INTEGRATION OF SHAPE MEMORY ALLOY FOR MICROACTUATION

ALAA A. H. ABUZAITER

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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ALAA A. H. ABUZAITER

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Electrical Engineering)

Faculty of Electrical Engineering
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

SEPTEMBER 2016

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved family;

my dear father and my merciful mother, those who sacrificed their life for me

To my brothers, sisters and my fiancee Hanan

Whose love, kindness, patience and prayer have brought me this far

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, my unlimited and sincere appreciation goes to the Lord of the seven heavens and earth ALLAH (SWT) for His endless mercies, blessings and guidance through from birth till now and forever. Alhamdullahi Robi Alamin.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude and thanks to Dr. Mohamed Sultan Mohamed Ali, my honourable supervisor, for giving me the opportunity to work in his wonderful research group. His continuous guidance, committed support and invaluable advice throughout my studies have made the completion of this work possible. His enthusiasm and hard work caused me to awake every day with enthusiasm for what I was to do next. I have learned a great deal from him on every aspect of academics including teaching, research, manuscript writing, grant applications and management skills and I hope to learn much more from him.

I sincerely thank all the professors and lecturers who have taught me for their invaluable lessons. In addition, I would also like to thank all of my friends: Omer Faris, Marwan Nafea, Salma, Noor Dzulaikha, Aqilah, Amirah 'Aisha and Krishna Veni: Thank you for sharing with me your useful ideas and information and offering moral support during the course of my studies.

Last but not least, I owe more than I can express to my mother Wedad, for the greatest support and love I have received. Sincere and deep gratitude goes to my father Abed Allah, my brothers (Mohamed and Ahamed), my sisters (Ola and Abeer) and my fiancee Hanan for their support and encouragement throughout the years of my Ph.D. They have been my source of dedication, inspiration and motivation, without them I would have never been able to accomplish this thesis.

ABSTRACT

Shape memory alloy (SMA) actuators in microelectromechanical system (MEMS) have a broad range of applications. The alloy material has unique properties underlying its high working density, simple structures, large displacement and excellent biocompatibility. These features have led to its commercialization in several applications such as micro-robotics and biomedical areas. However, full utilization of SMA is yet to be exploited as it faces various practical issues. In the area of microactuators in particular, fabricated devices suffer from low degrees of freedom (DoF), complex fabrication processes, larger sizes and limited displacement range. This thesis presents novel techniques of developing bulk-micromachined SMA microdevices by applying integration of multiple SMA microactuators, and monolithic methods using standard and unconventional MEMS fabrication processes. The thermomechanical behavior of the developed bimorph SMA microactuator is analyzed by studying the parameters such as thickness of SMA sheet, type and thickness of stress layer and the deposition temperature that affect the displacement. The microactuators are then integrated to form a novel SMA micromanipulator that consists of two links and a gripper at its end to provide three-DoF manipulation of small objects with overall actuation *x*- and *y*- axes displacement of 7.1 mm and 5.2 mm, respectively. To simplify the fabrication and improve the structure robustness, a monolithic approach was utilized in the development of a micro-positioning stage using bulk-micromachined SMA sheet that was fabricated in a single machining step. The design consisted of six spring actuators that provided large stage displacement range of 1.2 mm and 1.6 mm in *x*- and *y*-axes, respectively, and a rotation of 20° around the *z*-axis. To embed a self-sensing functionality in SMA microactuators, a novel wireless displacement sensing method based on integration of an SMA spiral-coil actuator in a resonant circuit is developed. These devices have the potential to promote the application of bulk-micromachined SMA actuator in MEMS area.

