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Robert E Tench, Clément Romano, Jean-Marc Delavaux. Broadband 2-W Output Power Tandem Thulium-Doped Single Clad Fiber Amplifier at $2 \mu\text{m}$. *IEEE Photonics Technology Letters*, 2018, 30 (5), pp.503 - 506. 10.1109/LPT.2018.2801840 . hal-01766662

HAL Id: hal-01766662

<https://hal.science/hal-01766662v1>

Submitted on 13 Apr 2018

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Broadband 2 W Output Power Tandem Thulium-doped Single Clad Fiber Amplifier at 2 μm

Robert E. Tench, *Senior Member, IEEE*, Clement Romano, and Jean-Marc Delavaux

Abstract—We report experimental and simulated performance of a tandem (dual-stage) Tm-doped silica fiber amplifier with a high signal output power of 2.6 W in the 2 μm band. Combined high dynamic range, high gain, low noise figure, and high OSNR are achieved with our design.

Index Terms—Doped Fiber Amplifiers, Infrared Fiber Optics, Optical Fiber Devices, Thulium, 2 microns.

I. INTRODUCTION

The recent progress in transmission experiments at signal wavelengths in the 2 μm band [1] shows the need for Thulium-doped fiber amplifiers (TDFAs) with a combination of high gain, low noise figure, and large dynamic range. Previous work has demonstrated single stage amplifiers operating from 1900-2050 nm and 1650-1850 nm [2,3]. In this paper we report the experimental and simulated performance of a tandem single clad TDFA employing in-band pumping around 1560 nm and designed for the 1900-2050 nm signal band. A combination of high gain (> 50 dB), output power of 2.6 W, > 30 dB dynamic range, and < 4 dB small signal noise figure are demonstrated with our design. Performance as a function of input power and signal wavelength is presented. The experimental data are in good agreement with steady-state simulations of our single clad tandem TDFA performance.

II. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

Figure 1 shows the setup for measurements of the tandem TDFA which consists of a preamplifier (Stage 1) and a power booster (Stage 2). Signal light from a single frequency discrete mode laser (DML) source (Eblana Photonics) is coupled into the first TDF F1 through attenuator A. Signal input power is set by varying the attenuator. In stage 1, fiber 1 is co- and counter-pumped using wavelength division multiplexers (WDMs) with 1550 nm grating stabilized DFBs (P1 and P2) which deliver more than 200 mW each into F1.

Manuscript submitted on December 13, 2017.

Robert E. Tench and Jean-Marc Delavaux are with Cybel LLC, 1195 Pennsylvania Avenue, Bethlehem, PA 18018 USA (e-mail: robert.tench@cybel-llc.com) (e-mail: jm@cybel-llc.com)

Clement Romano is with Cybel LLC, 1195 Pennsylvania Avenue, Bethlehem, PA, 18018 USA, and Institut Telecom/Paris Telecom Tech, 46 Rue Barrault, 75634, Paris, France (e-mail: clement.romano@cybel-llc.com).

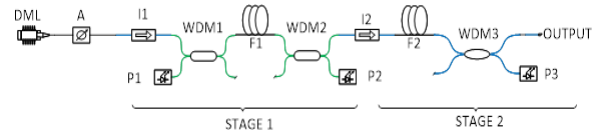


Figure 1. Tandem TDFA configuration.

The signal output of F1 is then coupled into the second TDF fiber F2, in Stage 2, which is counter-pumped either with a multi-watt 1560 nm fiber laser or a multi-watt 1567 nm fiber laser. Optical isolators I1 and I2 suppress parasitic lasing and ensure unidirectional operation. In our experiments, F1 is a 7 m length of OFS TDF designated TmDF200. Two types of fiber F2 are investigated, the first 5 m of OFS TmDF200 and the second 4.4 m of IXBlue TDF designated IXF-TDF-4-125.

III. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS AND SIMULATIONS

Figure 2 shows the measured gain (G) and noise figure (NF) for the two amplifier configurations, first the OFS/OFS combination and then the OFS/IXBlue combination. In all of our data, which are displayed as points in the figures, input powers are referenced to the input of F1, and output powers are referenced to the output of F2. Maximum values of G of 54.6 dB and 55.8 dB, for OFS/OFS and OFS/IXBlue, respectively, were measured at a signal wavelength λ_s of 1952 nm for fibre laser pump powers P_p at 1560 nm of 1.95 W. The corresponding NF was measured to be in the range

