

Athermal Holographic Filters

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Abstract—This letter presents the theory and experimental results of an athermal holographic filter design employing a thermally actuated microelectromechanical system mirror to compensate for the drift of Bragg wavelength due to changes of temperature. The center wavelength of our holographic filter is shown to remain constant from 21 °C to 60 °C.

Index Terms—Gratings, holographic filters, temperature compensations, wavelength-division multiplexing (WDM).

I. INTRODUCTION

HOLOGRAPHIC filters [1] have been used for wavelength-division-multiplexing (WDM) filtering applications [2], [3]. Temperature dependence is a critical concern for telecommunications. In thin film filter technology, proper selection of materials can combat the thermal drift of Bragg wavelengths [4]. Athermal filter designs were also reported for arrayed-waveguide gratings [5] and fiber Bragg gratings [6]. However, such flexibility is not available in bulk holographic filters. In this letter, a feasible system solution is proposed and experimentally shown to compensate for the effects of temperature change.

II. THEORY

A grating holographically imprinted inside a recording material can be operated as a WDM filter in the reflection geometry, as shown in Fig. 1.

The wavelength satisfying the grating equation (1) will be strongly reflected, whereas the other wavelengths pass through the filter unaffected

$$\lambda_B = 2n(T_0)\Lambda(T_0) \cos \theta_B \quad (1)$$

where $n(T_0)$ is the refractive index of the material at λ_B at temperature T_0 and $\Lambda(T_0)$ is the period of the index grating at T_0 . By inspecting (1), we notice that we can Bragg match the grating to a shorter wavelength if we tilt the incident beam away from the normal.

Temperature changes affect holographic filters mainly through two mechanisms. (Other possible effects will be neglected here, e.g., the thermal dependence of the piezoelectric tensor will manifest itself when stress is being applied.)

- 1) Thermal expansion or contraction of the bulk material (in our experiments, LiNbO₃: Fe).

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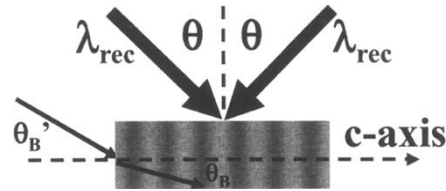


Fig. 1. Recording a holographic grating inside a LiNbO₃ crystal at $\lambda_{\text{rec}} = 488$ nm in the transmission geometry and then operating it as a WDM filter in the reflection geometry.

- 2) Thermal dependence of the dielectric constant of the bulk material.

Assume the Bragg wavelength of the filter is λ_B corresponding to an incident angle θ_B (θ_B is the angle measured inside the crystal, whereas θ_B' is measured outside the crystal) at temperature T_0 . When the temperature changes to $T_0 + \Delta T$, the Bragg wavelength of the filter will have a corresponding shift and move to $\lambda_B + \Delta\lambda$. If we adjust the incident angle by $\Delta\theta$ such that the Bragg wavelength shifts back to λ_B , we will have

$$\lambda_B = 2n(T_0 + \Delta T)\Lambda(T_0 + \Delta T) \cos(\theta_B + \Delta\theta) \quad (2)$$

If the thermal expansion coefficient (TEC) and the refractive index dependence on temperature are both linear within the temperature range of interest, we have $n(T_0 + \Delta T) \cong n(T_0)(1 + a\Delta T)$ and $\Lambda(T_0 + \Delta T) \cong \Lambda(T_0)(1 + b\Delta T)$. From (1) and (2), we can derive a relation between $\Delta\theta$ and ΔT for a constant Bragg wavelength in spite of temperature changes

$$\frac{\cos(\theta_B + \Delta\theta)}{\cos \theta_B} = \frac{1}{(1 + a\Delta T)(1 + b\Delta T)}. \quad (3)$$

Since both thermal coefficients a and b are positive [7], [8], we conclude that as the temperature rises, the Bragg wavelength of a given filter will shift upward, i.e., to a longer wavelength. To compensate for such a shift, we tilt the beam away from the normal. On the other hand, to undo the effect caused by a temperature drop, we adjust the beam toward the normal.

