitions is critically important to achieve higher energy efficiency in MTCMOS circuits.

With the increasing number of autonomous power/ground gating domains that are employed for more effective suppression of leakage currents in each new CMOS technology generation, reactivation noise (power and ground bouncing noise) that is produced by awakening MTCMOS circuit blocks has become an important reliability concern in modern integrated circuits [4–6]. Novel MTCMOS circuits with lower deactivation/reactivation energy consumption and suppressed noise are therefore highly desirable.

A variety of MTCMOS circuit techniques that employ sleep signal slew rate modulation for reactivation noise suppression are proposed in recently published papers [6–8]. The energy and timing overheads that are associated with these noise-aware MTCMOS circuit techniques are however overlooked in these publications. In this paper, mode transition energy consumption in noise-aware MTCMOS circuits is evaluated in detail. The break-even idle intervals and mode transition timing overheads for achieving net energy savings are identified with different low-noise MTCMOS circuits. With a digital triple-phase sleep signal slew rate modulation technique, the total mode transition energy consumption, break-even idle interval, and overall mode transition timing overhead are reduced by up to 45.31%, 60%, and 65.26%, respectively, as compared to the other noise-aware MTCMOS circuits that are evaluated in this paper.

This paper is organized as follows. The sources of deactivation/reactivation energy consumption in MTCMOS circuits are investigated in Section 2. Different noise-aware MTCMOS circuit techniques are described in Section 3. The mode transition energy consumption, break-even idle intervals, and mode transition timing overheads of noise-aware MTCMOS circuits are evaluated under an equal-noise constraint in Section 4. The paper is summarized in Section 5.
2. Deactivation/reactivation energy consumption in MTCMOS circuits

MTCMOS is effective in suppressing the leakage currents that are produced by an idle circuit. However, additional energy is consumed by an MTCMOS circuit during transitions from ACTIVE mode to SLEEP mode (deactivation process) and from SLEEP mode to ACTIVE mode (reactivation process) [6,7,9–13]. Lower mode transition energy consumption enables an MTCMOS circuit to transition to low-leakage SLEEP mode more frequently, thereby allowing more significant savings in total energy consumption [9–13]. MTCMOS circuit techniques with lower mode transition energy consumption and suppressed SLEEP mode leakage currents are therefore highly desirable. The sources of energy consumption during mode transitions in an MTCMOS circuit are identified in this section.

The voltage waveforms of the sleep signals (Sleep_Global and Sleep_Local) and the virtual ground line of a ground-gated MTCMOS circuit are shown in Fig. 2. The leakage energy savings in idle mode is equal to the total mode transition energy consumption due to the deactivation and reactivation events as given in the following equation:

$$E_{\text{reactivation}} = E_{R_{\text{Sleep\_Generator}}} + E_{R_{\text{Switching}}} + E_{R_{\text{Short\_Circuit}}} + E_{R_{\text{Leakage}}}.$$  

The breakeven point of energy consumption is achieved when the leakage energy savings in idle mode is equal to the total mode transition energy consumption due to the deactivation and reactivation events as given in the following equation:

$$P_{\text{Active\_Leakage}} = \int_{T_2}^{T_4} P_{\text{Leakage}}(t) \, dt = E_{\text{Deactivation}} + E_{\text{Reactivation}}.$$  

Provided that the duration of SLEEP mode is shorter than the breakeven idle interval, the energy consumed during mode transitions is higher than the leakage energy savings that is provided by the SLEEP mode. Gating the low-V_{th} circuit block is ineffective since the overall energy consumption is increased as compared to a conventional low-V_{th} circuit block without any ground gating. The SLEEP mode of an MTCMOS circuit should be exercised only if the duration of idle mode is longer than the mode transition timing overhead.