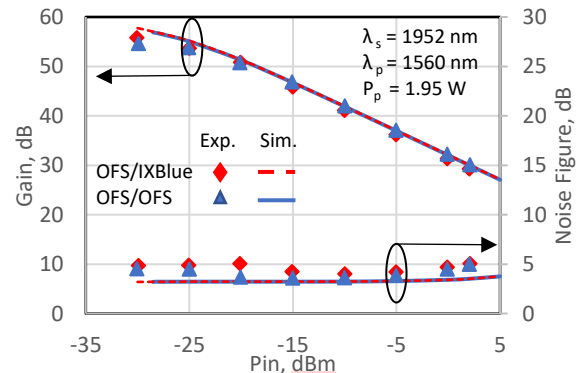


Figure 2. G and NF as a function of P_{in} for the two tandem amplifiers at 1952 nm.

of 4.0 to 5.1 dB for the OFS/IXBlue configuration, and 3.6 to 5.0 dB for the OFS/OFS configuration, for input powers

P_{in} between -30 dBm and +2 dBm.

The data demonstrate a large dynamic range of over 32 dB for an NF of 5.1 dB or less. For lower fiber laser pump powers ($P_p=0.2$ W to 0.8 W at 1560 nm), NF values as low as 3.2 dB were measured for the OFS/OFS configuration.

Simulations of these data were performed using fiber parameters measured in our laboratory [4]. The simulation is based on a three level model of the Thulium ion in silica using the 3H_6 , 3F_4 , and 3H_4 levels including ion-ion interactions [5]. The parameters of gain coefficient, absorption coefficient, and 3F_4 level lifetime were determined for the OFS and IXBlue fibers under test. Figure 3 plots the measured gain and absorption coefficients for the OFS fiber, which has a maximum absorption of 92 dB/m at 1630 nm. Figure 4 shows the gain and absorption coefficients for the IXBlue fiber, which has a maximum absorption of 140 dB/m at 1630 nm.

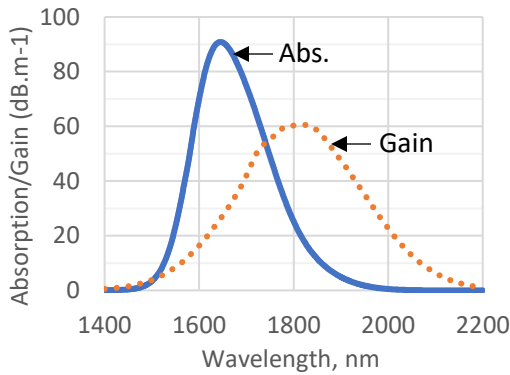


Figure 3. Measured gain and absorption coefficients for the OFS Tm-doped fiber.

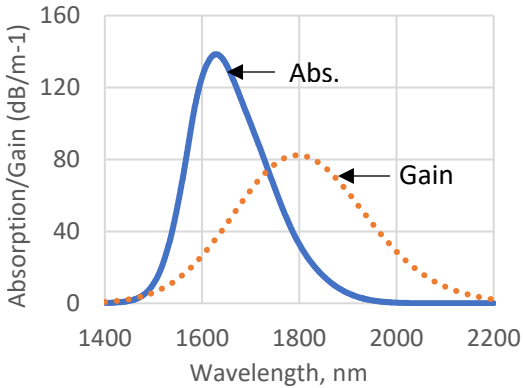


Figure 4. Measured gain and absorption coefficients for the IXBlue Tm-doped fiber.

The measured lifetimes are 650 μ S for the OFS fiber and 750 μ S for the IXBlue fiber. Other relevant parameters were taken from the literature. We note that our measurements of peak gain are lower than the peak absorption. This feature is consistent with some published data but not others [6-9].

The set of three level differential population equations [10] was solved using a stiff solver, while the propagation set of differential equations was solved with a 4th order Runge-Kutta method. The simulation accounts numerically for the amplified spontaneous emission (ASE) generated in the setup. Two stage simulation was carried out by sequentially applying the results of the single stage calculations.

As illustrated by the solid lines in Figure 2, the simulations agree well with the experimental data. Simulations of G are within 1.5 dB of the data for $P_{in} > -25$ dBm. Simulations of NF agree with the data to within 2 dB. These results validate the accuracy of our simulations for both high gain and highly saturated operating regimes.