Based on (3), we propose an athermal design to maintain the Bragg wavelengths of WDM filters invariant with respect to temperature fluctuations. The principle of operation is illustrated in Fig. 2. We use a bimetallic composite beam to control the direction of the incident light beam. The device makes use of the TEC discrepancy between two properly chosen materials (in our case, aluminum and silicon) and deflects as the temperature changes [9]. We operate the filter away from normal incidence because compensation for negative temperature drifts cannot be carried out near normal incidence and to avoid nonlinearities ($\Delta\theta$ is a highly nonlinear function of ΔT near normal incidence).

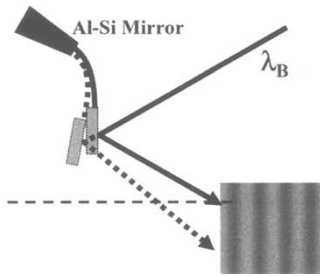


Fig. 2. Athermal design of holographic filter utilizing an Al-Si composite beam microactuator whose tip deflects as the temperature changes.

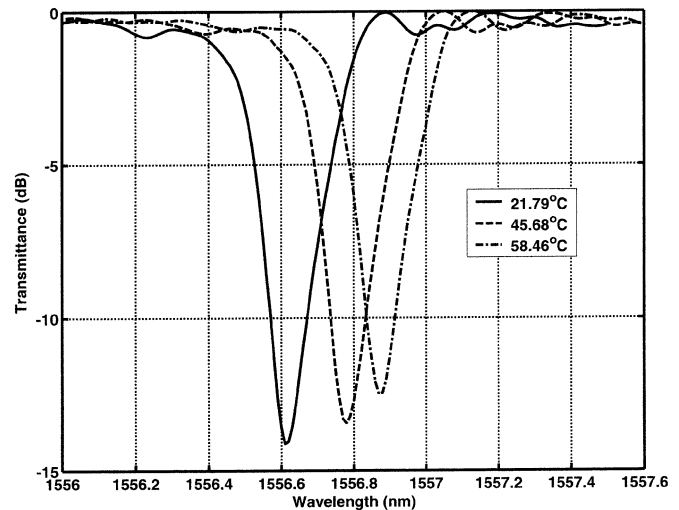
III. EXPERIMENT AND RESULTS

In our experiments, holographic filters are recorded in an iron-doped lithium niobate (LiNbO_3 : Fe, 0.05 wt % Fe_2O_3) crystal by interfering two coherent continuous-wave laser beams inside the crystal, as shown in Fig. 1. The crystal sample dimensions are $2.0 \times 1.0 \times 0.3$ cm with its c -axis running parallel to the longest edge and the concentration of Fe^{2+} is $1.283 \times 10^{24} \text{ m}^{-3}$. A stabilization system has been incorporated into the recording setup in order to prevent the interference pattern from drifting. By properly choosing the angle 2θ between the recording beams, we are able to control the Bragg wavelength of the grating, operated in the reflection geometry. The transmittance of a typical filter at an incident angle $\theta'_B = 5^\circ$ is shown in Fig. 3(a) for three different temperatures. The Bragg wavelength λ_B of the recorded filter at 21.79°C is measured to be 1556.61 nm. The filter efficiency is dropping due to hologram decay at elevated temperatures since the hologram was not thermally fixed [10].