ABSTRAK

Penggerak aloi yang memiliki memori bentuk (SMA) telah digunakan secara meluas untuk pelbagai aplikasi di dalam sistem elektromekanikal-mikro (MEMS). Bahan ini telah terbukti mempunyai ciri-ciri asas yang unik seperti kepadatan kerja yang tinggi, struktur yang ringkas, sesaran yang besar dan kesesuaian-bio yang baik. Ciri-ciri ini telah membawa kepada pengkomersialan aloi ini dalam beberapa aplikasi seperti mikro-robotik dan bidang bioperubatan. Walau bagaimanapun, penggunaan bahan ini masih belum dieksploitasi sepenuhnya disebabkan pelbagai isu praktikal. Dalam bidang penggerak-mikro khususnya, peranti yang difabrikasi mempunyai pelbagai masalah seperti darjah kebebasan (DoF) yang rendah, proses fabrikasi yang kompleks, saiz yang besar dan jarak sesaran yang terhad. Tesis ini membentangkan teknik baharu untuk membentuk peranti-mikro daripada SMA dengan menggunakan integrasi beberapa penggerak-mikro SMA dan kaedah monolitik dengan menggunakan proses piawaian MEMS dan fabrikasi MEMS yang tidak konvensional. Ciri-ciri termomekanikal penggerak-mikro dwi-lapisan SMA yang dibangunkan dianalisis dengan mengkaji parameter yang mempengaruhi sesaran seperti ketebalan kepingan SMA, jenis dan ketebalan lapisan ketegangan dan juga suhu pendepositan. Penggerak-mikro kemudiannya diintegrasi untuk membina satu penggerak-mikro SMA baharu yang terdiri daripada dua pautan dan satu penggenggam pada penghujungnya untuk memberikan manipulasi tiga DoF untuk suatu objek kecil dengan jumlah sesaran di paksi x dan y masing-masing sebanyak 7.1 mm dan 5.2 mm. Satu pendekatan monolitik telah digunakan dalam pembangunan penentu kedudukan-mikro menggunakan helaian SMA pukal yang difabrikasi melalui satu langkah pemesinan bagi mempermudahkan proses fabrikasi dan memperbaiki keteguhan struktur. Reka bentuk ini terdiri daripada enam penggerak berbentuk spring yang mengawal pergerakan dalam paksi x dan y sebanyak 1.2 mm dan 1.6 mm, dan juga putaran sebanyak 20° di paksi z. Kaedah pengesanan tanpa-wayar yang baharu berdasarkan integrasi SMA lingkaran gegelung dalam litar salunan telah dibangunkan bagi fungsi pengesanan sesaran dalam mikroakuator SMA. Teknik-teknik yang dibangunkan dijangka menggalakkan penggunaan penggerak SMA pukal yang dimesin dalam bidang MEMS.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Ag - Silver
Al - Aluminium
Au - Gold
BCB - Benzocyclobutene
CABG - Coronary artery bypass graft
CAD - Computer-aided design
Cd - Cadmium
CTE - Coefficient of thermal expansion
Cu - Copper
CVD - Chemical vapor deposition
DC - Direct current
DOF - Degrees of freedom
DSC - Differential scanning calorimetry
Fe - Iron
FEA - Finite element analysis
FESEM - Field emission scanning electron microscope
g - Gram
H_2O - DI water
HF - Hydrofluoric acid
Hf - Hafnium
HNO_3 - Nitric acid
Hz - Hertz
In - Indium
IR - Infrared
K - Kelvin
kg - Kilogram
LC - Inductor-capacitor

m^3	-	Cubic metre
mA	-	Milliampere
MEMS	-	Microelectromechanical systems
MHz	-	Mega hertz
mm	-	Millimetre
mm^2	-	Square millimetre
Mn	-	Manganese
Ni	-	Nickel
NiTi	-	Nickel-titanium
nm	-	Nanometer
NOL	-	Naval ordnance laboratory
OWSME	-	One-way shape memory effect
Pa	-	Pascal
PE	-	Pseudoelasticity
PECVD	-	Pplasma enhanced chemical vapor deposition
PI	-	Polyimide
Poly-Si	-	Polysilicon
Pt	-	Platinum
PVD	-	Physical vapor deposition
PWM	-	Pulse-width modulation
RF	-	Radiofrequency
S	-	Second
SE	-	Superelasticity
Si	-	Silicon
Si_3N_4	-	Silicon nitride
SiO_2	-	Silicon dioxide
SMA	-	Shape memory alloy
SME	-	Shape memory effect
SMM	-	Shape memory material
Sn	-	Tin
Ti	-	titanium
Tl	-	Thallium
TME	-	Temperature memory effect