Data illustrating the variation in output power P_{out} as a function of 1567 nm fiber laser pump power P_p are shown in Figure 5. For these data, P_{in} was set to between +1.3 and +2.2 dBm to saturate the amplifier and P_p was varied from 0.3 W to 3.2 W. For the OFS/OFS configuration, a maximum slope

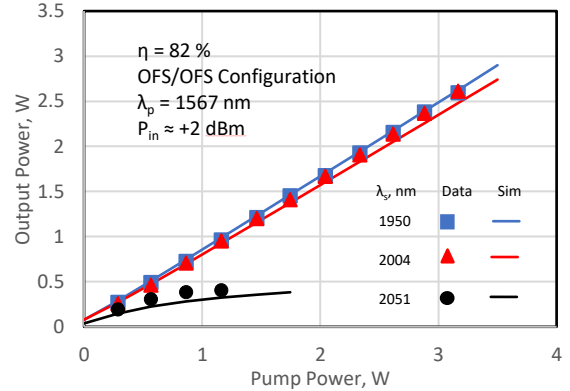


Figure 5. Saturated P_{out} vs. P_p for the OFS/OFS tandem amplifier.

efficiency of 82% was observed at $\lambda_s = 2004$ and 1952 nm, corresponding to maximum output powers at these wavelengths of 2.60 W. The slope efficiency is defined as $\Delta P_{out} / \Delta P_p$. A reduced output power of 0.4 W was achieved at 2051 nm because of lower slope efficiency and the onset of lasing. Figure 6 illustrates the long term stability

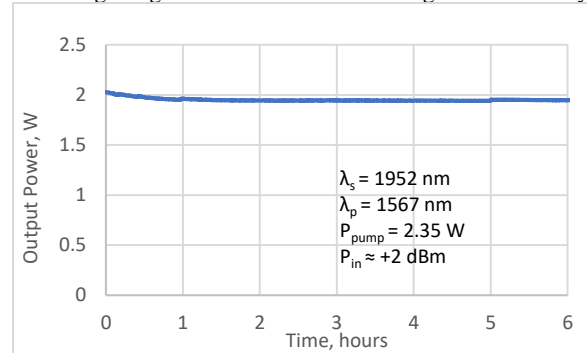


Figure 6. Long term stability of the TDFA output for $P_p = 2.43$ W.

of P_{out} at 1952 nm and $P_p = 2.43$ W over a period of 6 hours. The variation in P_{out} over this time period was less than 4%. No fiber nonlinear behavior such as Raman or Brillouin scattering was observed in our experiments.

Comparison of the data and simulations shows agreement to better than 0.5 dB for all experimental signal wavelengths as illustrated by the solid lines in Figure 5. These results validate the performance of our simulator as a function of signal wavelength.

Slope efficiency data as a function of λ_s for the OFS/OFS and OFS/IXBlue setups are shown in Figure 7. Simulated slope efficiencies, given by the solid lines in Figure 7, agree well with the experimental data for all the measured signal wavelengths. The simulations indicate that high slope efficiencies of $>70\%$ can be expected from 1900

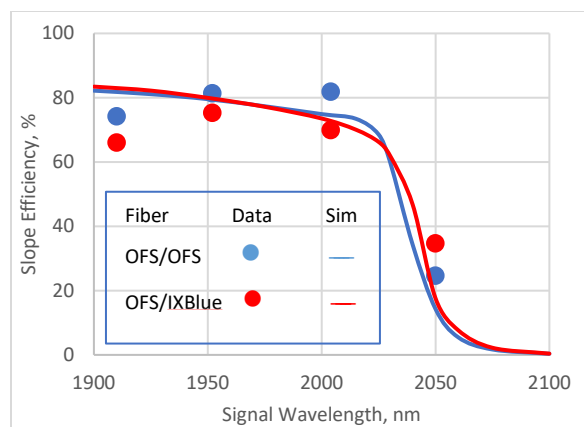


Figure 7. Slope efficiency as a function of λ_s for the two tandem configurations.

nm to 2020 nm. The simulations also show that the single clad fiber can deliver significant output power at 2051 nm with reduced efficiency. We attribute this behavior to the presence of lower wavelength ASE and to reabsorption at lower wavelengths.

In Figure 8 we contrast experimental output spectra obtained for the two TDFA amplifiers, for saturated input signals of +2.1 dBm at 1952 nm and fiber laser pump power at 1567 nm of 3.2 W. These data are taken under the same conditions and yield optical signal to noise ratios (OSNR) of 57 dB/0.1 nm for both configurations. The spectra observed for both setups exhibit small differences in the wavelength region below 1950 nm. We believe this is caused by the different doping of the two fibers. Nevertheless, the operating wavelength regions and bandwidths for the OFS and IXBlue fibers are largely equivalent. We attribute this similarity to the low concentration of Tm in the two fibers where the scattering and ion-ion interactions can be neglected.

