

Efficient Graphene Hot Electron Devices: Electrochemistry and Electron Emission

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In this talk, we will discuss recent work in hot electron devices, focusing on how graphene enables efficient hot electron devices that go beyond the present state of the art in both electron emission and electrochemistry.

First, we show how hot-electron processes can dramatically reduce the optical power densities required for photoemission. In metallic emitters, single-photon, multi-photon, or strong-field emission processes are the three mechanisms via which photoemission takes place. Photons with energy lower than the material workfunction can only drive photoemission through the multi-photon, or strong-field processes, both of which require large optical powers, limiting the integration of photoemitters with photonic integrated circuits. Here, we show that a waveguide integrated graphene electron emitter excited with 3.06 eV photons from a continuous wave (CW) laser exhibits two hot-electron processes that drive photoemission at peak powers >5 orders of magnitude lower than previously reported multi-photon and strong-field metallic photoemitters. Optical power dependent studies combined with modeling illustrate that the observed behavior can be explained by considering direct emission of excited electrons. These processes are dramatically enhanced in graphene due to the relatively weak electron-phonon coupling and the single layer structure. These results show that hot electron devices still offer a rich area of exploration.

Next, we show that the onset of electrochemical and photoelectrochemical reactions on a graphene surface can be modified with a semiconductor-insulator-graphene (SIG) device due to injection of hot-electrons from the silicon to the graphene. We observe that the device functions similar to a catalyst, but modifies electrochemical behavior through purely electronic signals. Unlike a material catalyst, such as platinum, which reduces the overpotential at a given current by modifying the transition state energy, the electronic catalyst explored here tunes the onset potential of the reaction by modifying the energy of photoelectrons with respect to the electrochemical reduction energy levels. As a model systems, the hydrogen evolution reaction on graphene is shown to be modified in an n-Si/Al₂O₃/graphene electrochemical device, and a p-Si/Al₂O₃/graphene photoelectrochemical device. Uniquely, it is shown that for every volt of bias applied across the silicon-insulator-graphene junction, the onset of hydrogen reduction on the graphene surface is modified by 1.45 V.