Two-dimensional modeling RF glow discharge at low pressure

Abstract. This paper presents a contribution to understand the fundamental properties of RF glow discharge based on numerical modeling. A fluid model with two dimensional based on the first three moments of Boltzmann equation, coupled with Poisson's equation is used in this work. This equation system is written in cylindrical coordinates following the geometric shape of a plasma reactor. Our transport equation system is discretized using the finite volume approach and resolved by the exponential implicit scheme. In this work, we are used the time splitting method to resolve our system. The model allows us to obtain the axial and radial distributions parameters of the discharge at different times of Radio-Frequency cycle (RF). The principal parameters are the electronic density, ionic density, electric potential, electric field and electronic temperature.

Introduction

RF glow discharges are used in a wide variety of applications in modern science and technology [1]. One of the largest and most important fields of application is the microelectronics industry, where RF glow discharges are used for etching of surfaces to form topographical surface features, as well as for depositing thin films. Similarly, glow discharges are used extensively in the materials processing industries for deposition of various thin films, coatings, and surface layers, and may additionally be employed for surface cleaning, pretreatment, and modification processes. Our model is based on the first three moments of Boltzmann's equations for ions and electrons, coupled to Poisson's equation. By considering the geometry of a plasma reactor, the transport equations are written in cylindrical coordinates.

In this work, we consider that RF glow discharge arises between two metal electrodes circular, plane and parallel. The two-dimensional transport equations are transformed into one-dimensional equations (drift-diffusion equation), while a time splitting approach [8,9] is adopted.

Model formulation

In this work, the model used to describe the kinetics of the charged particles for the RF glow discharge is the second moment transport model. It is based on the first three moments resolution of the Boltzmann equation. These three moments are continuity, momentum transfer and energy equations, which are strongly coupled with the Poisson's equation by considering the local electric field approximation for ions and the local mean energy approximation for electrons.

In the present model, the transport equations derived from the first three moments of Boltzmann's equation are written only for electrons and positive ions.

The two-dimensional equations of the electron and positive ion density are described by continuity equations expressed in cylindrical geometry [7,8,9,10].

(1) \[
\frac{\partial n_e}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial \Phi_{ee}}{\partial z} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial (r \Phi_{er})}{\partial r} = S_e
\]

(2) \[
\frac{\partial n_i}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial \Phi_{ei}}{\partial z} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial (r \Phi_{ir})}{\partial r} = S_i
\]

In the source term, only the ionization is considered, and other reactions are neglected, because we think that ionization is the main process in the RF glow discharge [2,12].

The source term \( S_e \) and \( S_i \) are expressed as a function of the electron temperature \( T_e \) in an Arrhenius form as shown [3,12].

(7) \[
S_e = S_i = k_i N_e \exp(-E_i / K_b T_e)
\]

where \( k_i \) is the pre-exponential coefficient, \( E_i \) is the ionization activation energy, \( N \) is the density of the neutral gas and \( K_b \) is the Boltzmann constant.

The electron temperature is calculated by the energy electron equation given by:

(8) \[
\frac{\partial n_e}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial \Phi_{ee}}{\partial z} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial (r \Phi_{er})}{\partial r} = S_e
\]

where \( n_e = n_e e_e \) is the electron energy density and \( \Phi_e \) is the electronic energy density flux.

The flux of electron energy density can be written as:

(9) \[
\Phi_{ee} = -\frac{5}{3} e_e \mu_e E_z - \frac{5}{2} D_e \frac{\partial n_e}{\partial z}
\]
The source term \( S_e \) is represented by two terms, an ohmic heating term and a collision loss term given by:

\[
S_e = -e \Phi_e E - \sum_j S_j H_j
\]

where the summation is over the reactions involving inelastic electron collisions and \( H_j \) is the electron energy loss per collision. This summation included ionization and excitation. Where the term excitation is given by:

\[
S_e = k_{ex} N_e \exp(-E_{ex}/K_T)
\]

Poisson’s equation is resolved in cylindrical geometry for the determination of the electric field and the discharge potential.

\[
\frac{1}{\varepsilon_0} \frac{\partial^2 \Phi}{\partial z^2} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} \left( \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial \Phi}{\partial r} \right) = e (n_e - n_i)
\]

where \( V \) is the electric potential, \( e \) is the elementary charge, and \( \varepsilon_0 \) is the permittivity of free space.

