

A Novel Ultra Low Power, High Impedance Current Mirror Circuit for Biasing Operational Amplifier in Sub-threshold Region

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Abstract - In this paper, we propose MOSFET model in region II (saturation) of a subthreshold region (where current becomes nearly constant with respect to drain-source voltage for a fixed gate-source voltage as shown in figure 1). We also propose designs of current mirrors operating in region II of subthreshold region for biomedical applications circuits like pacemakers, retinal implants, neural recording systems which are to be implanted within chest, eye and skull respectively. These circuits also find use in emerging electronics devices such as palmtops, laptops etc. The most important property of these circuits is extremely low power consumption in order to increase battery life time yet it has structural simplicity. The proposed current mirror has a power dissipation ranging from 4nW to 1000nW for an input current ranging from 1nA to 250nA. Its output resistance is found to be of the order of 108 Ω to 1010 Ω . The minimum source voltage (V_{dd} or V_{source}) required to bias the proposed mirror varies between 550 mV to 875mV for the input current varying between 1nA to 250nA with W/L RATIO of all MOS transistors being kept at 1. The minimum source voltage required further decreases if we increase W/L RATIO of MOS transistors. The current mirror shows extremely low temperature sensitivity of 0.031ppm/degree C and it has a very high resistance to source voltage fluctuations in comparison to the best current mirror circuits reported till date. The operations of the current mirror have been validated through simulations in Cadence using 180nm TAIWAN SEMICONDUCTOR MANUFACTURING COMPANY (TSMC) technology. The purpose of this paper is to model a MOSFET in region II of the subthreshold region and to use that model to show that a topologically simple current mirror designed in the subthreshold region works better than highly complex, saturation region current mirrors in terms of output resistance, matching accuracy and variation with temperature.

I. INTRODUCTION

The equation of current in the subthreshold exponential region (i.e. region I as shown in figure 1) is given as

$$I_d = I_0 S \exp(k(V_{gs}/V_{th}) - \exp(1-k)(V_{bs}/V_{th}) (1 - \exp(-V_{ds}/V_{th})) \quad (1)$$

Where $V_{th} = KT/q$ is the thermal voltage, I_0 is a positive constant current, S is the transistor size factor ($S = W/L$ RATIO, where W is the transistor width and L is its length), k is a technology dependent positive parameter, V_{gs} is the gate to source voltage, V_{bs} is the body (or bulk) to source voltage and V_{ds} is the drain to source voltage [1]. In the circuit the V_{gs} and V_{ds} values were made same for M3 and M2, thus causing I_{out} equal to I_{in} .

Figure 1 shows a variation of I_d with V_{ds} and equation 1 gives the variation of current (I_d) with V_{ds} in region I. In this paper we propose a current mirror in which all the MOSFETs are biased in region II (saturation) of subthreshold region thus making it an ultra low power current mirror.

This paper has been divided into 7 sections. Section 2 gives the overview of the characteristics of a typical current mirror and schematic & performance parameters of the proposed current mirror. A MOS transistor operating in the subthreshold region has been characterized in section 3. Section 4 gives details of the design of the current reference in the subthreshold region. Section 5 gives the simulation results of the current mirror while sections 6 and 7 give the conclusions and references, respectively.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF TYPICAL CURRENT MIRROR CIRCUITS

2.1 Typical Current mirror circuits

Figure 2 shows the traditional current mirror. Since the output impedance of the traditional current mirror is not infinite, the variation of the output node voltage V_{ds} (or the supply voltage) will influence the output current I_{out} . The sensitivity of I_{out} to variations in V_{ds} is a drawback in the applications of the current mirror

circuits. Also the output current is not exactly equal to input current due to λV_{ds} (λ -channel length modulation parameter) mismatch in transistors M1 and M2.

The cascoded current mirror was proposed to increase the output impedance and improve the current transfer ratio (i.e. the ratio of output current to input current). Even though this mirror improves output impedance and has a good current transfer ratio, the output voltage swing (or the minimum required source voltage is increased) is reduced due to the stacking of transistors.

The current mirror shown in Fig.3 shows increased output impedance and better current transfer ratio as shown by Kuo-Hsing Cheng, Chi-Che Chen and Chun-Fu Chung in "Accurate current mirror with high output impedance" [2]. Although this current mirror has high output impedance and matches output current to input current to a great extent, it also consumes a lot of power and occupies a large silicon area making it unsuitable for use in low power circuits.