TWSME	-	Two-way shape memory effect
W	-	Watt
Zn	-	Zinc
Zr	-	Zirconium
°C	-	Degrees celsius
µEDM	-	Micro electric discharge machining
µm	-	Micrometre

LIST OF SYMBOLS

A_f - Finish temperature of austenite phase transformation

A_s - Start temperature of austenite phase transformation

B_{max} - Maximum bending

B_{sma} - Phase transformation bending

c_{SiO_2} - Thermal capacity of SiO_2

c_{sma} - Thermal capacity of SMA

E - Young’s modulus

E_{Cu} - Heat energy loss resulting from the copper wires’ resistance

E_{Lh} - Energy of latent heat difference resulted from phase transformation

E_{con} - Convection energy from the SMA sheet to the surrounding air

E_{in} - Inner energy from electrical current

E_{sio_2} - Energy of the heat change of the SiO_2

E_{sma} - Energy of the heat change of the SMA

h - Sheet height

h_h - Equivalent convective heat transfer coefficient during heating process

h_C - Equivalent convective heat transfer coefficient during cooling process

h_{SiO_2} - Thickness of SiO_2

h_{sma} - SMA thickness

i - Electrical current

l - Sheet length

l_{cu}	-	Length of the Cu wire
M_f	-	Finish temperature of martensite phase transformation
M_s	-	Start temperature of martensite phase transformation
t	-	Time
T_0	-	Initial temperature
T_{0_h}	-	Initial temperature of the sheet during heating process
T_{0_c}	-	Initial temperature of the sheet during cooling process
T_{f_h}	-	Final temperature of the sheet during heating process
T_{f_c}	-	Final temperature of the sheet during cooling process
t_{0_h}	-	Time moment at the beginning of the heating process
t_{0_c}	-	Time moment at the beginning of the cooling process
t_{f_h}	-	Time moment at the finishing of the heating process
t_{f_c}	-	Time moment at the finishing of the cooling process
w	-	Width of the sheet
$Y(\xi)$	-	Young’s modulus
Y_A	-	Young’s modulus of SMA’s modulus at 100% austenite
Y_M	-	Young’s modulus of SMA’s modulus at 100% martensite
ε_{max}	-	Maximum SMA residual strain
ξ_{s_0}	-	Initial stress induced
ξ_0	-	Initial martensite fraction
ξ_0	-	Initial strain
ξ_T	-	Temperature-induced
ξ_s	-	Stress-induced
σ_0	-	Initial stress
ΔT	-	Temperature difference between the initial flat condition and the deformed state
α	-	Coefficient of thermal expansion
θ	-	Theta
$\Omega(\xi)$	-	Transformation tensor
β	-	Coefficient of thermo-elasticity
ξ	-	Martensite volume fraction

σ - Electrical resistivity

ρ_{SiO_2} - Densities of SiO_2

ρ_{cu} - Densities of Cu

ρ_{sma} - Densities of SMA

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Microelectromechanical systems (MEMS) is a technology that has paved the way for achieving a variety of microactuators, which are mainly utilized to manipulate small objects in micro-scale. Their rapid advancements offer many benefits to various applications, especially in biomedical [1, 2] and microrobotics [3] fields. Microactuators can be classified based on their actuation principles to electrostatic, electromagnetic, piezoelectric, thermal and shape memory alloy (SMA) actuators [4]. These actuators have their own properties and advantages that allow them to be used in various applications depending on their requirements.