The axial \( E_z \) and radial \( E_r \) components of the electric field strength are then found from the partial derivatives of the potential function, and are given by

\[
E_z = -\frac{\partial V}{\partial z} \quad \text{and} \quad E_r = -\frac{\partial V}{\partial r}
\]

**Boundary conditions**

The use of boundary conditions for the above mentioned transport equations is essential for the description of our problem.

In the model, boundary conditions were as follows:

At \( z = 0 \) (surface of left electrode)

\[
V = -V_{rf} \sin(2\pi ft)
\]

\[
\Phi_e = -\gamma \Phi_+
\]

\[
\frac{\partial n_e}{\partial z} = 0
\]

\[
T_e = T_{ec}
\]

At \( z = L \) (surface of right electrode)

\[
V = 0
\]

\[
\Phi_e = -\gamma \Phi_+
\]

\[
\frac{\partial n_e}{\partial z} = 0
\]

\[
T_e = T_{ec}
\]

Here, \( \gamma \) is the secondary electron emission coefficient, \( V_{rf} \) is the peak radio-frequency voltage, \( L \) is the inter-electrodes spacing and \( f \) is the excitation frequency. The boundary conditions on the electron temperature is difficult to specify [11]. A simplified constant temperature condition was used in the present study.

At the symmetrical axis and the dielectric wall, we used mainly Neumann boundary conditions:

\[
\frac{\partial n_e}{\partial r} = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{\partial n_i}{\partial z} = 0 \]

for the gradient particle densities, \( \frac{\partial V}{\partial r} = 0 \) for the electric potential and \( \frac{\partial T_e}{\partial r} = 0 \) for the electron temperature.

The boundary conditions used in our 2D model are recapitulated in Fig.1.

**Numerical methods**

The problem consists of determining the electron and positive ion density, electric potential, electric field and electron temperature as function of axial and radial position at different times of radio-frequency cycle.

For the charged particles, equations (1) and (2) have to be solved. Equation (8) for electron energy has the same form, by changing particle density \( n_e \) with electron mean energy density \( n^e \) and correctly expressing the source term \( S_{ex} \). Thus the resolution of the transport equations is done in the same way.

Thus the form of the transport equation to be solved is expressed in cylindrical geometry as follows:

\[
\frac{\partial n}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial (r \Phi_n)}{\partial r} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial (r \Phi_e)}{\partial r} = S
\]

In this work, we use the method of the fractional steps [12] to solve the equation (23). This method consists in replacing the two-dimensional equations by a system of one-dimensional equations in the object to reduce considerably the calculation time in each direction of space.

The discretization method of the equations system above is based on the finite difference scheme.

The system of equations becomes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\frac{n_i^{n+1}}{\Delta t} - \frac{n_i^n}{\Delta t} &= S_{i,j} \\
\frac{n_i^{n+1}}{\Delta t} + \frac{\Phi_{i+1/2,j}}{\Delta z} - \frac{\Phi_{i-1/2,j}}{\Delta z} &= 0
\end{align*}
\]
The drift-diffusion fluxes are discretized using the Scharfetter-Gummel exponential scheme [6].