2.2 Proposed current mirror

The schematic of the proposed current mirror is shown in Fig.4. The complete circuit operates in the subthreshold region and has a very simple structure. It also uses less number of MOS transistors thus occupying minimum silicon area. The MOS transistors M2 and M3 are used for current mirroring operation. M4 and M5 are used to match the V_{ds} (drain to source voltage) of M2 and M3 in order to avoid Lambda effect and have better current matching accuracy than a circuit with lambda effect. M1 simply acts as a passive load.

Since the subthreshold currents are very small, the V_{dd} or the source voltage required is very small (generally less than 1 volt). From simulations, the observed power dissipated in the circuit is in the range of 4nW to 1000nW (it varies with the current to be mirrored). Since the output current varies negligibly with the output voltage the output resistance is very high (figure 5), of the order of 108 Ω to 1010 Ω (These values were calculated by taking ratio of instantaneous values of drain to source voltage V_{ds} to drain current I_d and then taking average of these values for different V_{ds} , I_d and V_{gs} values). The output resistance values were determined by taking the average of three V_{ds} by I_d values measured for a particular output current. The minimum source voltage (V_{dd}) required to bias the proposed mirror varies between 550 mV to 875mV for the input current varying between 1nA to 250nA with W/L RATIO of all MOSFET transistors kept at 1. These values were measured by varying the V_{dd} and measuring the V_{dd} at which the output current came within 10% of the input current.

The minimum source voltage required further decreases if we increase W/L RATIO of MOSFETs. The current mirror shows extremely low temperature sensitivity of 0.031ppm/degree C and it has a very high resistance to voltage fluctuations required to bias the load in comparison to best current mirror circuits reported till date. All simulation results are discussed in detail in section 5 of this paper.

For matched transistors, current transfer ratio is 1 even with a wide variation of power supply voltage. M1 can also be biased using two diode connected MOS transistors. Also all the PMOS can be replaced by NMOS to get a NMOS current mirror.

III. BEHAVIOR AND MODELING OF A MOSFET IN THE SUBTHRESHOLD REGION

In order to validate our simulated value of output resistance of the proposed current mirror circuit, we have obtained the value theoretically using small signal analysis.

Since in our proposed current mirror circuit, MOSFETS M2, M3, M4 and M5 operate in region II (saturation) where the dynamic resistance is high, we have interpolated the current-voltage relation (equation 1 which is defined for region I) in this region using Newton's Divided Difference technique (to get equation 2 for region II) (We took the I_d values for 2 values of V_{ds} and found a and b and then took three such a and b values for three V_{gs} and took their average). The circuit used to collect data for this interpolation is shown in figure 6. We have tabulated the data of the MOSFET of figure 6 that is biased in region II of subthreshold in Table 1.

Using the data given in Table 1, the subthreshold current equation in region II is modeled as

$$I_d = P \exp^{kV_{gs}/V_{th}} (a + bV_{ds}) \quad (2)$$

The exponential factor has been kept to consider the exponential dependence of current on V_{gs} . Here $P = I_0 \exp(1-k)(V_{bs}/V_{th})$, b and a are constants. In equation 2 we have neglected the exponential dependence of current on V_{ds} as for large V_{ds} (in region II) $1 - e^{-V_{ds}/V_{th}}$ is nearly 1. In equation 1 if we neglect the V_{ds} term we get $I_{ds} = P \exp kV_{gs}/V_{th}$, from here we get equation 2 by interpolating this equation in region II (saturation) of subthreshold region. More accurate models can be obtained by interpolating equation 2 to higher degrees of V_{ds} . We solved equation 2 for values of a and b using Newton's divided difference method for three different values of V_{gs} and then took an average of the three values of a, b. The values of a, b obtained are 0.89887 and 0.04185 Volt⁻¹ respectively.

Then using the definitions of small signal parameters, MOSFET subthreshold trans-conductance (g_m)

$$(g_m = \frac{\partial I_d}{\partial V_{gs}}) \text{ and output resistance } (r_o) (r_o = \frac{1}{\frac{\partial I_d}{\partial V_{ds}}}) \text{ for a current of } 250\text{nA} \text{ are found to be}$$

5.2082microA/V and 95.579Mohm respectively.

