A 1 V folded common-gate CMOS LNA for full UWB band

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Abstract: This paper presents a low voltage 2.8–11.2 GHz CMOS broadband low noise amplifier (LNA) using folded common-gate (CG) topology. The broadband input matching is achieved by adopting CG topology. Bandwidth extension is proposed by inserting an inductor to create a broadband band-pass characteristic with a choke inductor. A folded topology is employed to reduce the supply voltage and thus power consumption. A source follower jointly acts as the buffer stage for broadband output impedance matching and feed-forward path for gain enhancement. Maximum power gain is 11.2 dB and the NF ranges from 2.58 to 4 dB over the full band. The LNA achieves an average IIP3 of −6.5 dBm while consumes only 4.6 mW. The proposed broadband LNA is designed in 0.18-\(\mu\)m CMOS process from 1 V supply.

Keywords: UWB LNA, folded topology, low power, CMOS

Classification: Integrated circuits

References

1 Introduction

Ultra-wideband technology using the unlicensed frequency band from 3.1 to 10.6 GHz has become much interested in broadband wireless communication recently [1, 2]. UWB technology can be found in many applications nowadays such as sensor networks, vehicular and ground penetrating radars, radio-frequency identification (RFID) and short range wireless communication systems like wireless personal area network (WPAN), wireless body area network (WBAN) [3].

Full UWB-band LNAs designed using several topologies have recently been published, such as distributed amplifiers [4], feedback amplifiers [5, 6], common gate [7, 2, 8], or LC ladder filters LNA [1]. With technology scaling, short channel devices suffer from poor linearity as the low supply voltage is mandated and due to high field mobility effect. New architecture and solution for low supply voltage is preferred. Also, the signal to noise ratio (SNR) is more stringent as it reduced with low supply voltage. It poses more challenge on NF performance of the preceding stage like LNA. Folded topology is among few candidates for low supply voltage design.

In LNA design, at frequencies well below the $f_T$ of transistors, cascode or CS topologies provide a low noise figure, good input matching, and a high reverse isolation. At higher frequencies, on the other hand, the pole at the cascode node (typically on the order of $f_T/2$) shunts a considerable portion of the RF current to ground, thereby lowering the gain and raising the noise contributed by the cascode device. With technology scaling, the CG topology is starting to be recognized as an alternative to the common-source or cascode for the LNA, especially at frequencies near 10 GHz or higher [9]. Moreover, CG shows a constant NF with respect to $\omega_0/\omega_T$ which is not feasible with cascode or CS topology. Also, it provides better isolation as the missing of $C_{gd}$ path from input to output like in CS LNA.

In this paper, we propose a low voltage broadband LNA operating in the full UWB band from 3.1 to 10.6 GHz. The folded common-gate LNA is adopted for the first time with the proposed bandwidth extension technique and forward path for gain enhancement.

2 Proposed folded broadband LNA

2.1 Circuit topology

To take advantage of CG topology and folded structure as abovementioned, the proposed folded CG broadband LNA is presented in Fig. 1. The LNA
consists of NMOS M1 at input common-gate stage and PMOS M2 at the folded branch. A RF chock inductor \( L_c \) is inserted to steer the RF signal current toward the output branch. In conventional folded topology with RF choke inductor, \( L_c \) only ensures to deliver the RF signal current to the output just within the narrow bandwidth of operation frequency. It is because the high impedance seen from choke LC tank is achieved around the resonant frequency of \( L_c \) and parasitic capacitances at the source of M1 and drain of M2.

Not to spoil the wideband input wideband characteristic of CG M1, the proposed series inductor \( L_e \) is inserted at node X to broaden the bandwidth (BW) at this bottle neck of the folded topology.

In order to control the gain flatness, a small capacitance \( C_e \) is also inserted at node X. \( C_e \) will give a room for tuning the Q-factor as well as BW of gain transfer function, which will be analyzed in the section 3.

