

# Controlling graphene plasmons with resonant metal antennas and spatial conductivity patterns

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**Graphene plasmons promise unique possibilities for controlling light in nanoscale devices and for merging optics with electronics. Here we introduce a versatile platform technology based on resonant optical antennas and conductivity patterns for launching and controlling of propagating graphene plasmons, constituting an essential step for the development of graphene plasmonic circuits. We demonstrate the launching and focusing of infrared graphene plasmons with geometrically tailored antennas, and how they refract when passing through a 2-dimensional conductivity pattern, here a prism-shaped bilayer. To that end, we directly map the graphene plasmon wavefronts using an imaging method that will also benefit the testing of future design concepts for nanoscale graphene plasmonic circuits and devices.**

Surface plasmon polaritons (SPPs)—coupled excitations of photons and mobile charge carriers—in metals and doped semiconductors offer intriguing opportunities to control light in nanoscale devices (1–7). Plasmons provide both a strong local field enhancement and confinement, accompanied by an appreciable reduction of the wavelength compared to free-space radiation. However, plasmons in metals exhibit relatively strong losses and cannot be controlled by electrical fields. Consequently, a strong quest for novel plasmonic materials arises (8). Among them, doped graphene excels due to its two-dimensional nature and high carrier mobility, supporting plasmons with an extreme confinement and a wavelength that can be strongly reduced compared to photons of the same frequency (9–14). More importantly, the carrier concentration in graphene can be tuned by electrical gating, opening exciting avenues for nanoscale electrical control of light (15–21). The ultra-short graphene plasmon (GP) wavelengths, however, come at the expense of a large momentum mismatch with photonic modes of the same frequency (22–25). Future graphene plasmonic circuits (15) will thus critically depend on converting incident light into propagating GPs, and on controlling their propagation and focusing to enhance light-matter interactions.

Figure 1 introduces the launching of GPs with metal antennas. The calculations (26) consider gold rods of length  $L$  acting as resonant dipole antennas. As shown in Fig. 1A, they provide strong near fields of opposite polarity at the rod extremities. For the fixed illumination wavelength  $\lambda_0 = 10.20 \mu\text{m}$ , the near-field intensity enhancement factor  $f^2 = (E/E_0)^2$

indicates the fundamental dipolar antenna resonance at  $L = 2.9 \mu\text{m}$ .  $E$  is the electric field averaged over the antenna surface and  $E_0$  the incident electric field. The Fourier transform (FT) of Fig. 1A reveals antenna near fields with orders of magnitude increased momentum compared to the incident wavevector  $k_0$  (Fig. 1C). When such antenna is placed on graphene (assuming a Fermi energy  $E_F = 0.44 \text{ eV}$  and a carrier mobility  $\mu = 1136 \text{ cm}^2/(\text{V}\cdot\text{s})$ ), the high-momentum near-field components match the GP wavevector, thus exciting propagating GPs. Indeed, we observe an oscillating near-field distribution around the antenna on graphene (Fig. 1D). The distance between the field maxima of same polarity (same color) yields the GP wavelength,  $\lambda_p = 380 \text{ nm}$ , which is a factor of 27 smaller than  $\lambda_0$  (24, 25). Accordingly, the FT of Fig. 1D yields a bright ring of diameter  $k_p = 2\pi/\lambda_p = 27k_0$ , corroborating propagating GPs (Fig. 1F). As expected, the excitation of GPs broadens and shifts the antenna resonance (black curve in Fig. 1E).

To analyze how efficient GPs are excited, we calculated the quantity  $\eta_p = P_p/(I_0 A_{\text{ant}})$  (red curve in Fig. 1E), where  $P_p$  is the power transferred into graphene,  $I_0$  the illuminating intensity and  $A_{\text{ant}}$  the geometrical antenna cross-section.  $\eta_p$  provides a good estimation for the cross-section exciting GPs relative to the antenna's geometrical cross-section (26). It clearly follows the antenna's resonance. Compared to non-resonant antennas, e.g., with a quadratic cross-section ( $600 \times 600 \text{ nm}$ ), the efficiency on resonance is enhanced by a factor of 28. The resonant near-field enhancement around the antenna is thus the source for strong GP excitation.