Then replacing each MOSFET in the current mirror circuit with its model as shown in figure 7 and using the g_m and r_o values calculated above, we have obtained the approximate output resistance of current mirror as $R_{out} = 2r_o$ (where r_o is the output resistance of a MOSFET found earlier) which evaluates to 191.194Mohm. Thus a close matching is obtained between the simulated (108 Ω to 1010 Ω) and theoretical values of R_{out} .

IV. CURRENT REFERENCE

Current references (CR) are used in all analog systems to provide stable and temperature-independent current. In this section a simple CR designed entirely in the subthreshold region is proposed. This CR is to be used in the proposed current mirror in place of the ideal current source. The schematic of the CR is presented in figure 8. The reference current of the proposed current mirror is 490nA. Here the resistance R (200k shown in circuit) is used to force the desired current in the output branch. The source voltage and temperature sensitivity of this reference circuit (not the complete current mirror circuit) are obtained as 0.076 and 0.10 respectively. The reference current value can be changed by changing the value of the W of the MOSFET transistor Q1 or by changing the value of resistance (shown as 200k in the circuit). W value of all other transistors is 1microm. The resistance (200k) in the schematic can also be replaced by a MOS transistor.

V. SIMULATION RESULTS FOR CURRENT MIRROR

The Cadence simulation results are based on 180 nm technology files from TAIWAN SEMICONDUCTOR MANUFACTURING COMPANY. The supply voltage used is 2 Volts. All results are based on typical analysis with a temperature of 270 C. The W and L values for all transistors in the proposed current mirror are 1microm. Fig. 5 shows the variation of I_{out} with source voltage (V_{source}) for an input current of 250nA. As can be seen from graph ((875.7mV, 249.8nA), (2.003V, 250nA), (3.002V, 250nA), (3.787V, 250.4nA)) for V_{source} varying from 1 to 3 V, I_{out} is nearly constant and is equal to 250nA which is the same as the input current. Thus, the output resistance is nearly infinite for this range. Even when V_{source} voltage goes beyond 3V the percentage variation in I_{out} is just 0.16%. Table 2 shows the I_{out} and minimum source voltage required for different input currents.

The MOS M1 in figure 4 acts as a passive load. The circuit is quite independent of the value of V_{dc} (the dc that is required to bias M1) and works well for any value of V_{dc} more than 882.9mV. Thus the load can also be biased using a biasing branch having two diode-connected MOSFETS. The temperature sensitivity of the proposed current mirror is 0.031ppm/degree C.

The circuit behaves well in all the corner simulations (i.e. slow-slow, fast-fast, fast-slow, and slow-fast cases of silicon). Thus we see that a topologically simple current mirror designed in subthreshold region works better than highly complex, saturation region current mirrors in term of output resistance, matching accuracy and variation with temperature.

Simulation Results of Current Reference

Sensitivity of Reference current to a parameter x is given as $I_{refSx} = (\partial I_{ref}/\partial x) / (I_{ref}/x)$. The temperature sensitivity of the current reference designed is 0.10 as can be seen in figure 9. The temperature sensitivity of the proposed current mirror can further be improved by replacing the resistance (200k resistance) by a MOS transistor.

The sensitivity of the CR to source voltage is 0.076 as can be seen in fig. 10.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have modeled a MOSFET in region II of subthreshold region. Also a very high output impedance and high accuracy current mirror in region II of subthreshold region is proposed and analyzed. In region II the variation of drain current with drain voltage is very less. According to the simulation results, the output impedance and accuracy of the proposed circuit is better than current mirrors in saturation region ($V_{gs} \geq V_{t}$ and $V_{ds} \geq V_{gs} - V_{t}$). The motive of this paper was to model a MOSFET in region II of subthreshold region and show that a complete simple structure low power circuits with nearly minimum transistor aspect

ratios can be easily designed in subthreshold region of operation and they work better than complex circuits designed for normal (with $V_{gs} > V_t$) region operation in terms of lower power consumption and smaller size for the same output characteristics. The proposed current mirror, along with current reference circuit, is suitable for use in extremely low power, high output impedance and low frequency operations. Such circuits are best suited for bio-medical applications such as pacemakers, retinal implants, neural recording systems which are to be implanted within chest, eye and skull respectively where power dissipation requirement has to be low to increase battery life time.