At the end of SLEEP mode, Sleep_Global transitions high to initiate a reactivation event. Energy (E_{R_{\text{Sleep\_Generator}}}) is consumed (from T_4 to T_5) by the sleep signal generator while turning on the sleep transistor during a reactivation event. The internal nodes of low-V_{th} circuit block are charged to V_{DD} in the SLEEP mode. The leakage energy (E_{\text{Leakage}}) that is consumed by the sleep signal generator and the MTCMOS circuit during the deactivation delay (T_1 to T_2) also contributes to the deactivation energy consumption. The overall deactivation energy consumption overhead (E_{\text{Deactivation}}) is:

$$E_{\text{Deactivation}} = E_{D_{\text{Sleep\_Generator}}} + E_{D_{\text{Internal\_Nodes}}} + E_{D_{V\text{GND}}} + E_{D_{\text{Leakage}}}.$$  

where $T_D$ ($T_2 - T_1$) and $T_R$ ($T_5 - T_4$) are the deactivation delay and reactivation delay, respectively.

The breakeven point of energy consumption is achieved after the virtual ground line is charged to the steady-state voltage $V_{\text{stable}}$ in the SLEEP mode. Under this scenario, the virtual ground line is discharged from $V_{\text{stable}}$ to $\sim 0\, \text{V}$ during a reactivation event. Depending on the actual MTCMOS circuit, however, the breakeven point of energy consumption can be achieved before the virtual ground line is charged to $V_{\text{stable}}$ in the SLEEP mode, as shown in Fig. 3. Under this scenario, the virtual ground line can be discharged either from $V_{\text{stable}}$ or from a voltage level lower than $V_{\text{stable}}$ towards $\sim 0\, \text{V}$ during a reactivation event, as shown in Fig. 3.

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**Fig. 1.** A ground-gated 32-bit Brent-Kung adder. “Sleep_Global” is the input signal coming from the on-chip power management unit. “Sleep_Local” is the sleep signal that is applied to the local ground-gated MTCMOS circuit block. Local sleep signal generator can be a simple buffer or a more sophisticated circuit for reshaping the sleep signal, depending on the MTCMOS implementation.

**Fig. 2.** The voltage waveforms of the sleep signals and virtual ground line in a ground-gated MTCMOS circuit during different modes of operation. $T_D$: deactivation delay, $T_R$: reactivation delay. The breakeven point of energy consumption is achieved after the virtual ground line is charged to the steady-state voltage $V_{\text{stable}}$ in the SLEEP mode.
3. Mode transition in noise-aware MTCMOS circuits

When an idle MTCMOS circuit is awaken, high instantaneous currents flow through the sleep transistors. Significant reactivation noise is produced on the power and ground distribution networks [4–8]. Sleep signal slew rate modulation is effective in suppressing the reactivation noise in an MTCMOS circuit [6–7]. Mode transition energy consumption and timing overhead of recently published noise-aware MTCMOS circuits that employ sleep signal slew rate modulation are briefly discussed in this section.

3.1. Single-phase sleep signal slew rate modulation

The instantaneous currents that cause reactivation noise are primarily composed of switching and short circuit currents that are produced by the low-Vth circuit block in an MTCMOS circuit [4–7]. By sufficiently increasing the rise delay of a single-phase sleep signal, the rate of change of instantaneous currents is reduced [6,7]. The reactivation noise is thereby suppressed in an MTCMOS circuit.

Single-phase sleep signal slew rate modulation however significantly increases the reactivation delay and energy consumption of MTCMOS circuits. Both the breakeven idle interval and overall mode transition timing overhead are prohibitively long when the single-phase sleep signal slew rate modulation technique is applied to an MTCMOS circuit.

3.2. Stepwise $V_{gs}$ MTCMOS

A stepwise $V_{gs}$ MTCMOS circuit technique to suppress mode transition noise is presented in [6]. Stepwise $V_{gs}$ MTCMOS employs a two-step wake up scheme as shown in Fig. 4. The sleep signal transitions from 0 V to an intermediate voltage level $V_X$ ($0 \text{ V} < V_X < V_{DD}$) during the first step of a reactivation event. The sleep signal is maintained at $V_X$ until the virtual ground line is discharged to a sufficiently low voltage level. The sleep signal is subsequently raised from $V_X$ to $V_{DD}$ during the second step of reactivation. The reactivation noise is suppressed due to the weaker conductivity of the sleep transistor and the lower voltage swing on the virtual ground line during the first and the second, respectively, wake up steps [8].