Intriguingly, in Fig. 1D we observe plane GP wavefronts parallel to the antenna axis, in contrast to metal SPPs launched by dipole antennas (27). We explain these plane wavefronts by the weak diffraction of the GPs, resulting from their short wavelength compared to the antenna length. The antenna can be thus considered as an extended plasmon source with a length of several GP wavelengths.

For an experimental demonstration, we fabricated gold rods on CVD-grown graphene transferred onto a 5-nm-thick  $\text{SiO}_2$  layer on a  $\text{CaF}_2$  substrate (26). We imaged the near-field distribution with a scattering-type scanning near-field microscope (s-SNOM) using a dielectric Si tip (Fig. 2A). Tip and sample were illuminated with s-polarized light (electric field  $E_0$ ) parallel to the antenna axis, thus efficiently exciting the antenna. While scanning the sample, the real part of the p-polarized tip-scattered light,  $\text{Re}(E_{s,p})$ , is recorded simultaneously to topography (26). On metal plasmonic antennas, such imaging scheme yields the vertical near-field component,  $\text{Re}(E_z)$  (28). This scheme also allows for

mapping the vertical near field of the GPs wavefronts launched by the antenna. We stress the fundamental difference to former experiments (24, 25), where a metal tip was used to both excite and detect GPs, yielding complex images of plasmon interference.

Figure 2B shows the topography of two Au antennas on graphene being strongly off (left) and near resonance (right). Near-field images at  $\lambda_0 = 11.06 \mu\text{m}$  and  $\lambda_0 = 10.20 \mu\text{m}$  (Fig. 2, C and D) verify the dipolar mode on the right antenna. Importantly, we also observe short-range spatial near-field oscillations around this antenna. Their period is about 400 nm, matching the GP wavelength at mid-infrared frequencies (24, 25). Our experimental observations agree well with numerical simulations (Fig. 2, E and F) assuming  $E_F = 0.44 \text{ eV}$  and  $\mu = 1136 \text{ cm}^2/(\text{Vs})$ . These values, used in all the calculations throughout this work, are consistent with our former experiments, where similarly grown graphene was used (24, 26). Because of the relatively low mobility, the field oscillations decay within a few plasmon wavelengths. For quantitative comparison, we show in Fig. 2, G and H, the experimental and calculated near-field profiles,  $\text{Re}(E_{s,p})$  and  $\text{Re}(E_z)$ , along the dashed black lines indicated in Fig. 2, C and D, and Fig. 2, E and F, respectively. We find an excellent agreement, particularly for the oscillation periods and relative field strengths.

Figure 2I depicts the plasmon wavelength  $\lambda_p$  extracted from near-field images taken at different illumination wavelengths  $\lambda_0$ . Good agreement with the calculations is found, confirming the GP origin of the near-field oscillations. Note that the experimental images directly reveal the plasmon wavefronts and wavelength  $\lambda_p$  (the later given by the distance between two consecutive field maxima of the same polarity (color)), rather than LDOS maps and  $\lambda_p/2$  as observed in refs. (24, 25).

We also fabricated and imaged much shorter antennas (left structure in Fig. 2, B to F) being strongly off-resonance with the incident wavelength. Owing to the weak field enhancement, we do not observe GPs around them (Fig. 2, C and D). For the same reason, some asperities remaining from the lithography process do not launch GPs. This result proves that GPs are launched by the resonant antenna near fields and not by the tip.

Resonant antennas can be simultaneously used for engineering the GP wavefronts, as we demonstrate in the following with concave and convex antenna extremities. While the convex extremity launches diverging GPs (Fig. 3, A to C, same data as shown in Fig. 2, A, C, and E), the concave extremity launches converging GPs (Fig. 3, D to F), yielding a focus at a distance of about 400 nm, recognized by the change of the wavefront curvature (illustrated by green lines in Fig. 3D).

The concave extremity represents a 2D lens for focusing GPs (Fig. 3G). The focal length  $f$  is determined by the cavity radius, which nominally is 400 nm, and thus agrees well with the focus position observed in Fig. 3E. To analyze the focus, we plot in Fig. 3, H and I, the experimental and calculated near-field intensities,  $|E_{s,p}|^2$  and  $|E_z|^2$ , along the white dashed lines in Fig. 3, E and F, respectively (red curves). The dashed lines trace the field at a constant distance of 400 nm around the antenna extremity. We observe a strongly localized intensity at the focus position (position 2 in Fig. 3, E and F), which is enhanced by a factor of about 6 compared to positions 1 and 3. Compared to the convex antenna extremity (grey curves in Fig. 3, H and I), the plasmon focus yields an about 3-fold enhanced intensity.