Electrostatic microactuators have been applied in many applications such as hard disc drives and aeronautical fields [5, 6]. These actuators provide fast response, small energy loss and reversible motion. However, they often suffer from a limited displacement range, short lifetime and high voltage requirements for their operation [1, 3]. Electromagnetic microactuators have been utilized in several devices, such as micropumps and optical switches [7, 8]. Yet, this type of actuator requires complicated control systems, due to its magnetic nature [9]. Piezoelectric microactuators are applied extensively in printers and digital cameras [10], due to their fast response, high accuracy and large stress tolerance [11]. Despite their advantages, piezoelectric actuators require high actuation voltages and involve a complicated fabrication process, which make them uncomplimentary [12]. Thermal microactuators have limited applications compared to other types of actuators, due to their slow response, high power consumption and the high temperature requirement for actuation [13]. One of the most popular types of thermal microactuators is the bimorph type, which actuates using the difference in the coefficient of thermal expansion (CTE) of two different materials. SMA microactuators is a type of thermal actuators that overcome the major drawbacks of conventional thermal microactuators.

SMA microactuators offer various advantages over other actuation techniques, such as high work density, large actuation force, simple mechanical structures, resistance to corrosion, low cost, biocompatibility and large actuation range [14]. Although this material was discovered in the mid-twentieth century, it has received a great deal of attention from researchers and, thus, it has been deployed in many application in various fields, such as microrobotics [3], micropumps [15], medical tools and biomedical applications [16]. Nonetheless, there is still room for improvement in terms of the design and fabrication of SMA microactuators in order to grasp better performance, simpler fabrication and a more rigid structure.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the significant work by many researchers on the bulk-micromachined SMA microactuators, the exploitation of this material has not been pushed to its boundaries in the area of microrobotics. There has not been a satisfactory advancement in SMA actuation mechanisms and integration techniques in order to improve the performance of SMA microactuators. These issues stand in the way of the implementation of SMA in many microactuators. Nonetheless, many SMA-based devices have been presented in recent years. However, there are several limiting issues that need to be highlighted and resolved to enhance the performance and allow further miniaturization of the overall size of these devices. One of these concerns is device fabrication process itself, which usually comprises several long steps that result in complex design and fabrication, high cost and low-resulted integrity [17-20]. Moreover, in order to assemble SMA-based devices, it often involves the assembly of multiple parts along with the SMA actuator such as heating circuit, couplings, bias spring, feedback sensor and joints [21-23]. This practice brought about bulky design, limited actuation, low degree of freedom, less actuation force and prosaic robustness. These issues can be addressed by adopting the integration of multiple SMA microactuators and a monolithic approach to form the device structure.

Another issue associated with microactuators is in cases where their movement tracking is required. The conventional approaches that have tackled this matter adopted the integration of sensors with actuators, which resulted in bulkier and costlier devices whose fabrication is rather complex. Therefore, this has limited the utilization of such actuators in implantable devices, where compactness is necessary to minimize their medical invasiveness. Consequently, more advanced actuators have incorporated a self-sensing mechanism that provides real-time movement feedback without the need for additional sensors or readout circuitry. However, these attempts were limited to piezoelectric actuators [24, 25] that involve complex implementation of the sensing process. A potential solution that allows both compactness and a passive device can be implemented by integration of an SMA actuator with a self-sensing element.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this research are to develop bulk-micromachined SMA micromanipulators and an integrated wireless displacement sensing element. The specific objectives are:

1. To investigate the bulk-micromachined SMA bimorph actuation methods and the associated parameters that govern the actuation performance such as types and thickness of the stress layer as well as the depositing temperature.

2. To develop a multi-link integrated bulk-micromachined SMA micromanipulator with three degrees of freedom (DoF) and a gripper mechanism.

3. To design and fabricate a novel monolithic SMA micro-positioning stage that offers a three DoF.

4. To develop an SMA wireless displacement sensing method based on integration of an SMA spiral-coil actuator in a resonant circuit.

