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► **To cite this version:**

Aitor Lopez-Aldaba, D Lopez-Torres, J Ascorbe, S Rota, C Elosua, et al.. SnO₂-MOF-Fabry-Pérot humidity optical sensor system based on fast Fourier transform technique. European Workshop on Optical Fibre Sensors (EWOFS 2016), May 2016, Limerick, Ireland. pp.9916-29. hal-01291371

HAL Id: hal-01291371

<https://hal.science/hal-01291371v1>

Submitted on 21 Mar 2016

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SnO₂-MOF-Fabry-Pérot humidity optical sensor system based on fast Fourier transform technique

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, a new sensor system for relative humidity measurements based on a SnO₂ sputtering deposition on a microstructure (MOF) low-finesse Fabry-Pérot sensing head is presented and characterized. The interrogation of the sensing head is carried out by monitoring the fast Fourier transform phase variations of the FP interference frequency. This method is independent of the signal amplitude and also avoids the necessity of tracking the wavelength evolution in the spectrum; moreover, it is applicable networks that require narrow band sensors, allowing high multiplexation rates. The sensor is operated within a wide humidity range (20%–90% relative humidity) with a maximum sensitivity achieved of 0.14rad/%. The system uses an optical interrogator as unique active element which presents a cost-effective feature.

Keywords: Photonic crystal fiber, microstructured optical fiber, fiber sensor, humidity sensing.

INTRODUCTION

Optical fiber based sensors have shown relevant capabilities to measure different parameters such as temperature, curvature, displacement, pressure, refractive index, electric field, relative humidity and gases, among others. Since the first experiments with microstructured optical fibers (MOFs), they have shown improved characteristics over conventional optical fibers and great potential for sensing applications [1]. Several geometries have been proposed for this kind of fiber. Among them, suspended-core MOFs present relatively large air holes surrounding a small core (typically few μm of diameter) that seems to be suspended along the fiber length and maintained by small width silica bridges. Different pure silica suspended-core fibers have been applied for instance in temperature and curvature sensing [2] and in gas sensing [3].

Fiber based optical Fabry-Pérot (FP) interferometers are quite a popular sensor configuration due to their compactness, simple configuration, flexibility in tuning sensitivity and dynamic range. A fiber based FP sensor is most of the times fabricated by splicing a section of waveguide, which acts as the cavity, to a standard optical fiber, providing it with the potential for low insertion-loss and multiplexing capability. The FP cavity output signal presents an interference pattern that is a function of the length and of the refractive index of the cavity, or more precisely, the effective indices of the different modes supported by the fiber sample. FP cavities composed by MOFs are an even more common structure: a hybrid structure that used a MOF as the guiding fiber and cascade it with a hollow-core fiber and a single mode fiber (SMF), for high-temperature sensing, was demonstrated [4]. Other fiber based sensors were accomplished by fusing a small length of PCF to the end of a cleaved SMF for relative humidity ranged 40%-95% RH [5] or by chemical deposition of PSP and PAH [6].

Among optical fiber sensors, those based on nanocoatings have recently experienced a remarkable development [7]. Furthermore, new techniques in chemical deposition, such as sputtering [8], allow the morphology of the deposited coatings to be controlled with high accuracy, and as a consequence, the final features (sensitivity, kinetics) of the sensor.

In this paper, a SnO₂- (would it be interesting to explain a little bit here or just at the beginning of the next section how SnO₂ coating is performed in order to facilitate the understanding?) hybrid-Fabry-Pérot interferometer based on a novel four-bridge dual highly coupled Y shaped cores microstructured optical fiber is presented and characterized. By monitoring the fast Fourier transform (FFT) phase variations of the PF interference frequency an experimental study of

this cavity's response with relative humidity changes, and optical power fluctuations in time is presented. This measuring method is independent of the signal amplitude and avoids the necessity of tracking the wavelength evolution in the spectrum, which simplifies the measurements.

EXPERIMENTAL SET-UP AND OPERATION PRINCIPLE

The Fabry-Pérot interferometer was fabricated by splicing a single mode fiber to ~1mm of a novel four-bridge MOF, with its end cleaved, as shown in Figure 1 a. (which process for SNO2 coating, where and what are the characteristics of the coating layer?) The fiber is composed by four big air holes divided by four thin silica bridges, approximately 900 nm thick, and presents an elongated core of $3.2\mu\text{m}$ by $1.07\mu\text{m}$, exhibiting a double Y shape. This specific core shape can be seen as two coupled single mode guiding cores [9]. This specific shape provides unprecedented possibilities for interferometric sensing. The cross-section of the four-bridge MOF and its core details are presented in Figure 1 b and 1 c, respectively.