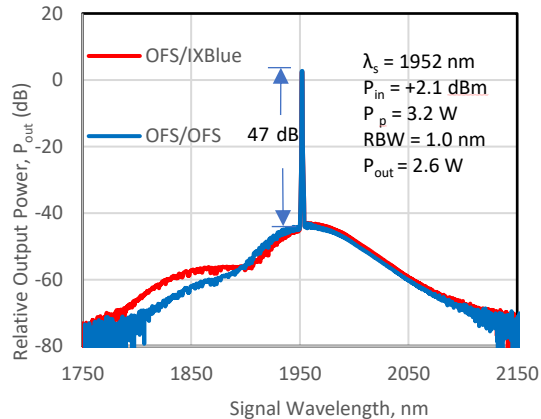


Figure 8. Saturated output spectra for the two tandem configurations.

Figure 9 compares the experimental output spectrum for the OFS/IXBlue configuration with the results of our steady-state simulations. We find that the simulations predict the

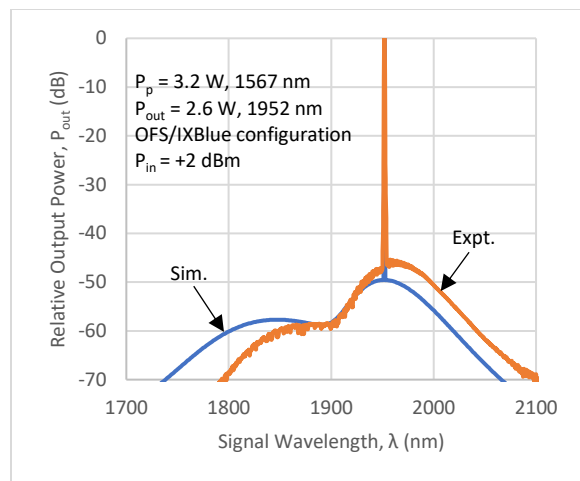


Figure 9. Comparison of experimental and simulated output spectra for the OFS/IXBlue configuration.

experimental data relatively well. At low wavelengths <1900 nm, we believe the differences between data and simulation are caused by the wavelength dependence in the passive components and the non-monochromatic spectrum of the single frequency laser source.

IV. DISCUSSION

The high measured internal gain of >55 dB represents a significant improvement over results previously reported [2,3] for single stage TDFAs. Such a high small signal gain is promising for preamplifier, repeater, and low noise applications.

The high observed slope efficiency of 82% and output power of 2.6 W also show significant improvement over previously reported performance [2,3]. The experimental SNR of 57 dB/0.1 nm for a saturated amplifier output is important for applications such as booster amplifiers.

The usable operating optical bandwidths of the tandem TDFAs, with the criterion of 10 dB down from the spontaneous emission peak (Figure 8), are estimated to be 122 nm for the OFS/OFS configuration and 130 nm for the OFS/IXBlue configuration. These values agree with previous work [2,3] and are fully consistent with the simulated slope efficiencies in Figure 7.

Our steady state simulations of tandem TDFA performance agree well with the experimental data, over a range of P_{in} from -30 dBm to +2 dBm, for measurements of G , NF , and P_{out} . This agreement covers the measured wavelength range of 1910 - 2051 nm. Future work will extend the studied wavelength range toward lower wavelengths. The good agreement between experiment and theory confirms that our simulator is a useful tool for the design of tandem high gain, high power TDFAs.

Finally, we note that both the OFS and IXBlue configurations of the tandem TDFA exhibit similar performance, both experimentally and in simulation, confirming [1-3] that we can employ multiple commercial sources of Tm-doped fiber in our simulation and design of high performance tandem optical amplifiers.

V. SUMMARY

We have reported the design and experimental performance of a tandem single clad TDFA, in-band pumped around 1560 nm and operating in the 1900 – 2050 nm signal band. Small signal gains >55 dB, output powers as high as 2.6 W, and small signal noise figures as low as 3.2 dB were experimentally measured. Slope efficiencies as high as 82% were also observed, and an SNR of 57 dB/0.1 nm was demonstrated with output powers >2 W. Comparison of our data with steady state simulations yielded good agreement, thereby validating our model for high gain and high saturated output powers from the tandem two-stage TDFA over a wavelength range of 1952-2051 nm. Our design is appropriate for high transmit power, preamplifier, and repeater applications in the 2 μ m region.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to OFS and IXBlue for the Thulium-doped silica fibers, and to Eblana Photonics for the single frequency source lasers in the 2000 nm band.

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