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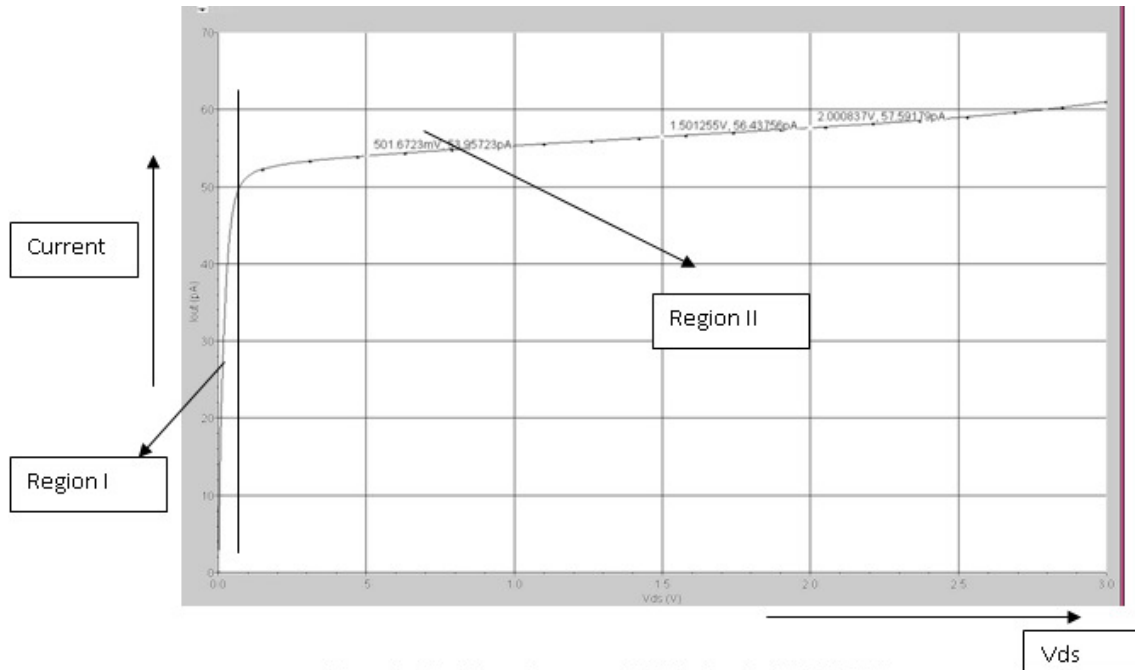


