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Determination of magnetic anisotropies and miscut angles in epitaxial thin films on vicinal (111) substrate by the ferromagnetic resonance

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ABSTRACT

A method for determining magnetic anisotropy parameters of a thin single-crystal film on vicinal (111) substrate as well as substrate miscut angles from angular dependence of ferromagnetic resonance field has been proposed. The method is based on the following: (i) a new approach for the solution of the system of nonlinear equations for equilibrium and resonance conditions; (ii) a new expression of the objective function for the fitting problem. The study of the iron silicide films grown on vicinal Si(111) substrates with different miscut angles confirmed the efficiency of the method. The proposed method can be easily generalized to determine parameters of single-crystal films grown on substrates with an arbitrary cut.

1. Introduction

Epitaxial ferromagnetic films and various multilayer structures grown on single-crystal substrates are widely studied because of prospects of their application in spintronic devices [1,2]. Particular attention has recently been focused on the study of magnetic films grown on the vicinal cuts of Si(111) single-crystal substrates. For these substrates, methods of creating stepwise surfaces providing a high accuracy of the step width and step height are well developed [3,4]. This offers the possibility to control the magnetic properties of the films in a wide range by varying the miscut angle of the vicinal Si(111) surface in a narrow range [5,6]. In this context, methods for precise determining magnetic anisotropy parameters of the thin films [7] assume greater importance, among which ferromagnetic resonance (FMR) is a convenient and powerful technique [8].

Recently, we have pointed to the high sensitivity of the FMR technique to small miscut angles of a vicinal (111) surface in single-crystal thin films [9]. The possibility of azimuthal and polar miscut angles determination from FMR field angular dependences was demonstrated. The aim of this work is to describe in more detail our developed method for determining magnetic anisotropy parameters of a thin film and substrate miscut angles as well as the new approaches realized in it.

2. Theoretical background

Let us consider a thin film in an external in-plane magnetic field **H**. The equilibrium direction of the magnetization **M** and the ferromagnetic resonance condition for a thin-film sample can be obtained from the free energy density expression of the system

$$F(\theta, \phi) = -M_s H \cos(\phi - \phi_H)\sin\theta + F^a(\theta, \phi), \tag{1}$$

where the first term of Eq. (1) is the Zeeman energy contribution, and the second term is the magnetic anisotropy energy contribution. In the coordinate system xyz where the z axis coincides with the film normal, θ denotes the polar angle between the magnetization and the z axis, while φ and φ_H correspond to the azimuthal angles of **M** and **H** respectively, measured with respect to the x axis. M_s is the saturation magnetization. For a single-crystal thin ferromagnetic film deposited on a vicinal (111) surface with a small miscut angle δ (a model of the film is shown in Fig. 1), the density of the magnetic anisotropy energy can be written as [9]

$$
\begin{aligned}
F^a(\theta, \phi) = {}& 2\pi M_s^2 \cos^2\theta - K_\perp \cos^2\theta - \\
& - K_1 \sin\theta \cos(\phi - \phi_1) - K_2 \sin^2\theta \cos^2(\phi - \phi_2) + \\
& + K_4\left(\tfrac{1}{3}\cos^4\theta + \tfrac{1}{4}\sin^4\theta\right) - \tfrac{K_4\sqrt{2}}{3}\sin^3\theta\cos\theta\cdot\sin 3(\phi - \phi_4) + \\
& + \delta\tfrac{K_4}{6}\left\{
\begin{array}{c}
\sin 2\theta\cdot(7\sin^2\theta - 4)\cdot\sin(\phi - \phi_4 + \xi) + \\
+\sqrt{2}\,\sin^2\theta\cdot(7\sin^2\theta - 6)\cdot\cos 2(\phi - \phi_4 - \xi/2) - \\
-\sqrt{2}\,\sin^4\theta\cdot\cos 4(\phi - \phi_4 + \xi/4)
\end{array}
\right\}
\end{aligned}
\tag{2}
$$