A sleep signal modulator for stepwise $V_{gs}$ MTCMOS circuit is proposed in [8]. The output signal of the stepwise $V_{gs}$ sleep signal modulator, Sleep_Local (that is connected to the gate terminal of the sleep transistor as shown in Fig. 1), is discharged from $V_{DD}$ to an intermediate voltage level (between $V_{DD}$ and 0 V) before being fully discharged to 0 V during a deactivation event, as shown in Fig. 4. The stepwise $V_{gs}$ MTCMOS circuit therefore suffers from a long deactivation delay. Significant weak inversion currents are produced by the low-$V_{th}$ circuit block during the long deactivation process of a stepwise $V_{gs}$ MTCMOS circuit. Furthermore, significant short circuit currents are produced by the stepwise $V_{gs}$ sleep signal generator during mode transitions [7]. The stepwise $V_{gs}$ MTCMOS circuit therefore suffers from high energy consumption during mode transitions.

3.3. Triple-phase sleep signal slew rate modulation

A triple-phase sleep signal slew rate modulation (TPS) technique is presented in [6] to suppress the reactivation noise while accelerating the reactivation process in MTCMOS circuits. The concept of triple-phase sleep signal slew rate modulation is shown in Fig. 5. The sleep signal rises fast from 0 V to the threshold voltage of sleep transistor to reduce the reactivation delay without producing significant noise during Phase_1 [6,7]. The sleep signal is subsequently decelerated to suppress the noise waveform in Phase_2 where the peak reactivation noise is produced. After the virtual ground line voltage is reduced to a very low level close to 0 V, the rise of sleep signal is accelerated again to shorten the remaining duration of reactivation process in Phase_3.

A fully digital triple-phase sleep signal slew rate modulator is proposed in [6] to produce the triple-phase sleep signal that is shown in Fig. 5. With the triple-phase sleep signal modulator [6,7], the rising speed of sleep signal is adjusted by monitoring the
voltage level of Sleep_Local and virtual ground line. The transitions between the three phases of reactivation occur automatically. This digital sleep signal modulator is effective for reducing the reactivation delay and energy consumption as compared to the single-phase sleep signal slew rate modulator [6,7]. Furthermore, the deactivation delay and energy consumption with the digital triple-phase sleep signal modulator are significantly suppressed as compared to the stepwise \( V_{gs} \) sleep signal modulator [6,7]. Both the breakeven idle interval and the overall mode transition timing overhead of an MTCMOS circuit are thereby shortened with the digital triple-phase sleep signal modulator as compared to the single-phase and stepwise \( V_{gs} \) sleep signal modulators.

4. Evaluation of low-noise MTCMOS circuits

A ground-gated 32-bit Brent-Kung adder is designed with the UMC 80 nm multi threshold voltage CMOS technology (high-\( V_{th,NMOS} = +370 \) mV, low-\( V_{th,NMOS} = +155 \) mV, high-\( V_{th,PMOS} = -310 \) mV, low-\( V_{th,PMOS} = -105 \) mV, and \( V_{DD} = 1 \) V) [17] to evaluate the mode transition phenomenon with different sleep signal slew rate modulation techniques in this section. The sleep transistor is sized 5 \( \mu \)m to achieve similar (within 5%) delay along the critical signal propagation path (in ACTIVE mode) of MTCMOS circuit as compared to the standard purely low-\( V_{th} \) circuit. The mode transition noise is characterized with the parasitic impedance package are 217 m\( \Omega \), 8.18 nH, and 5.32 pF, respectively [4-8]. The parasitic resistance, inductance, and capacitance of the 40-pin Dual In-line Package (DIP-40) [4-8]. The parasitic resistance, inductance, and capacitance of the 40-pin Dual In-line Package are 217 m\( \Omega \), 8.18 nH, and 5.32 pF, respectively [4-8]. Postlayout HSPICE simulation is performed with different MTCMOS circuits.

The on-chip hottest temperature is assumed to be 90 °C (a typical number in modern multi-core high performance microprocessors [14-15]) for both short idle periods and active mode of operation. Three different sleep signal modulators are designed to produce the real sleep signals for the ground-gated MTCMOS circuit under an equal-noise constraint at 90 °C [7]: single-phase sleep signal modulator (composed of two-stage inverters), stepwise \( V_{gs} \) sleep signal modulator, and the fully digital triple-phase sleep signal modulator (TPS-Digital). The sleep signal waveforms are tuned to suppress the peak ground bouncing noise to a negligible level that is less than 2 mV with different MTCMOS circuit techniques at 90 °C [7]. Low on-die temperatures down to the room temperature (25 °C) assuming active cooling during long idle periods are also considered in this study. The three sleep signal slew rate modulated MTCMOS circuits are characterized at both 25 °C and 90 °C in this section.