Figure 1: Variation of current with V_{ds} of a single MOSFET

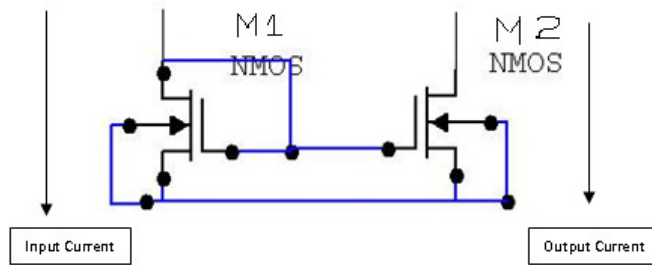


Fig2 Traditional current mirror

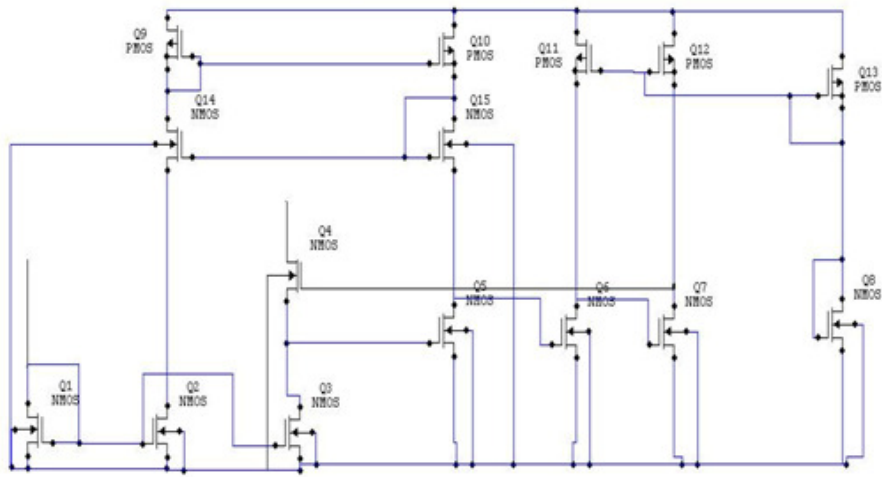


Fig.3 A current mirror with feedback

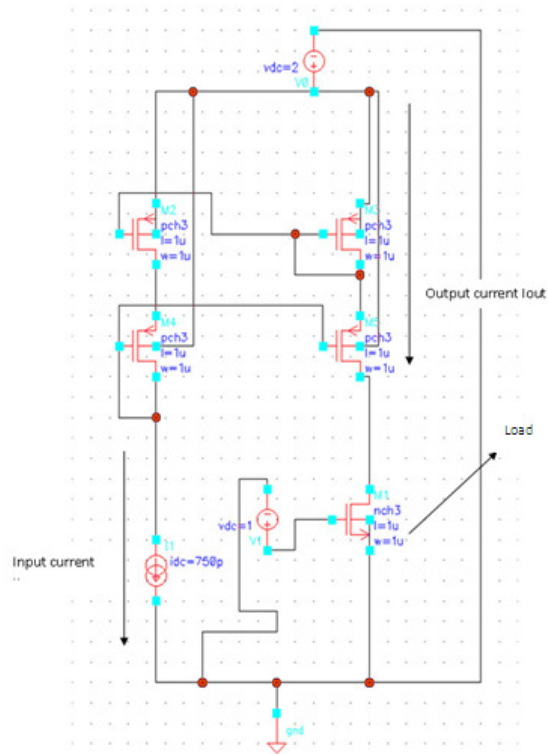