\[
\Phi_{i,j+1/2} = \frac{D}{\Delta x} \left( \frac{R_1}{1 - \exp(R_1 \Delta z)} - \frac{R_2 \exp(R_2 \Delta z)}{1 - \exp(R_2 \Delta z)} \right)
\]

\[
\Phi_{i,j-1/2} = \frac{D}{\Delta x} \left( \frac{R_1}{1 - \exp(R_1 \Delta z)} - \frac{R_2 \exp(R_2 \Delta z)}{1 - \exp(R_2 \Delta z)} \right)
\]

Where:

\[
R_1 = \frac{E_{i+1/2,j}}{D} \Delta z, \quad R_2 = \frac{E_{i+1/2,j}}{D} \Delta z
\]

\[
R_3 = \frac{E_{i+1/2,j}}{D} \Delta z, \quad R_4 = \frac{E_{i+1/2,j}}{D} \Delta z
\]

Many numerical techniques exist for the solution of such sets of two-point equations, varying in their efficiency and simplicity. In this work, we used the Thomas algorithm to calculate the density \( n_{i,j} \).

The Poisson's equation (13) is most often discretized by using central finite-difference scheme.

\[
\frac{\partial^2 V}{\partial z^2} = \frac{2V_{i,j} - 2V_{i+1,j} - V_{i+2,j}}{\Delta z^2} + \frac{2V_{i+1,j} - 2V_{i,j} + V_{i+2,j}}{\Delta z^2}
\]

With:

\[
\frac{\partial^2 V}{\partial r^2} = -\frac{V_{i,j+1} - V_{i,j-1}}{2 \Delta r}
\]

The resolution of the Poisson's equation is solved using iterative methods from the Successive Over-Relaxation (SOR) combined by Thomas algorithm for the tridiagonal matrix [5].

**Results and discussions**

An argon-like discharge was studied as an example of an electropositive discharge.

The following table gathers all the source data and the transport parameters used in our two dimensional modeling.

*Fig.2* shows the electron and ion densities distribution in the gap on the symmetric axis (r=0 cm) for 25% and 75% of radio-frequency cycle. At 25% RF cycle, the left electrode is at its peak negative potential. The electron density is modulated substantially near the electrodes, with the electrons repelled by the momentary cathode and attracted by the momentary anode (at 75% RF cycle, left electrode). However electron density profiles which are flatter in the bulk (plasma) can be obtained by increasing the gas pressure or the electrode spacing.

The ion density is not modulated by the RF since the ions are too massive to respond to the rapidly changing field.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( L ) (cm)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R ) (cm)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( P ) (torr)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( V_0 ) (V)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( f ) (MHz)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( T_{\text{oe}} ) (K)</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( N ) ( \mu ) ( V ) ( \text{cm} ) ( \text{s} ) ( ^{-1} )</td>
<td>8.5 ( \times ) 10^{21}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( N ) ( \mu ) ( V ) ( \text{cm} ) ( \text{s} ) ( ^{-1} )</td>
<td>3.6 ( \times ) 10^{19}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( k_i ) (cm (^3) / s)</td>
<td>1.0 ( \times ) 10^{-7}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( E_i ) (eV)</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( H_i ) (eV)</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( k_{\text{ex}} ) (cm (^3) / s)</td>
<td>5.0 ( \times ) 10^{-3}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( E_{\text{ex}} ) (eV)</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( H_{\text{ex}} ) (eV)</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \gamma )</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( T_{\text{ex}} ) (eV)</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The electric potential and electric field distribution in the gap are shows in *Fig.3* and *Fig.4*. The potential oscillates according to the applied sinusoidal waveform, at the left electrode (z=0 cm), while the right electrode (z=3 cm) is always at ground (zero) potential. The potential of the plasma is seen to be more positive than the potential of either electrode at any time of RF cycle.

However, a sharp potential drop is seen in the plasma sheath, especially when the electrode is the momentary cathode (25% RF cycle at z=0 cm, and 75% RF cycle at z=3 cm).