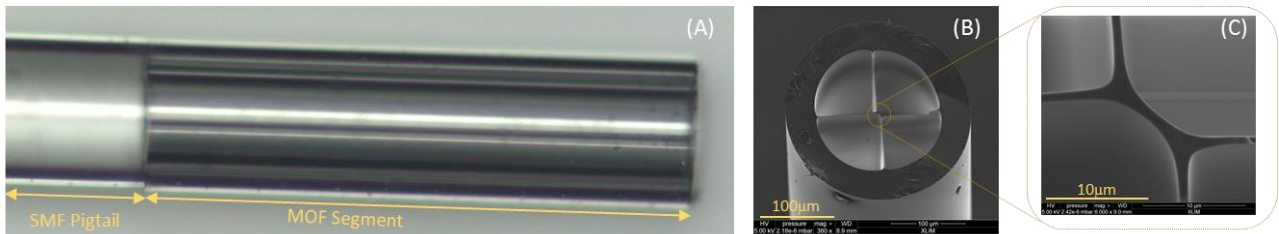


Figure 1. A) MOF based Fabry-Pérot interferometer, (B) the cross-section of the used four-bridge MOF and (C) the four-bridge MOF core detail.

Figure 2 presents the experimental set-up used to characterize the four-bridge MOF Fabry-Pérot based sensing head and the SnO_2 -FP final sensor. A commercial interrogating sensor device (Smartec SM125) was used to illuminate the network and also to analyze the spectra of the signal guided through the sensor. It should be noticed that this equipment was originally commercialized for FBG sensors' monitoring and allows sensors to be interrogated in real time (sampling frequency of 1Hz) [10]. The SM125 is remotely controlled through a MATLAB software that also executes the FFT real time analysis. The sensing head was inserted into a climatic chamber where humidity ranges from 20% to 90% were applied at a constant temperature of 25°C to evaluate its response to this magnitude.

Due to the use of the FFT phase as the sensing parameter, power constraints are not as limiting as in other techniques, allowing more sensors to be multiplexed.



Figure 2. Experimental setup of the proposed system.

The MOF-FP optical fiber core was used as the substrate in a DC-Sputter deposition process (Pulsed DC Sputtering System, Nadetech Innovations) with a partial pressure of argon of 6.75×10^{-2} mbar, intensity of 140 mA and voltage of 190 V. The SnO_2 target 99.99% of purity was purchased from ZhongNuo Advanced Material Technology Co.

The device sensing principle consists on the interaction between the evanescent field of the guided light and the SnO_2 deposition on the core lateral surfaces and on the reflective interface at the end of the FP cavity.

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

The output signal of the Fabry-Pérot interferometer can be seen in Figure 3. It presents an interferometric fringe pattern with a wavelength spacing of 1.6 nm (Figure 3.A). Figure 3 b) shows the FFT of the FP spectra. As a result of the periodicity of the spectra, the FFT presents a narrow set of frequencies that characterize completely the sensing head, with its main component located at 0.8375nm^{-1} . To measure the changes induced by the humidity changes, the phase variations of this frequency component were studied. This behavior in addition to the FFT analysis allows a number of different sensors to be multiplexed and simultaneously interrogated of just by setting correctly its spatial frequency, which is a result of the wavelength spacing and so of the length of the fiber PCF fused.

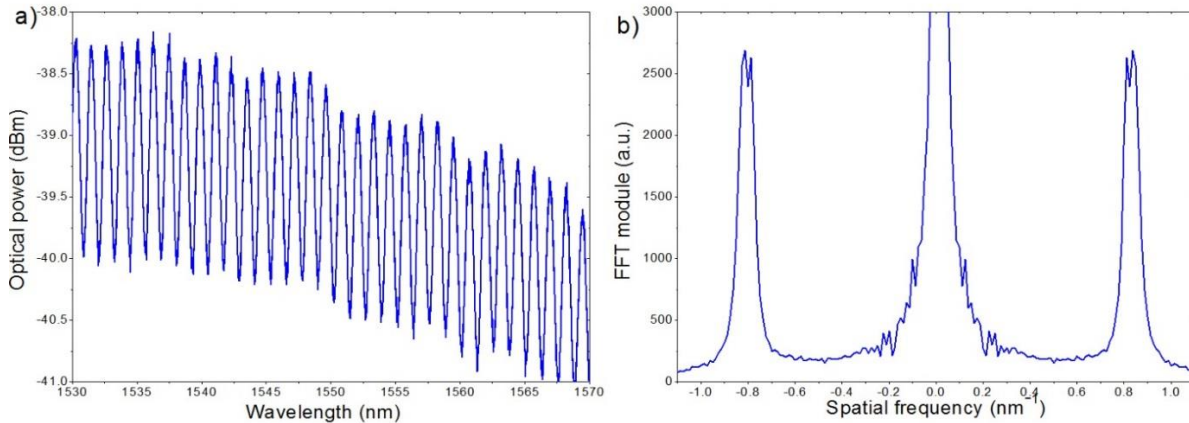


Figure 3. (a) Optical spectra of the sensor before deposition at 25°C and 40% humidity (room conditions) and (b) its fast Fourier transform.