The source follower buffer is used to ensure the wideband matching and measurement purpose at the output. The gain is enhanced by feed-forwarding the input to the buffer, through \( C_F \), a DC blocking capacitor.

### 2.2 Gain enhancement

By exploiting the current source of the buffer, the gain is enhanced by feed-forward connecting the input to the buffer through AC coupling capacitor \( C_F \). At the same time, the input signal flows to the output through both folded branch and \( C_F \) with the same sign. Hence, a summation occurs to reinforce the signal level and thus the gain at the output. Fig. 3 (a) shows the S21 performance with and without extra forward path. More than 2 dB of gain improvement is achieved.

![Fig. 1. Schematic of the proposed broadband folded CG LNA.](image)
3 Bandwidth extension technique

Fig. 2 (a) describes the small signal model of the folded CG LNA proposed in Fig. 1. \( C_X \) is the total capacitance at node X, \( C_X = C_{GD1} + C_e \). Without \( L_e \), near resonant choke frequencies of \( L_c/(C_X + C_{gs2}) \), most of the current flows to node Y as the choke impedance is high. However, the effect works only within a narrow frequency range around the peaking. To increase the effect over wide frequency range, inductor \( L_e \) is inserted in series between nodes X and Y. The LC network between X and Y can be now created and decomposed into a LC \( \pi \)-network around \( L_e \) which acts like a LPF with a high cut-off frequency (\( \omega_2 \)) and a resonant choke around \( L_c \) at lower peaking frequency (\( \omega_1 \)) as a narrow BPF. The resultant transfer function is a broadband BPF characteristic as illustrated in Fig. 2 (b).

![Small signal model of the folded CG LNA and the transfer function of LC network between node X and Y.](image)

Qualitatively, at low frequency near \( \omega_1 \) (around 3 GHz), \( Z_{Lc} \) presents negligibly small impedance, thus the LC network effectively acts like only a tank of \( L_c/(C_X + C_{gs2}) \). Since the tank presents high impedance around the resonant frequency \( \omega_1 \approx 1/\sqrt{L_c(C_X + C_{gs2})} \), a large portion of input current \( I_X \) is delivered to node Y as \( I_Y \). As the frequency goes up to \( \omega_2 \) (near 10 GHz), the large choke inductor \( L_c \) can be considered open. Effectively, the LC network acts like a LPF LC \( \pi \)-network of \( C_X - L_e - C_{gs2} \). The cut-off frequency is put further away at \( \omega_2 \approx 1/\sqrt{L_e(C_X + C_{gs2})} \). Input current signal below this cut-off frequency will be delivered to the output at node Y. The ratio of \( \omega_2/\omega_1 \) can be approximately estimated as

\[
\omega_2/\omega_1 \approx \sqrt{L_c/L_e} \tag{1}
\]

Quantitatively, the transfer function from node X to Y \( (H(s)=I_Y/I_X) \) is derived as follows

\[
H(s)=\frac{sL_cg_m2}{s^4L_cC_XL_eC_{gs2}+s^3L_cC_XL_eC_{g_m2}+s^2(L_cC_X+L_cC_{gs2}+L_eC_X)+sL_cg_m2+1}
\]

\[
H(s) = \frac{a_1s}{s^2 + \frac{\omega_1^2}{Q_1} + \omega_1^2} \times \frac{a_2}{s^2 + \frac{\omega_2^2}{Q_2} + \omega_2^2} \tag{2}
\]

\[
H(s) = \frac{a_1s}{s^2 + \frac{\omega_1^2}{Q_1} + \omega_1^2} \times \frac{a_2}{s^2 + \frac{\omega_2^2}{Q_2} + \omega_2^2} \tag{3}
\]
where \( s = j\omega \), \( Q_1 \) and \( Q_2 \) are the \( Q \)-factor of BPF and LPF, respectively. From (2), \( H(s) \) can be represented by the standard transfer function of high order BPF and LPF as shown in (3). From (2) and (3), the relation of LPF’s cut-off frequency and HPF’s peaking frequency are extracted from (2) as

\[
\omega_1 \times \omega_2 = \frac{1}{\sqrt{L_e C_X L_c c_{g2}}}
\]