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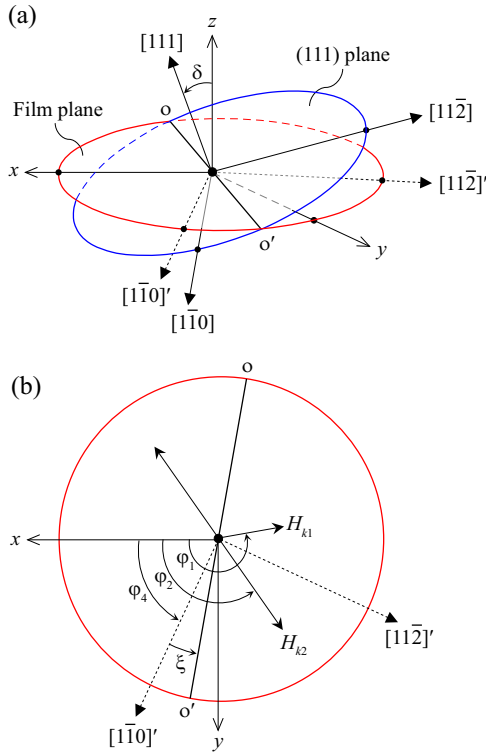 *E-mail address:* platon.solovev@gmail.com (P.N. Solovev).

Fig. 1. The model and the orientation scheme of the crystallographic plane (111) of the single-crystal film with respect to its surface (a). Notations used in the phenomenological model of the thin film (top view) (b).

Here, the first term describes the energy contribution from the demagnetizing field of the film. The second term describes the energy of the uniaxial perpendicular anisotropy with the constant $K_\perp$. This magnetic anisotropy is associated with the symmetry breaking at the film surface and at the interface between the film and the substrate [7]. The following two terms of Eq. (2) describe the energies of the unidirectional (with constant K_1) and the uniaxial (with constant K_2) magnetic anisotropies, which fields H_{k1} and H_{k2} lie in plane of the film and are directed at angles φ_1 and φ_2 respectively (Fig. 1b). The remaining terms of the expression are related to the magnetocrystalline cubic anisotropy with the constant K_4 and the orientation φ_4 of the $[1\bar{1}0]'$ crystallographic direction (see Fig. 1).

In low-dimensional systems such as thin films, a shape anisotropy energy is usually the dominant term in the total magnetic anisotropy energy. The shape anisotropy is the main reason of in-plane orientation of the magnetization in the sample. The reorientation of the spontaneous magnetization from the film plane to the normal because of the surface anisotropy is possible only for ultrathin films with thicknesses of a few atomic layers [10]. Therefore, when the film is magnetized by the in-plane external magnetic field, the equilibrium angle θ equals $\pi/2$.

Using the Smith and Suhl formula [11,12], the ferromagnetic resonance equation and equilibrium condition can be written as follows

$$\left[H_R\cos(\phi_M - \phi_H) + \frac{F_{\phi\phi}^a}{M_s}\right] \times \left[H_R\cos(\phi_M - \phi_H) + \frac{F_{\theta\theta}^a}{M_s}\right] - \frac{F_{\theta\phi}^{a^2}}{M_s^2} = \left(\frac{\omega_0}{\gamma}\right)^2,$$
(3)

$$H_R\sin(\phi_M - \phi_H) + F_\phi^a/M_s = 0,$$
(4)