Various mode transition related design metrics of different sleep signal slew rate modulated MTCMOS circuits are shown in Table 1. The TPS-Digital and single-phase MTCMOS circuits both adapt well to the fluctuations of die temperature and maintain the effectiveness in suppressing the reactivation noise even at 25 °C (the lowest temperature that is considered in this study) as listed in Table 1. The parasitic capacitors attached to the internal nodes of low-\( V_{th} \) circuit block and the virtual ground line are however not discharged to sufficiently low voltage levels at the end of the relaxation period (\( T_r \) as shown in Fig. 4) at low die temperatures with the stepwise \( V_{gs} \) MTCMOS circuit. When the second wake up step is initiated, therefore, significant amount of noise is produced by the stepwise \( V_{gs} \) MTCMOS circuit at 25 °C as listed in Table 1.

The stepwise \( V_{gs} \) and TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuits are effective in reducing the reactivation delay (\( T_d \)) as compared to the single-phase MTCMOS circuit. When the virtual ground line of the ground-gated MTCMOS circuits is discharged from the steady-state SLEEP mode voltage to ~0 V during a reactivation event (the reactivation scenario that is shown in Figs. 2 and 3(a)), the stepwise \( V_{gs} \) and TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuits reduce the maximum reactivation delay (\( T_{R_MAX} \)) by 72.46% (64.68%) and 67.25% (64.54%), respectively, as compared to the single-phase MTCMOS circuit at 90 °C (25 °C).

The stepwise \( V_{gs} \) and TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuits are also effective in suppressing the reactivation energy consumption (\( E_R \)) as shown in Fig. 6. Significant accumulated weak inversion currents are produced by the low-\( V_{th} \) 32-bit adder due to the longer reactivation process in the single-phase MTCMOS circuit at 90 °C, thereby increasing the maximum reactivation energy consumption (\( E_{R_MAX} \)) by 93.14% and 91.46% as compared to the stepwise \( V_{gs} \) and TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuits, respectively, assuming that the virtual ground line of the ground-gated MTCMOS circuits is discharged from the steady-state SLEEP mode voltage to ~0 V during a reactivation event (the reactivation scenario that is shown in Figs. 2 and 3(a)). The TPS-Digital and stepwise \( V_{gs} \) MTCMOS circuits reduce the maximum reactivation energy consumption by 15.7% and 14.9%, respectively, as compared to the single-phase MTCMOS circuit at 25 °C.

The stepwise \( V_{gs} \), MTCMOS circuit suffers from a long deactivation delay as discussed in Section 3.2. The deactivation delay (\( T_d \), the time interval from Sleep_Global falls to 10 mV until Sleep_Local falls to 10 mV) is reduced by up to 89.91% and 87.27% with the single-phase and TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuits, respectively, as compared to the stepwise \( V_{gs} \) MTCMOS circuit. Due to the long deactivation delay, the stepwise \( V_{gs} \) MTCMOS circuit also increases the deactivation energy consumption (\( E_D \), the total energy consumed by a sleep signal generator and MTCMOS circuit together during the deactivation delay) by up to 15.59x and 7.91x as compared to the single-phase and TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuits, respectively, as shown in Fig. 6.

With suppressed deactivation and reactivation energy consumption, the TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuit achieves the lowest overall mode transition energy consumption (reactivation energy

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**Table 1** Mode transition related design metrics of sleep signal slew rate modulation techniques.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temperature</th>
<th>90 °C</th>
<th>25 °C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Circuit Technique</strong></td>
<td>Single-Phase</td>
<td>Stepwise ( V_{gs} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peak Ground Noise (mV)</td>
<td>2.090</td>
<td>2.337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( T_R_{MAX} ) (ns)</td>
<td>44.12</td>
<td>12.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( T_R_{BE} ) (ns)</td>
<td>42.20</td>
<td>12.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( T_E ) (ns)</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( E_R ) (pJ)</td>
<td>1.972</td>
<td>1021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( E_{R_MAX} ) (pJ)</td>
<td>1.628</td>
<td>0.720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( E_D ) (pJ)</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steady-State SLEEP Power (nW)</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakeven Idle Interval (number of clock cycles)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The reactivation, deactivation, and overall mode transition energy consumption with various sleep signal slew rate modulated MTCMOS circuits. (a) $T = 90 \, ^\circ C$, (b) $T = 25 \, ^\circ C$.