Figure 4: The Proposed Current Mirror

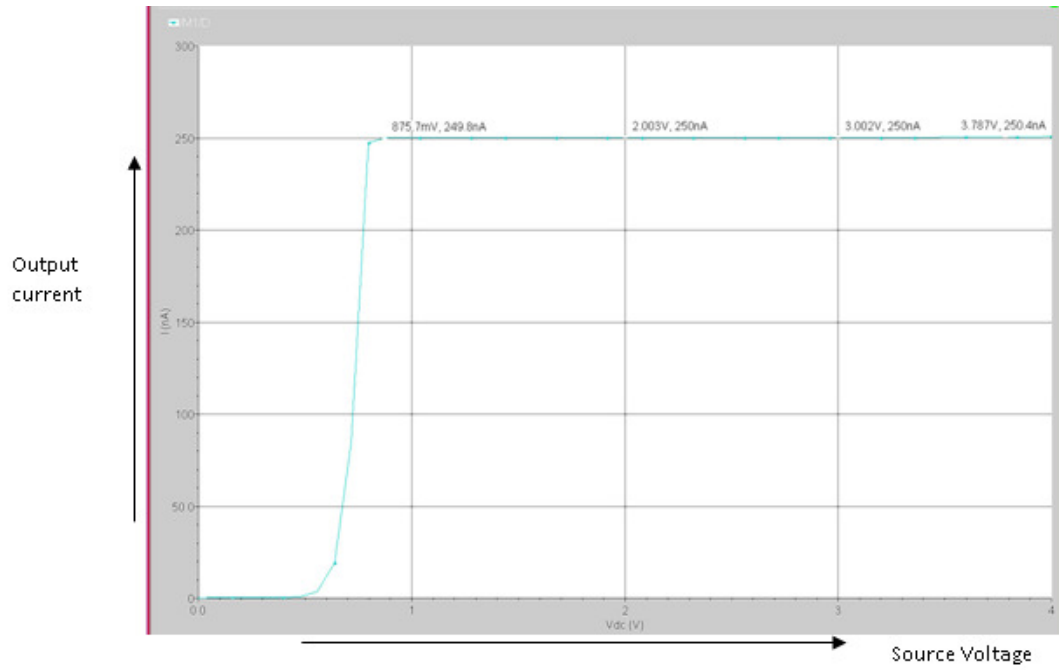


Fig. 5: Variation of I_{out} with source voltage for an I_{in} of 250nA

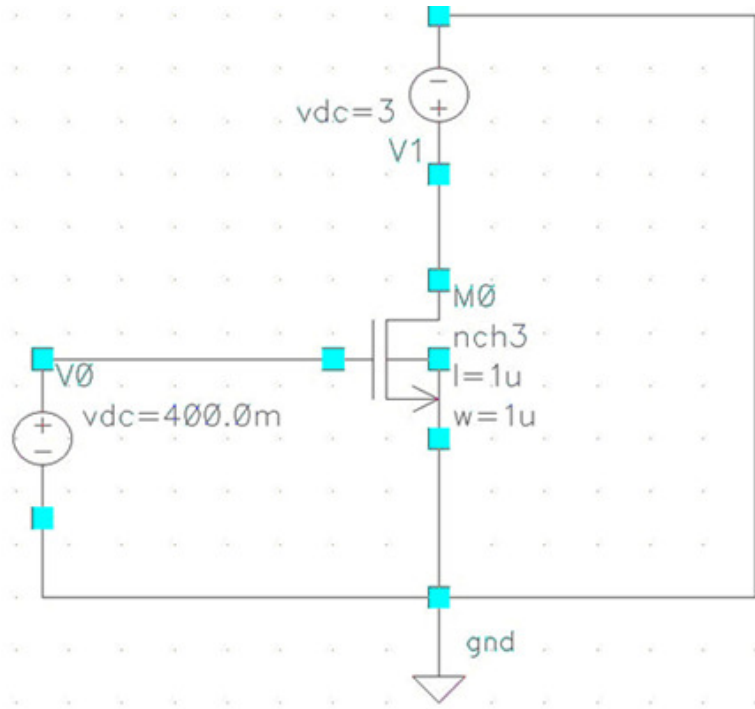


Figure 6: The schematic used for the interpolation of the subthreshold behavior in region II

