A micromechanism study of thermosonic gold wire bonding on aluminum pad

H. Xu,1,2,a) C. Liu,1 V. V. Silberschmidt,1 S. S. Pramana,3 T. J. White,3,4 Z. Chen,3 M. Sivakumar,3 and V. L. Acoff2

1Wolfson School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering, Loughborough University, Loughborough, LE11 3TU, United Kingdom
2Department of Metallurgical and Materials Engineering, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487, USA
3School of Materials Science and Engineering, Nanyang Technological University, Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798
4Centre for Advanced Microscopy, Australian National University, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia
5ASM Technology Singapore, 2 Yishun Avenue 7, Singapore 768924

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A micromechanism of thermosonic gold wire bonding was elaborated by examining its interfacial characteristics as a result of the bonding process, including the fragmentation of the native aluminum oxide layer on Al pads, and formation of initial intermetallic compounds (IMCs). It is found that the existence of an approximately 5 nm thick native oxide layer on original Al pads has a significant effect on the bonding, and the nucleation of IMCs during the bonding process must overcome this relatively inert thin film. Bonding strength was fundamentally determined by the degree of fragmentation of the oxide films, through which the formation of IMCs can be initiated due to the direct contact of the metal surfaces to be bonded. The extent of fracture the oxide layer was strongly influenced by the level of ultrasonic power, as at its high level alumina fragmentation becomes pervasive resulting in contiguous alloy interfaces and robust bonds. The IMCs formed at the interfaces were identified as Al4Al and AuAl2 with a thickness of 150–300 nm. The formation mechanism of such IMCs was explained by the effective heat of formation theory.


I. INTRODUCTION

Thermosonic gold wire bonding is broadly used for electronic interconnects. In this process, a thin gold wire is attached to an aluminum metallization pad using a combination of ultrasonic energy, pressure (~140 MPa) and heat (150–220 °C), to initiate a complex solid state reaction of fundamental technological importance. The mechanisms traditionally used to describe bonding are fretting1 and microslip.2,3 During fretting interfacial sliding cleans and heats the wire and pad surfaces, while in the microslip model localized rather than gross interfacial motion is emphasized; both descriptions assume that removal of a ubiquitous native alumina overlayer is essential for successful bonding as it will act as a barrier to diffusion, but to date, this has not been verified experimentally.

Ultrasonics enhance bonding. Langenecker4 found aluminum single crystal elongation when exposed to 20 kHz vibration at constant temperature (18 °C) proved equivalent to the morphological changes accompanying heating alone. However, the ultrasonic energy density required for deformation was ~107 times less than by thermal energy (for example, an ultrasonic energy of 35 W cm−2 is equivalent to 600 °C). Harman5 reported that ultrasonic treatment activated dislocation formation and migration in metal pads and wires, with the beneficial influence on bonding strength being well documented.6–8 Nonetheless, a full account of the underlying mechanistic aspects has not been presented.

Intermetallic compound (IMC) crystallization at the Au–Al interface is essential to form a strong bond. According to an early Au–Al equilibrium phase diagram,9 five IMCs—AuAl3, AuAl, Au2Al, Au5Al2, and Au4Al—possibly exist. However, subsequent studies have revealed greater complexity, including polymorphism and metastable phases10–25 (Table I). Au4Al is at least trimorphic and exists in the cubic β (Im3m) (Ref. 16) and β′ (P213) (Refs. 13–15) forms; a third tetragonal polymorph (I4/mmm) (Ref. 17) has been reported. The phase initially identified as Au5Al2 was, subsequently, shown by Range and Buechler18 to be Au9Al3, a complex rhombohedral structure R3c of large unit cell. Definitive crystallographic data for Au9Al2 has not been collected, and its existence is speculative, despite frequent reference to this compound. Consequently, previous x-ray diffraction studies of the Au–Al system using thin film couples28–30 suggesting that “Au5Al2” nucleates first, followed by Au2Al or Au4Al, should be considered in this light; the substantial difficulties of Francombe et al.31 in isolating the rhombohedral phase by electron diffraction are noted. Interfacial reactions during wire bonding are inherently non-equilibrium processes, with the possibility of quenching metastable compounds. In general, high symmetry alloys with small unit cells will easily crystallize, while long range ordered and low symmetry phases are less likely to form during bonding. Therefore, Au9Al3 (often mislabelled as