The GP focus is determined by the numerical aperture (NA) of the

extremity and the GP wavelength, analogous to diffraction-limited optics. Generally, the full width at half maximum (FWHM) of a focus size at wavelength  $\lambda$  can be estimated by  $\text{FWHM} \approx \lambda/(2\text{NA})$ , where  $\text{NA} = \sin(\alpha)$ . With  $\alpha = 70^\circ$  (from Fig. 3D) and  $\lambda_p = 436 \text{ nm}$ , we calculate  $\text{FWHM} = 232 \text{ nm}$ , agreeing well with  $\text{FWHM} = 235 \text{ nm}$  in the experimental (Fig. 3H) and  $\text{FWHM} = 216 \text{ nm}$  in the calculated (Fig. 3I) near-field profiles (red curves), respectively. Note that the focus size can be tailored by varying the NA. In Fig. 2C, where the opening angle  $\alpha$  of the cavity and thus the numerical aperture are smaller ( $\alpha = 29^\circ$ ,  $\text{NA} = 0.485$ ), we measure a larger  $\text{FWHM} = 458 \text{ nm}$  (fig. S2), in agreement with the expected  $\text{FWHM} = 450 \text{ nm}$  (26).

Both the launching of GPs with antennas and wavefront mapping offer unique possibilities for studying fundamental and applied aspects of graphene plasmonics. In Fig. 4 we demonstrate that the propagation direction of GPs can be controlled by 2D refractive elements based on spatial conductivity patterns, as recently proposed (15). Our experiment is illustrated in Fig. 4A. A resonant gold antenna is illuminated with field  $E_0$  parallel to the antenna axis. The antenna fields launch GPs propagating perpendicular to the antenna, which are refracted at a prism structure where the Fermi energy and thus GP wavelength is locally modified.

In the experiment, the prism consists of a graphene bilayer (26), which is outlined by a dashed black line in the topography image (Fig. 4B). Its height is 0.8 nm (Fig. 4C). In the near-field image,  $\text{Re}(E_{s,p})$ , we observe horizontal GP wavefronts above both the left-hand side and very end of the right-hand side of the antenna (wavelength  $\lambda_{p,2}$ ), as before in Figs. 2 and 3. Inside the prism, we find an increased plasmon wavelength,  $\lambda_{p,1} = 1.4 \lambda_{p,2}$  (Fig. 4E). We explain it by a locally increased conductivity. Note that the conductivity, and thus the wavelength  $\lambda_p$ , scales with the Drude weight  $D$  (29). For stacks of decoupled graphene layers (where interlayer hopping of electrons is neglected), the Drude weight scales as  $D \sim n_G^{1/2} l$  (29), with  $n_G$  being the carrier density per layer and  $l$  the number of layers. Assuming that the carriers are equally distributed between the layers (30), we obtain  $n_G = n/l$ , and subsequently  $D \sim n^{1/2} l^{1/2}$ , where  $n$  is the total carrier density equal to that of the monolayer graphene. For a bilayer the conductivity is thus 1.41 larger than in a monolayer, yielding  $\lambda_{p,1}/\lambda_{p,2} = D = 1.41$ , in agreement with our experimental finding.

Outside the left prism boundary, the wavefronts are tilted by  $24^\circ$ . For the propagation directions we find  $\alpha_1 = 50^\circ$  and  $\alpha_2 = 26^\circ$ , yielding  $\sin(\alpha_1)/\sin(\alpha_2) = 1.75$  (Fig. 4F). Our findings,  $\lambda_{p,1}/\lambda_{p,2} > 1$  and  $\sin(\alpha_1)/\sin(\alpha_2) > 1$ , demonstrate that GPs qualitatively follow the most fundamental law of refraction, Snell's law:

$$\frac{\sin \alpha_1}{\sin \alpha_2} = \frac{n_2}{n_1} = \frac{\lambda_1}{\lambda_2} \quad (1)$$