The duration of idle mode of an MTCMOS circuit has to be longer than the overall mode transition timing overhead ($T_{\text{Overhead}}$: sum of deactivation delay, reactivation delay, and break-even idle interval) for providing net energy savings in the SLEEP mode, thereby justifying the transition to low-leakage SLEEP mode. The break-even idle interval and overall mode transition timing overhead associated with different MTCMOS circuits are evaluated in this paper. The single-phase MTCMOS circuit reduces the steady-state SLEEP mode leakage power consumption by up to 14.77% and 10.09% as compared to the stepwise $V_{gs}$ MTCMOS circuits, respectively, at 90 $^\circ C$ (25 $^\circ C$). TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuit thereby provides the highest energy efficiency during mode transitions in an MTCMOS circuit.

The single-phase MTCMOS circuit consumes the lowest steady-state SLEEP mode leakage power due to the simplest and smallest sleep signal modulator among the MTCMOS circuits that are evaluated in this paper. The single-phase MTCMOS circuit reduces the steady-state SLEEP mode leakage power consumption by up to 14.77% and 10.09% as compared to the stepwise $V_{gs}$ and TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuits, respectively, as listed in Table I.

The effectiveness of ground gating for leakage power savings is degraded at lower temperature [4,5]. The break-even idle intervals with all three MTCMOS circuits are therefore elongated at 25 $^\circ C$, as shown in Fig. 7(a). Alternatively, only 20 idle clock cycles are required to achieve net savings in energy consumption with the TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuit at 90 $^\circ C$.

The TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuit achieves the shortest break-even idle interval due to the lowest mode transition energy consumption among the MTCMOS circuits that are evaluated in this paper, as shown in Fig. 8. Alternatively, the stepwise $V_{gs}$ and single-phase MTCMOS circuits require the longest break-even idle interval at 25 $^\circ C$ and 90 $^\circ C$, respectively. The TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuit shortens the break-even idle interval by 60% (47.37%) and 47.37% (35.48%) as compared to the single-phase and stepwise $V_{gs}$ MTCMOS circuits, respectively, at 90 $^\circ C$ (25 $^\circ C$).

The TPS-Digital sleep signal modulator monitors the virtual ground line voltage during a reactivation event, thereby...
The TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuit reduces the overall mode transition timing overhead by 65.26% (50.5%) and 47.62% (48.98%) as compared with the single-phase and stepwise $V_{gs}$ MTCMOS circuits, respectively, at 90 °C (25 °C) as shown in Fig. 9. TPS-Digital MTCMOS circuit allows more frequent transitions to the low-leakage SLEEP mode due to the reduced overall mode transition timing and energy overheads. Digital triple-phase sleep signal slew rate modulation thereby provides more significant savings in overall energy consumption as compared to the other MTCMOS circuits that are evaluated in this paper.

5. Conclusions

The sources of mode transition energy consumption with noise-aware MTCMOS circuits are identified in this paper. The deactivation/reactivation energy consumptions of various recently published low-noise MTCMOS circuit techniques are evaluated. The breakeven idle intervals and mode transition timing overheads with different MTCMOS circuits are investigated. A digital triple-phase sleep signal slew rate modulated MTCMOS circuit suppresses the overall mode transition energy consumption by up to 45.31% as compared to the other noise-aware MTCMOS circuits that are evaluated in this paper in a UMC 80 nm CMOS technology. Furthermore, the digital triple-phase MTCMOS circuit reduces the breakeven idle interval and the overall mode transition timing overhead by up to 60% and 65.26%, respectively, as compared with the other low-noise MTCMOS circuits that are evaluated in this paper. Digital triple-phase sleep signal slew rate modulation is therefore recommended as the most energy efficient technique for achieving fast mode transitions with negligible reactivation noise in MTCMOS circuits.

References