5. To characterize the performance of the developed actuators, including their temporal and thermal responses.

1.4 Scope of Research

The scope of this research focuses on the development of SMA devices using the integration of multiple SMA microactuators and monolithic approaches. Furthermore, this research studies SMA bimorph actuation methods, which uses internal Joule heating to actuate the SMA microactuators. In addition, using finite element analysis (FEA), the thermomechanical behavior and the thermal responses of SMA micromanipulators were simulated. The current flow distribution of the monolithic micro-positioning stage is also simulated. In term of the fabrication process, this study follows the standard and unconventional of MEMS fabrication techniques including conventional lithography, electroplating, etching processes, as well as the use of micro electrical discharged machining (μEDM) and plasma enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD). In addition, the research examines the integration of a sensing element in an SMA actuator by utilizing a resonant circuit to develop a wireless displacement sensing device. The software that were used in the design and simulation are SolidWorks and COMSOL Multiphysics, respectively. For characterization purposes, different apparatus such as laser displacement sensor, force sensor, impedance analyzer, thermal camera, and microscope were used for displacement sensing, force measurement, resonant frequency tracking, thermal analysis, and microscopic imaging, respectively.

1.5 Research Contributions

The research proposes four significant contributions by developing SMA microactuators. These contributions can be highlighted as follows:

1. Simulation and characterization of SMA bimorph actuators in order to determine the optimal thickness of SMA and the stress layer as well as the depositing temperature. Based on these simulation results, an optimized design was fabricated using bulk-micromachined SMA bimorph actuators.

2. Development of a novel SMA micromanipulator structure by the integration of a sequence of SMA bimorph microactuators. The SMA micromanipulator has three DoF with a large actuation range and simple fabrication steps with a gripping mechanism.

3. A novel monolithic micro-positioning stage driven by six SMA microactuators. The device was fabricated in a single fabrication step and provided large displacement ranges.

4. A novel wireless displacement sensing method using resonant-based SMA actuators has been studied and experimentally demonstrated with a spiral-coil SMA actuator.

1.6 Potential Impact of the Research

The applications of MEMS-based actuators in robotics and biomedical areas are currently limited due to the factors of low actuation force, limited displacement range, bulky size, actuation mechanism and biocompatibility. The use of SMA bulk-micromachined actuators overcomes these weaknesses exceptionally well. It also paves the way for a variety of potential applications such as micro surgical tools and active catheters; for these applications, the SMA biomedical devices require compactness and biocompatibility that is essential for minimally invasive surgery. Therefore, the precise control as well as the high DoF of the developed SMA microactuators that form the final micromanipulator would be greatly beneficial [26-28].

Furthermore, this research introduces a monolithic SMA micro-positioning stage that has a three DoF movement. This monolithic approach has improved the fabrication process at a lower cost, it has also helped in maintaining structure robustness and reliable actuation. These features would potentially promote the application of SMA-based actuators in highly precise mechanisms. In addition, by using SMA and its shape memory effect, a spiral-coil actuator that has a self-sensing function has been developed. The utilization of this actuator in the form of a resonance circuit has allowed the implementation of a wireless displacement sensing that is passive and very compact in size. This method also eliminates the need for a wired interface, which is an important criterion for many biomedical devices such as implantable devices. The successful outcomes of this research are expected to promote advances in these device technologies in biomedical fields and beyond.

1.7 Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 is a general overview of MEMS microactuators applications followed by the problem statement, objectives and scope of the research. Chapter 2 presents the literature review of this research, which covers an overview of MEMS actuation mechanisms, SMA material properties and actuation methods, MEMS micromanipulators, micro-positioning stage and wireless displacement sensing. Chapter 3 presents the thermomechanical behavior analysis of the bimorph SMA structure and studies the parameters that affect the displacement of the microactuator. Chapter 4 proposes a new structure for an SMA micromanipulator by integrating a sequence of SMA bimorph microactuators with three DoF and a gripping mechanism. Chapter 5 reports the development of a novel three-DoF monolithic SMA micro-positioning stage capable of linear movements along *x*- and *y*-axes as well as rotational movements provided by six SMA actuated springs. Chapter 6 demonstrates a method that enables real-time displacement monitoring and control of micromachined resonant-type actuators using wireless radio frequency. Finally, the thesis concludes with chapter 7, where the key results and directions for future work are discussed. A list of publications arising from the thesis is given.

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