In Fig. 4G we corroborate the GP refraction with a numerical calculation, assuming  $E_{F,2} = 0.44 \text{ eV}$  for the graphene monolayer (as in Figs. 2 and 3). For the bilayer we increased the conductivity to match the experimental wavelength ratio,  $\lambda_{p,1} = 1.4\lambda_p$  (Fig. 4H). We measure  $\alpha_1 = 50^\circ$  and  $\alpha_2 = 30^\circ$ , yielding  $\sin(\alpha_1)/\sin(\alpha_2) = 1.53$ , qualitatively following Snell's law (Eq. 1). The quantitative discrepancy found in both experiment and theory, i.e.,  $\sin(\alpha_1)/\sin(\alpha_2) > \lambda_{p,1}/\lambda_{p,2}$ , is attributed to the strong GP damping. In strongly absorbing media, Snell's law deviates from its simple form (Eq. 1), as fronts of constant amplitude and phase may exhibit different diffraction angles (31), which is not considered in our

analysis. While further studies are required for a better quantitative understanding, our results demonstrate that GP propagation can be controlled by refraction. In the future, local gating of graphene could open exciting avenues for electrically tunable refractive elements, among others for steering of GPs.

Launching and controlling of propagating GPs with resonant metal antennas and spatial conductivity patterns could lead to various applications, including GP focusing into gated graphene waveguides, resonators, modulators or plasmon interferometers for communication and sensing. By improved doping strategies and carrier mobility in graphene, we expect GPs to propagate over several wavelengths at mid-infrared, near-infrared, and telecommunication wavelengths. Resonant antenna devices might also be used for converting the GPs into far-field radiation, which would enable a purely optical read-out of graphene plasmonic circuits or wireless on-chip communication between them.