where $f_0 = \omega_0/2\pi$ is the microwave pump frequency, and γ is the gyromagnetic ratio. The partial derivatives of $F_{\phi\phi}^a$, $F_{\theta\theta}^a$, $F_{\theta\phi}^a$, and F_ϕ^a have to be taken at the equilibrium position of the magnetization vector, that is, for angles $\theta = \pi/2$ and $\varphi = \varphi_M$, for which the total free energy density F has its minimum value.
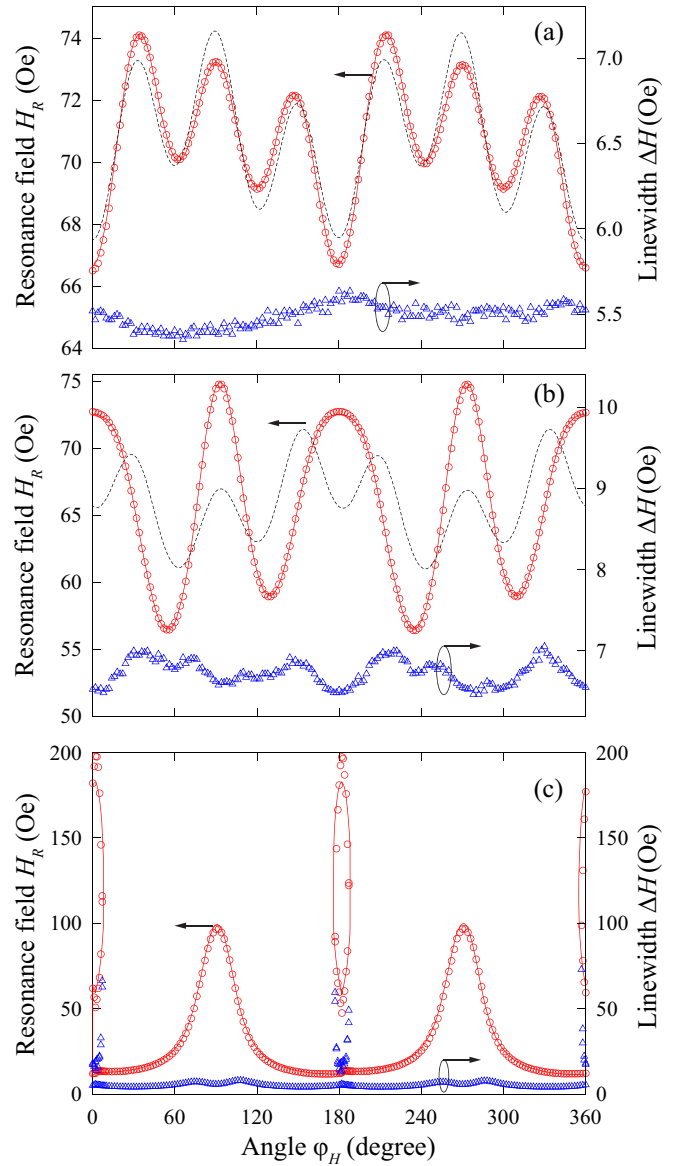

Fig. 2. Dependences of the resonance filed H_R and FMR linewidth ΔH on the sweeping magnetic field direction φ_H: (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2, (c) sample 3. Symbols correspond to the experimental measurements. Solid lines are the theoretical calculations for the model of a film on the vicinal surface with $\delta \neq 0$, while dashed lines show the theoretical results for the case of singular surface ($\delta = 0°$).

In practice, methods for determination of model parameters by means of FMR are based on one or other numerical procedure that allows to approximate the experimental angular dependence $H_R^*(\phi_H)$ by the theoretical curve $H_R(\phi_H)$, which is calculated from the nonlinear Eqs. (3) and (4). The practical realization of such a procedure faces two problems that influence both the accuracy and the reliability of the obtained results.

The first problem is directly related to the realization of an algorithm for simultaneous solution of the nonlinear equations for equilibrium and resonance conditions. When modeling the resonance field prior knowledge of the external field is required to calculate the equilibrium direction of **M**. The solution of this problem with a large number of unknown parameters for the considered here model leads not only to a long calculation time but also to an emergence of errors that are difficult to control. We suggest a quite simple solution of this problem, which can be used in all cases when a magnetization vector and an external magnetic field lie in the same plane. Let us first rewrite the system of the nonlinear Eqs. (3)–(4) as