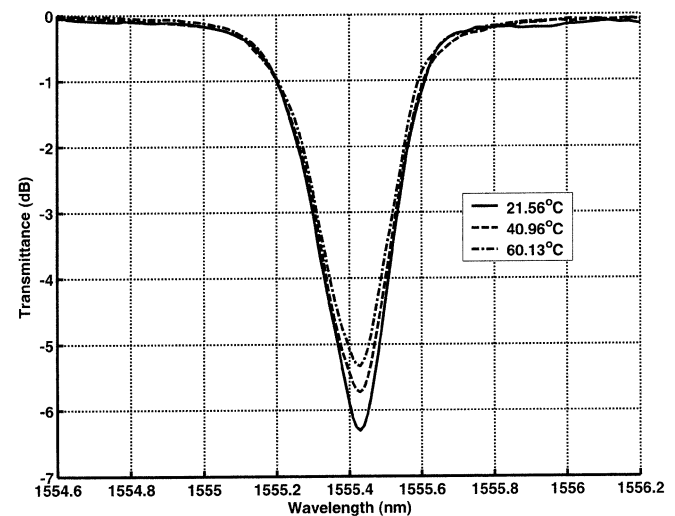
To specify the microelectromechanical systems (MEMS) mirror parameters, we first figure out the Bragg wavelengths for a series of incident angles at four different temperatures (21.79°C , 33.36°C , 45.68°C , 58.46°C). Temperature monitoring is made possible by reading the resistance off a thermistor in close contact with the LiNbO_3 crystal when the whole system is in thermal equilibrium. A thermoelectric (TE) cooler is used to control the temperature of the system. The Bragg wavelength corresponding to the incident angle $\theta'_B = 5^\circ$ ($\theta_B \cong 2.25^\circ$) at the lowest temperature is chosen as the target wavelength that will be maintained constant through angular compensation. By doing a fit of the data to (3), we end up with the optimal compensation angles as a function of temperature change. This is plotted as a solid line in Fig. 4.

Our data suggest that for operation around an incident angle $\theta'_B = 5^\circ$, an angular correction of 1.18° will be required for a temperature change of 100°C . The aluminum-silicon composite beam was designed to deflect about 0.59° for a temperature change of 100°C .

A photograph of the MEMS mirror is shown in Fig. 5. It is composed of two parts: a mirror part (surface dimensions 1.0×3.0 mm, 50 nm of gold deposited on 0.45-mm silicon gives a reflectance of 85% at 1550 nm) and a beam (surface dimensions 2.0×0.5 mm, 500-nm aluminum deposited on 0.025-mm silicon), which deflects as the temperature varies. The measured deflection angle of the mirror as a function of temperature is also plotted in Fig. 4.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 3. (a) Filter response measured in the through channel at $\theta'_B = 5^\circ$ for three different temperatures. (b) Filter response measured in the through channel at $\theta'_B = 5^\circ$ for three different temperatures with the compensating MEMS mirror.

We mount the holographic filter and the MEMS mirror on two separate TE coolers as depicted in Fig. 5. Two identical thermistors are used to monitor the temperatures of the filter and the mirror. The output from a tunable laser is reflected off the mirror toward the filter at an (outside) incident angle of 5° . At this point both the filter and the mirror are at room temperature. The filter response is measured and the Bragg wavelength is determined. Then the TE coolers are turned on and raise the temperatures of both. The readings of the two thermistors are kept the same throughout the measurements of filter response. The filter shapes at $\theta'_B = 5^\circ$ for three different temperatures are plotted in Fig. 3(b). Compared with Fig. 3(a), the drift of the Bragg wavelength is indeed compensated for by the deflection of the mirror. The compensation can be done easily in practice because the response time of the MEMS mirror is much shorter than that of the bulkier LiNbO_3 crystal.

In Fig. 6, we plot the Bragg wavelengths measured with the athermal design for three different incident angles. The dashed

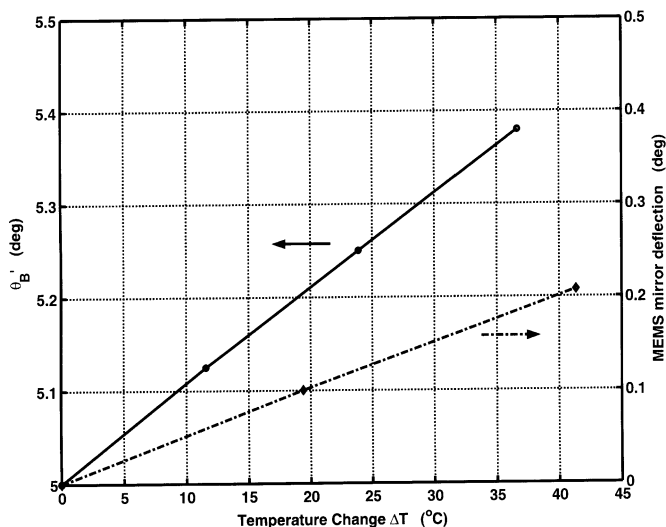


Fig. 4. Solid curve represents the calculated optimal compensation angle θ'_B as a function of temperature change ΔT . The dashed-dotted curve is the measured angular deflection of the MEMS mirror subject to ΔT .