The electric field is rather weak in the pulk plasma, since the plasma is a nearly equipotential volume. However, relatively strong electric fields develop in the sheath, and the sheath electric field is severely modulated by the RF.
Inter-electrodes gap (cm)  
0.0  0.5  1.0  1.5  2.0  2.5  3.0

Electric potential (V)  
-40  -20  0  20  40  60  80  100

25% of RF Cycle
75% of RF Cycle

Fig. 3: Electric potential on the symmetric axis at 25% and 75% RF cycle.

Inter-electrodes gap (cm)  
0.0  0.5  1.0  1.5  2.0  2.5  3.0

Axial electric field (V cm⁻¹)  
-200  -150  -100  -50  0  50  100  150  200

25% of RF Cycle
75% of RF Cycle

Fig. 4: Axial electric field on the symmetric axis at 25% and 75% RF cycle.

Fig. 5 shows the electron temperature distribution in the gap at 25% and 75% RF cycle. We observe much higher temperatures near the plasma-sheath interface during the cathodic part of the RF cycle, since the presence of the relatively intense electric field. In the plasma electron temperature is lower and nearly time independent.

Inter-electrodes gap (cm)  
0.0  0.5  1.0  1.5  2.0  2.5  3.0

Electron temperature (eV)  
0  1  2  3  4  5  6

25% of RF Cycle
75% of RF Cycle

Fig. 5: Electron temperature on the symmetric axis at 25% and 75% RF cycle.

Figs. 6, 7 and 8 represent the distribution axial and radial of charged particle at 25% and 75% RF cycle. The 2D distribution of electric potential, axial and radial electric field at 25% and 75% RF cycle are shown respectively in figs. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14.

Figs. 15 and 16 are the plot 2D of electron temperature at 25% and 75% of the RF cycle.

Fig. 6: 2D distribution of electron density at 25% RF cycle.

Fig. 7: 2D distribution of electron density at 75% RF cycle.

Fig. 8: 2D distribution of ion density at 25% and 75% RF cycle.

Fig. 8: 2D distribution of ion density at 25% and 75% RF cycle.
Fig. 9: 2D distribution of electric potential at 25% RF cycle.

Fig. 10: 2D distribution of electric potential at 75% RF cycle.

Fig. 11: 2D distribution of axial electric field at 25% RF cycle.

Fig. 12: 2D distribution of axial electric field at 75% RF cycle.

Fig. 13: 2D distribution of radial electric field at 25% RF cycle.

Fig. 14: 2D distribution of radial electric field at 75% RF cycle.
Fig.15: 2D distribution of electron temperature at 25% RF cycle.

Fig.16: 2D distribution of electron temperature at 75% RF cycle.

Conclusion
In this paper, a fluid model with two dimensional was used to analyse charged particle transport in low pressure radio-frequency (RF) discharges. The algorithm based on finite difference method for the spatial and radial discretization coupled to the time splitting technical. This technical is a good approach to resolve the two-dimensional transport equation of the radio-frequency glow discharge model. An argon-like discharge was examined as an example of an electropositive discharge.

Nomenclature

- \( n_e, n_i \) : Electron, ion and energy number density
- \( \Phi_e, \Phi_i \) : Electron and Ion flux
- \( S_e, S_i \) : Source term for Electron, ion and energy
- \( V \) : Electric potential
- \( E \) : Electric field
- \( \varepsilon_e \) : Electron energy
- \( T_e \) : Electron temperature
- \( \mu_e, \mu_i \) : Electron and Ion Mobility
- \( D_e, D_i \) : Electron and ion diffusivity
- \( \gamma \) : Coefficient for secondary electron emission
- \( N \) : Neutral species density
- \( e \) : Elementary charge

\( \varepsilon_0 \) : Free space permittivity
\( L \) : Longitudinal inter-electrode gap
\( r \) : Radius of the electrodes
\( \Delta z \) : Axial spatial step
\( \Delta r \) : Radial spatial step
\( \Delta t \) : Temporal step
\( T \) : Period

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