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**Supplementary Materials**

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Materials and Methods

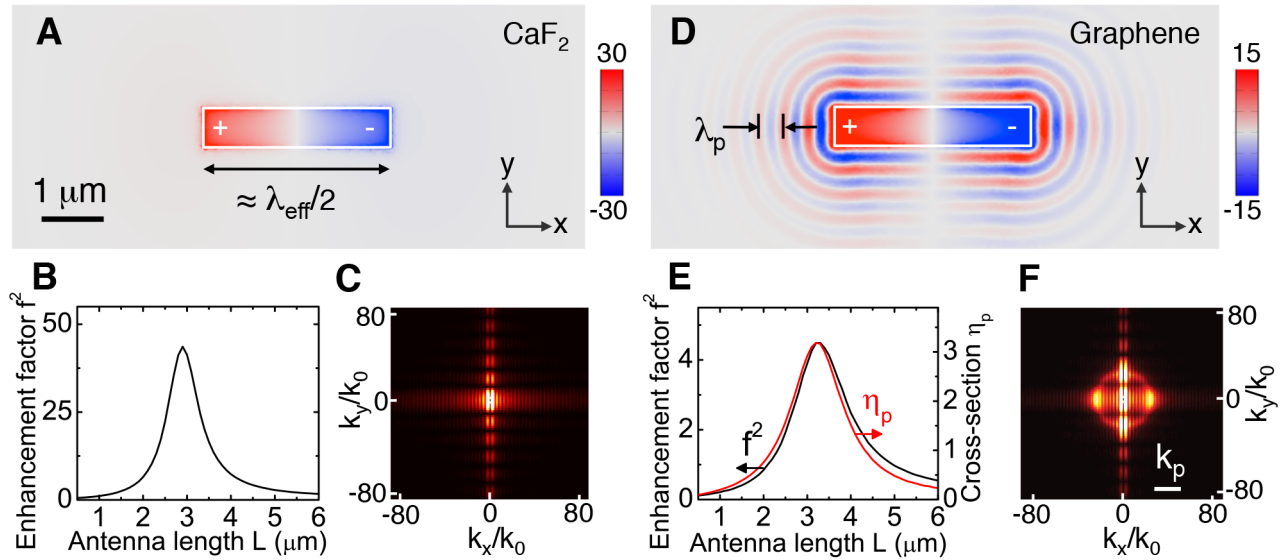
Figs. S1 and S2

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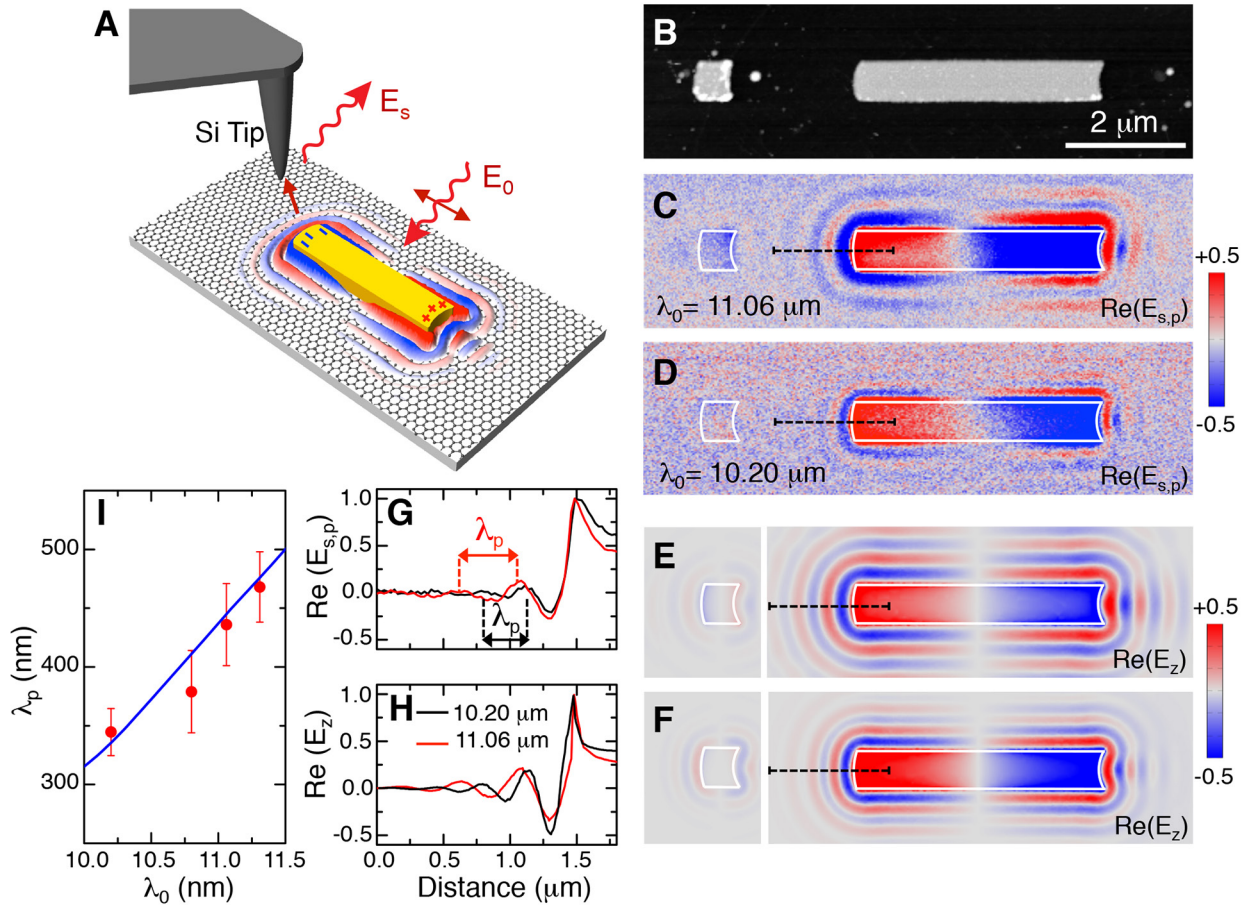
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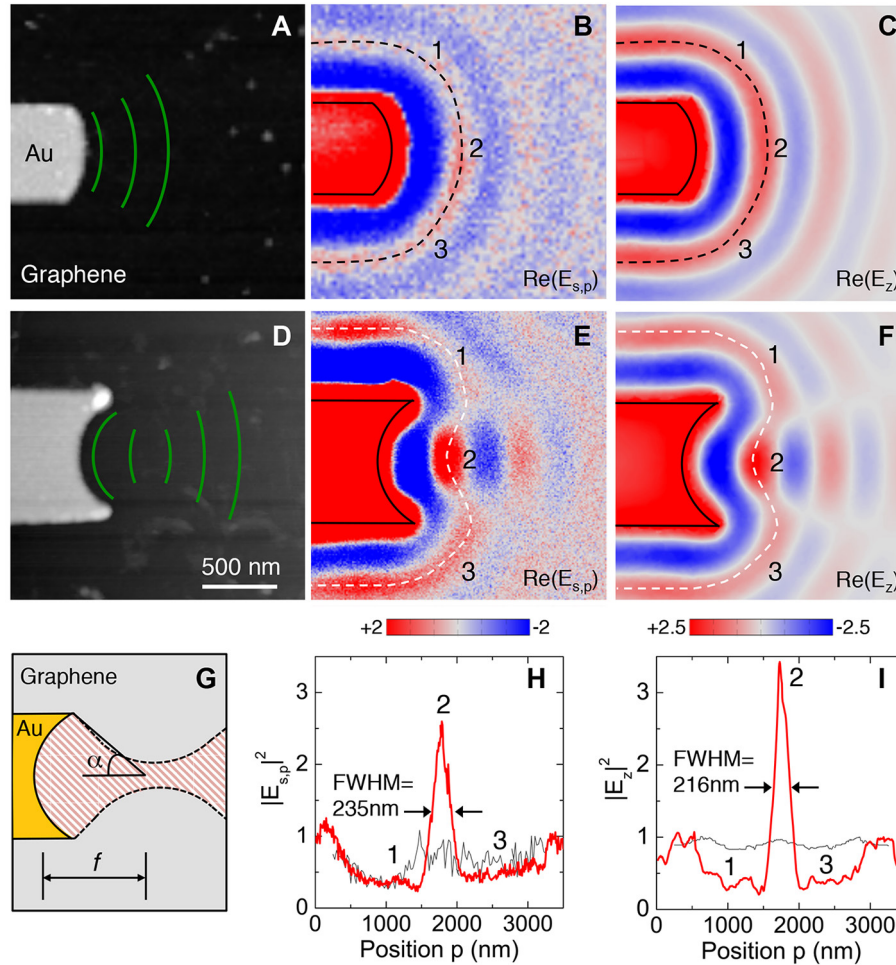
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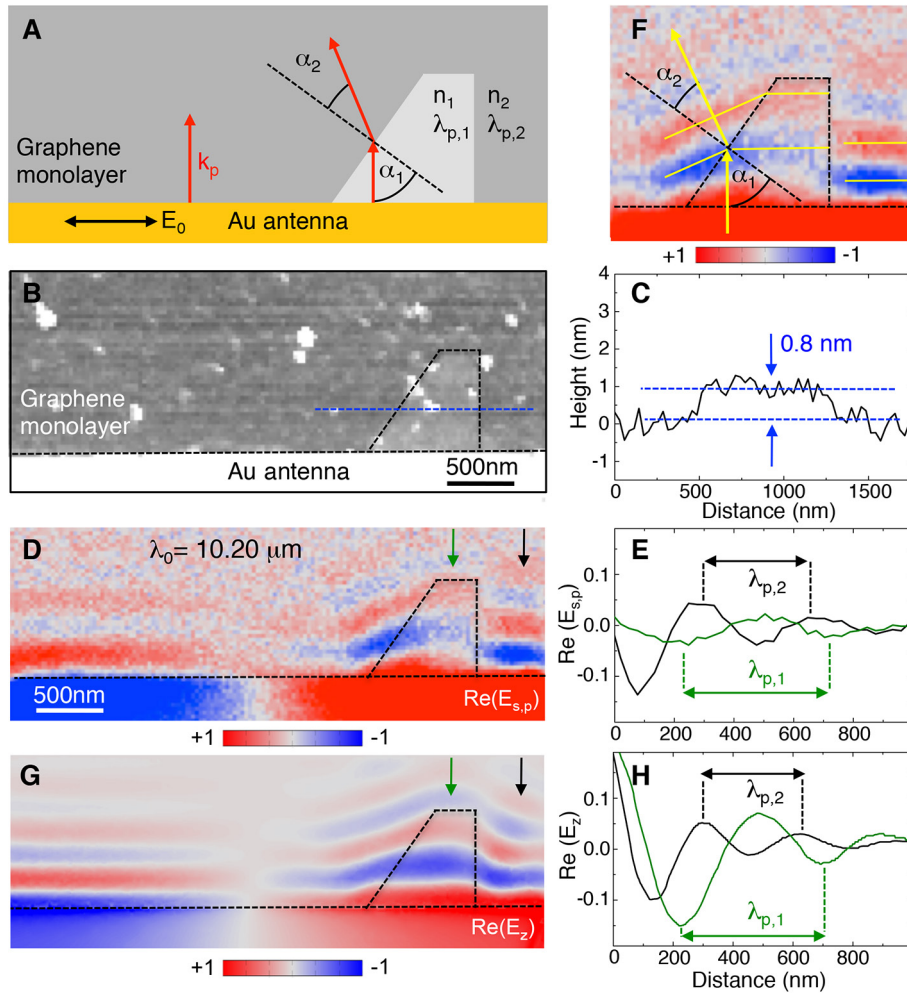
**Fig. 1. Numerical study of launching propagating GPs with resonant dipole antennas at  $\lambda_0 = 10.20 \mu\text{m}$ .** (A) Near-field distribution of a resonant antenna (length  $L = 2.9 \mu\text{m}$ , width  $w = 0.6 \mu\text{m}$  and height  $h = 40 \text{ nm}$ ) on a  $\text{CaF}_2$  substrate. (B) Near-field intensity enhancement factor  $f^2$  as a function of  $L$ . (C) Absolute value of the Fourier transform of the near field in (A). (D) Near-field distribution of a resonant antenna ( $L = 3.2 \mu\text{m}$ ,  $w = 0.6 \mu\text{m}$ ,  $h = 40 \text{ nm}$ ) on graphene on a  $\text{CaF}_2$  substrate. (E) Enhancement factor  $f^2$  and  $\eta_p$  as a function of  $L$ . (F) Absolute value of the Fourier transform of the near field in (D). Panels (A) and (D) show the real part of the near-field z-component 5 nm above the antenna surface, normalized to  $|E_0|$ .