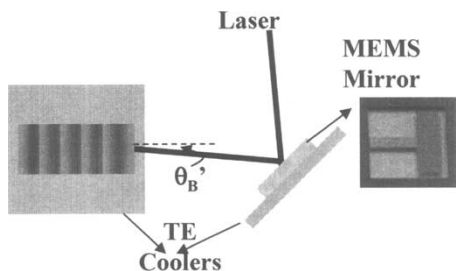


Fig. 5. Experimental setup combining the thermally driven MEMS mirror with the recorded holographic filter to realize the athermal filter design. A picture of the MEMS mirror is also shown.

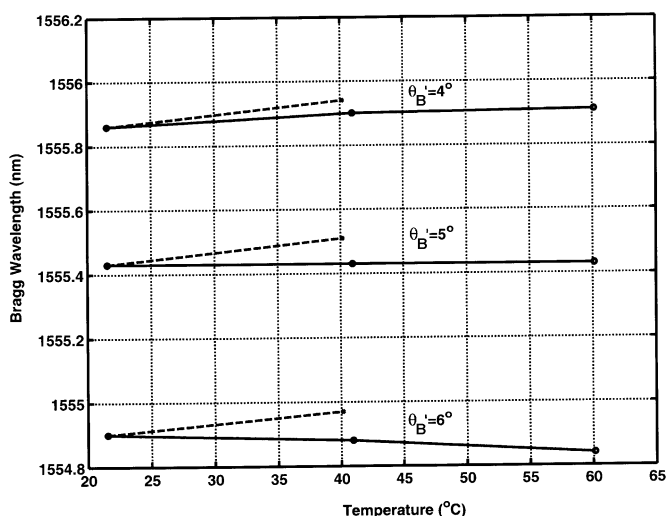


Fig. 6. Bragg wavelengths measured with the athermal design for three different incident angles versus temperature.

lines indicate the drifts of Bragg wavelengths due to the raised temperature in the absence of mirror compensation. We can see that for $\theta'_B = 5^\circ$, the Bragg wavelength remains constant between 21°C and 60°C , which corroborates the validity of our athermal design. Without the athermal mechanism, the Bragg

wavelength would drift about 0.16 nm (20 GHz) from 21°C to 60°C . The Bragg wavelengths for $\theta'_B = 4^\circ$ are seen to increase with the rising temperature despite the counteracting MEMS operation although they do not increase quite as much as when there is no compensation mechanism; on the other hand, the Bragg wavelengths for $\theta'_B = 6^\circ$ are decreasing with the rising temperature because they are overcompensated by the MEMS mirror deflection. The athermal WDM filter design employing the MEMS mirror keeps the Bragg wavelength constant; however, to couple the reflected or transmitted beam back into a fiber, another counteracting MEMS mirror must be used to undo the beam walkoff.

Since many thermally actuated MEMS devices consist of materials that possess different mechanical properties, they can suffer from hysteresis. The Bragg wavelength of the athermal filter system undergoes a 0.09-nm (11.25 GHz) decrease after we cool it back down to room temperature. A possible solution to this problem is to anneal the MEMS device at an elevated temperature (about 300°C) before use. The drift in the Bragg wavelength due to hysteresis was experimentally shown to reduce to 0.01 nm (1.25 GHz) after annealing.

IV. CONCLUSION

We have shown that the temperature dependence of the Bragg wavelength of a holographic filter can be compensated by incorporating a passive thermally actuated MEMS mirror into the system. The packaging should be such that the mirror and the filter thermally track each other. To improve the performance of the athermal filter design, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of the evolution of filter shapes away from normal incidence. Other topics such as beam walkoff, polarization dependent loss, and the elimination of mirror hysteresis are also important considerations in practical applications.

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