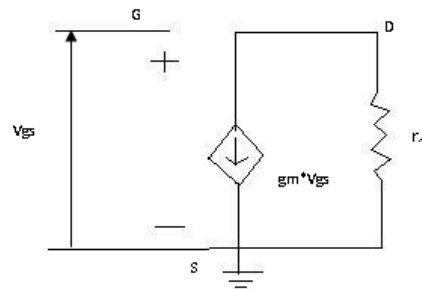


Figure 7: Small Signal Model for a MOSFET in Sub-threshold

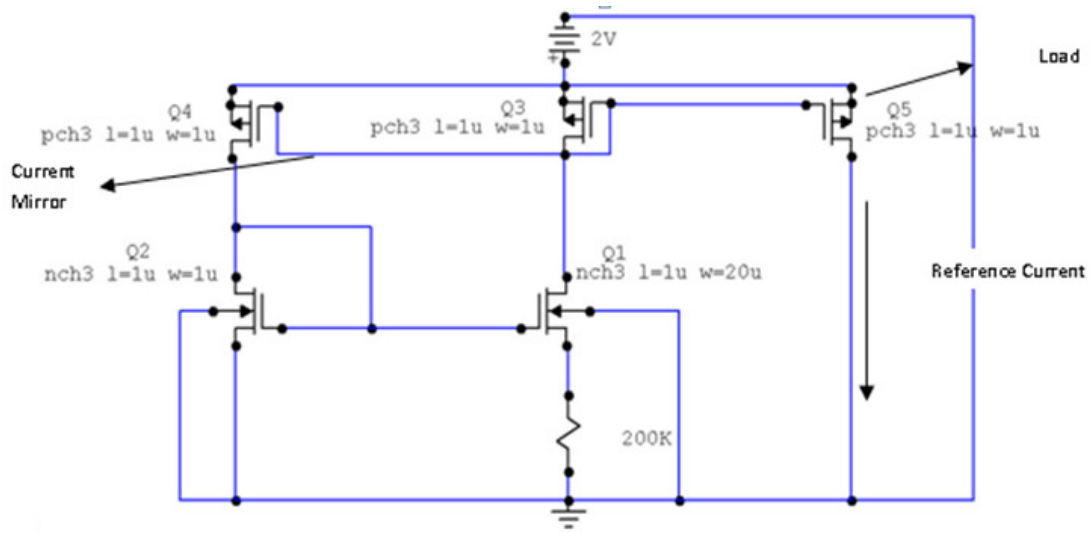


Figure 8: Current reference schematic for a reference current of 490nA

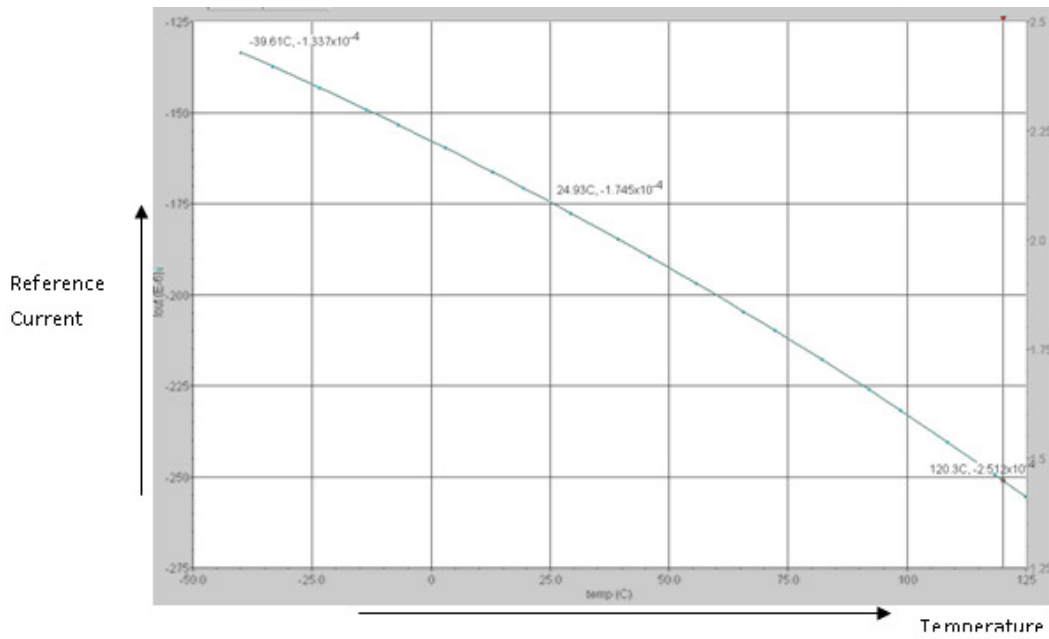


Figure 9 Reference Current vs. Temperature

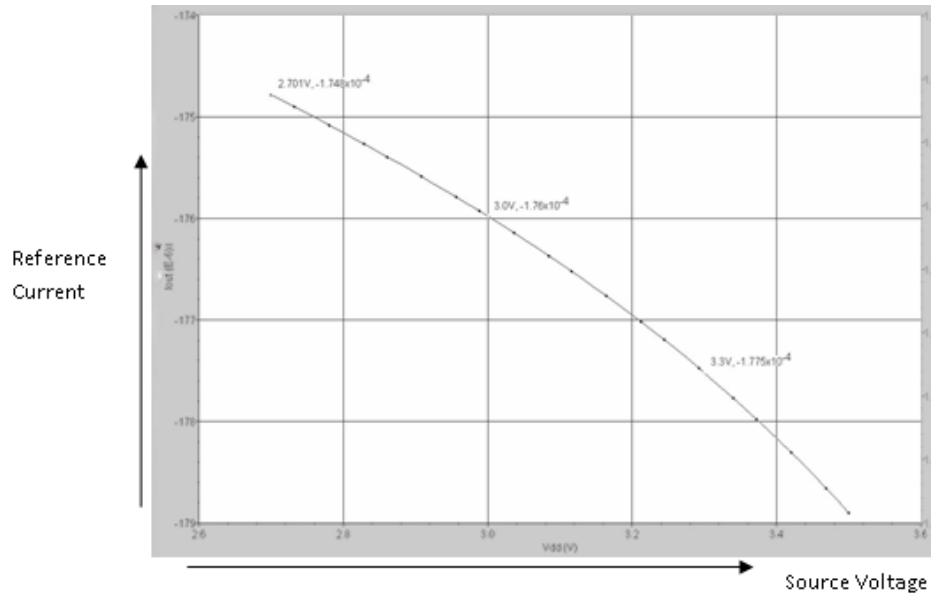


Figure 10: Reference Current vs. Source Voltage

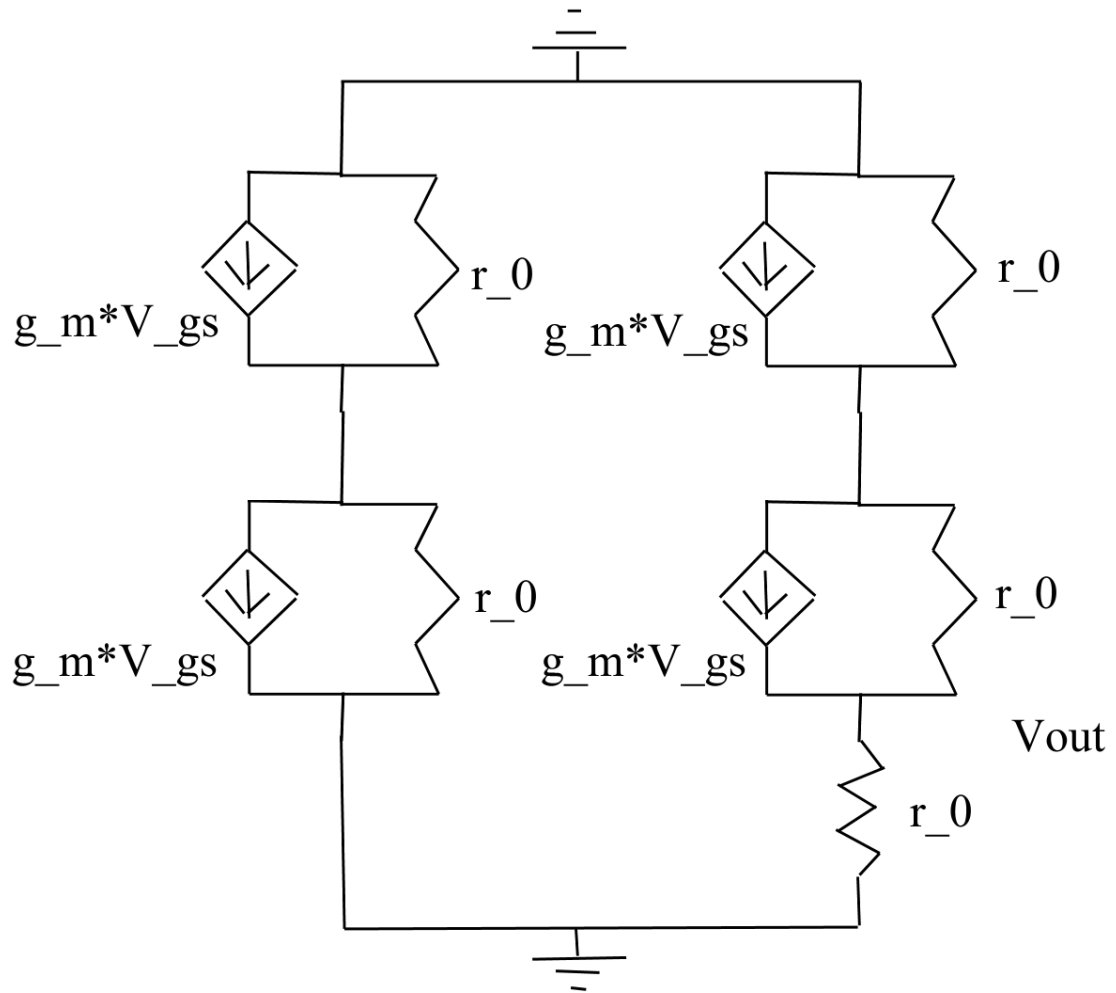


Table 1: Current and Voltages Values In region II of subthreshold region

Vgs	Id (drain current)	Vds
400 mV	53.95723pA	500 mV
	56.43756pA	1.5 V
500 mV	636.557pA	500 mV
	665.761pA	1.5 V
600 mV	6.793587nA	500 mV
	7.097663nA	1.5 V

Table 2: Iout for different V_{source} values and min V_{source} for different input currents

Iin current	Iout (1<V_{source}<2.75V)	Iout (2.75V<V_{source})	Min V_{source} Required
750pA	750pA	750.4pA	562.8mV
1nA	1nA	1.004nA	561.8mV
250nA	250nA	250.4nA	875.7mV
500nA	500nA	500.7nA	943.6mV