From (3) as well as from the qualitative analysis above (1), the frequency characteristic of the LNA can be controlled with and by selecting proper values of \( L_e, L_c \) and \( C_X \). A small \( C_e \) of 40 fF is added to \( C_X \) to control the BW as well the Q-factors as in (2) for the optimal gain flatness. In this design, \( L_e \) and \( L_c \) are selected as 3.6 nH and 11 nH, respectively.

4 Simulation results and discussion

Fig. 3 (b) presents the S21 performance of the designed LNA without \( L_e \) and with various values of \( L_e \) to examine its effect on the bandwidth of the LNA. The bandwidth is enhanced significantly, more than 2.2 times. S21 achieves its best performance with \( L_e \) value of 3.6 nH.

The LNA is simulated and designed in 0.18-\( \mu \)m CMOS process from 1 V supply. Fig. 3 (c) shows the gain and matching performance over −1 dB bandwidth from 2.8 to 11.2 GHz band. The average power gain is around 10.5 dB and almost constant within the full bandwidth. Good input/output matching with \( S_{11}/S_{22} \) of below −10/−13 dB is observed in the whole band, respectively.

The simulated NF of the proposed LNA is also presented in Fig. 3 (d), which is improving with frequency. It is because the effect of \( L_n \) on input matching and NF increases at high frequencies. This is also the advantage of CG topology over other architectures like CS or cascode amplifiers, whose NF is increasing with frequency. In this LNA design, the NF values range from 2.58 to 4 dB, which is good at GHz range of operation frequency.

Two-tone test with 1 MHz spacing is applied at various frequencies to examine the IIP3 linearity performance of the proposed LNA. In the frequency range of 3–10 GHz, the IIP3 varies from −5 to −8.1 dBm. The linearity is acceptable given moderate power consumption.

Table I summarizes the designed LNA performances and compare with other state-of-the-art published works in wideband LNA designs, shown in Fig. 3 (e). The proposed LNA consumes only 4.6 mW from 1 V supply with good performance for broadband applications. This is the first reported common gate folded LNA intended for 3.1–10.6 GHz full UWB band and broadband applications using standard 0.18-\( \mu \)m CMOS technology.

5 Conclusion

A low power broadband LNA working in the UWB full band of 3.1–10.6 GHz was proposed and designed in 0.18-\( \mu \)m CMOS technology. Wideband performance is achieved by adopting bandwidth extension technique for folded common-gate (CG) topology using an extra inductor. The large headroom
of single stack LNA ensure good linearity performance at low supply voltage for low power consumption. The proposed LNA has an average gain of 10.5 dB and NF of around 3 dB over the full UWB band. The folded CG LNA consumes only 4.6 mW from 1 V of supply voltage. With technology scale down, the proposed LNA will achieve even better performance. It is suitable for cost-effective low-power trends of CMOS hardware integration in the next generation wireless and UWB radios.

![Simulated S21 with and without extra forward path for gain enhancement](image1)

![S21 without Le and the effect of Le on BW extension at 2.6 nH, 3.6 nH, and 4.6 nH](image2)

![Simulated S11 and S22 of the proposed LNA](image3)

![S21 and NF](image4)

![Performance comparison table of the proposed LNA with previously published works](image5)

**Fig. 3.** Simulated S21 with and without extra forward path for gain enhancement (a), S21 without Le and the effect of Le on BW extension at 2.6 nH, 3.6 nH, and 4.6 nH (b), simulated S11 and S22 of the proposed LNA (c), S21 and NF (d), and performance comparison table of the proposed LNA with previously published works (e).
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