In order to verify the proper operation of the SnO_2 -FP sensing head, the humidity-sensing performance of the sensor in the atmosphere of different RHs, with the temperature set at 25°C, was experimentally carried out. Figure 4 a) illustrates the FP performance without any chemical deposition. It can be seen that there is an unclear tendency to follow the climatic chamber variations in humidity: sensitivity is very low and the signal is too much noisy. Therefore, the interferometer is inoperative with no deposition.

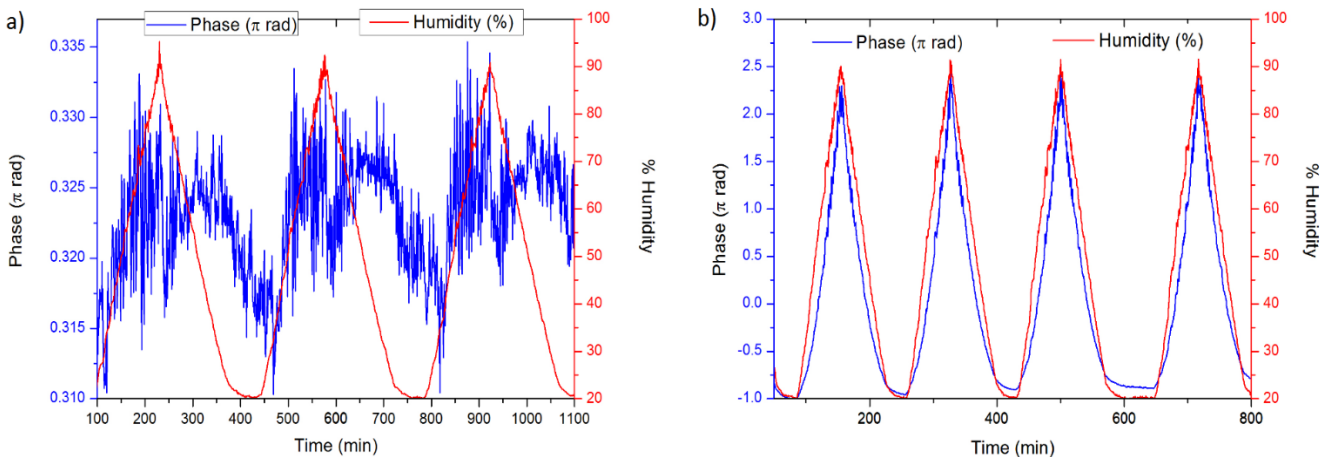


Figure 4. Sensor response to humidity: a) before deposition, and b) after SnO_2 deposition.

The sensor performance after the chemical deposition is shown in Figure 4 b). SnO_2 chemical deposition enhances its sensitivity and improves the Signal to Noise rate. Typically, the sensitivity of humidity sensors is different depending on the humidity range [5], but in our case, the sensor response shows a linear behavior in the measured humidity range (20%-90%) with a sensitivity of 0.14π rad/% RH. Two of the main characteristics of this sensing head are its speed

reaction to humidity changes and its reversibility, allowing the sensor to work continuously without its replacement after saturation.

Finally, in order to probe the stability of the system, the phase variations during 200 minutes for a 40% RH and 25°C, have been tested showing an instability of around 0.007π rad. These results are shown in Figure 5.

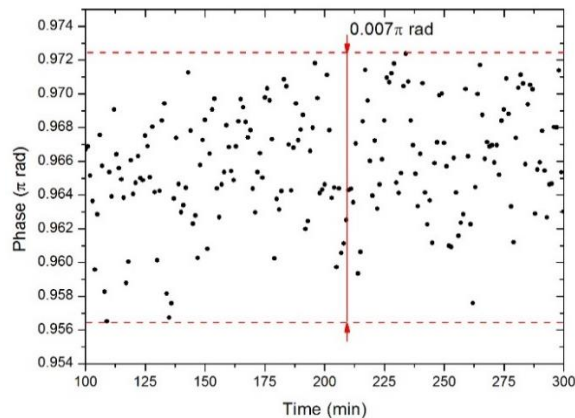


Figure 5. Phase fluctuations along 200 minutes for 40% and 25°C.

CONCLUSIONS

To summarize, a new sensor system for relative humidity measurements based on its interaction with a SnO_2 chemical deposition on a MOF-Fabry-Pérot cavity has been proposed and experimentally demonstrated. The interrogation of the sensing head has been carried out by monitoring the FFT phase variations of one of the FP interference frequency. This method is independent of the signal amplitude and also avoids the necessity of tracking the wavelength evolution of the spectrum, which can be a handicap when noise is present and allows to multiplex several sensors. The sensor has been operated within a wide humidity range (20%–90% RH) with a maximum sensitivity achieved of $0.14\text{rad}/\% \text{RH}$ and a phase standard deviation of 0.0043π rad. It presents linear and constant response along the entire RH range. The SnO_2 MOF-FP sensor presents high-speed response, reversibility, high repeatability rate, robust and compact features, and the FFT-based interrogation technique complements the system with powerful multiplexing capabilities.

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