**Fig. 2. Verification of an antenna-based GP launcher.** (A) Illustration of the experiment. (B) Topography image of an off- and on-resonance dipole antenna (left and right, respectively). (C and D) Experimental and (E and F) calculated images, illustrating the real part of the vertical near-field component of the antennas shown in (B) for  $\lambda_0 = 11.06 \mu\text{m}$  and  $10.20 \mu\text{m}$ , respectively. (G) Experimental and (H) calculated near-field profiles along the dashed black lines in (C, D) and (E, F), respectively. (I) Experimental (symbols) and calculated (solid line) GP wavelength  $\lambda_p$  as a function of  $\lambda_0$ .



**Fig. 3. Wavefront engineering of GPs.** (A and D) Topography, (B and E) experimental and (C and F) calculated near-field images,  $\text{Re}(E_{s,p})$  and  $\text{Re}(E_z)$ , of a convex and a concave antenna extremity, respectively ( $\lambda_0 = 11.06 \mu\text{m}$ ). The green lines in the topography images illustrate the GP wavefronts. (G) Illustration of GP focusing with a concave antenna extremity. (H and I) Experimental and calculated near-field intensity (red curves) along the white dashed lines in (E) and (F), respectively. The grey curves show the experimental and calculated near-field intensity along the black dashed lines in (B) and (C), respectively. All curves are normalized to their maximum in the lower left corners of (E) and (F).



**Fig. 4. Refraction of GPs at a graphene bilayer prism.** (A) Illustration of our experiment and Snell's law of refraction. (B) Topography image of a graphene bilayer prism next to a resonant Au antenna. (C) Height profile along the dashed blue line in Fig. 3B. (D) Near-field image,  $\text{Re}(E_{s,p})$ , recorded simultaneously with the topography shown in Fig. 4B. (E) Near-field profiles taken at the positions marked by black and green arrows in (D). (F) Analysis of the GP wavefronts. Image extracted from Fig. 4D. (G) Calculated near-field image,  $\text{Re}(E_z)$ . (H) Near-field profiles taken at the positions marked by black and green arrows in (G).