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a)Electronic mail: hxu14@bama.ua.edu and huixu.hit@gmail.com.
AuAl₂ for determining Au₄Al and AuAl₂, and the structure and bonding strength. IMCs in gold wire bonds are rare during thermosonic bonding. Small unit cell polymorph stable under ambient conditions. The effective heat of formation ΔH were calculated at the composition with the lowest eutectic temperature (78 at. % Au and 22 at. % Al) (Ref. 27). ΔH were calculated at the effective composition of 67 at. % Au and 33 at. % Al near the aluminum pad, while ΔH° at 80 at. % Au and 20 at. % Al was assumed adjacent the gold wire.

Au₅Al₂ has the most extensive order of any Au–Al alloy confirmed to date (44 atoms per unit cell) and anticipated to rarely appear during thermosonic bonding. Small unit cell volume IMCs such as ordered (Au₄Al, P₂₁₃, 20 atoms per unit cell) and disordered (Au₂₃Al, Fm̅3m, 4 atoms per unit cell) are expected to be prevalent.

In this paper, the evolution of amorphous aluminum oxide encapsulating the aluminum pad is monitored by high resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM) to directly clarify its role during bonding. It is found that fracture of this outer alumina film promotes the formation of IMCs, whose integrity correlates with ultrasonic energy, interfacial structure and bonding strength. IMCs in gold wire bonds are crystallographically described as Au₄Al and AuAl₂, and the manner by which amorphous alumina controls Au and Al interfacial concentrations and interdiffusion are examined explicitly.

II. EXPERIMENTAL METHODS

Thermosonic gold wire bonding employed an ASM Eagle 60AP ball/wedge automatic bonder. The gold wire (99.99 wt %) was 20 μm in diameter with an elongation of 2%–6%. A silicon chip patterned with 1 μm thick sputtered aluminum pads was loaded on a work stage. An electrical signal was loaded on a work stage. An electrical signal was applied to the gold wire and heated to a temperature of 810°C at a normal force of 200 mN. The ultrasonic power developed in the pi-electron current, 4500 V gap voltage, and transverse ultrasonic vibration were measured by a combination of a laser interferometer and a piezoelectric stack. The actual bonding force, DAC, is assumed consistent with the highest symmetry, with minimum unit cell volume polymorph stable under ambient conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition⁣Au:Al</th>
<th>Polymorph/compound symmetry</th>
<th>Space group</th>
<th>Atoms per unit cell</th>
<th>Unit cell volume (Å³)</th>
<th>ΔH° b (kJ/mol)</th>
<th>ΔH (Pretorius et al.) (kJ/mol)</th>
<th>ΔH° (near Al pad) (kJ/mol)</th>
<th>ΔH° (near Au wire) (kJ/mol)</th>
<th>Structure reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Au₂Al₃</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Cubic</td>
<td>Fm̅3m</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67.28⁣</td>
<td>−19</td>
<td>−18.5</td>
<td>−7.8</td>
<td>−19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Au₄Al₁₄</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>Cubic</td>
<td>Fm̅3m</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.85⁣</td>
<td>−26</td>
<td>−20.0</td>
<td>−11.9</td>
<td>−18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Au₄Al</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cubic (β')</td>
<td>P₂₁₃</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>331.76⁣</td>
<td>−30</td>
<td>−19.8</td>
<td>−14.8</td>
<td>−18.0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cubic (β)</td>
<td>Im̅3m</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30.96⁣</td>
<td>−37</td>
<td>−16.3</td>
<td>−24.4</td>
<td>−14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tetragonal</td>
<td>I4/mmm</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.02⁣</td>
<td>−44</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>−44.2</td>
<td>−35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Au₄Al₁</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>Rhombohedral</td>
<td>R̅3c</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>724.7⁣</td>
<td>−44</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>−44.2</td>
<td>−35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Au₂Al</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Orthorhombic</td>
<td>Pnaa</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>190.5⁣</td>
<td>−30</td>
<td>−19.8</td>
<td>−14.8</td>
<td>−18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Au₄Al</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Orthorhombic</td>
<td>Pnmm</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>475.1⁣</td>
<td>−30</td>
<td>−19.8</td>
<td>−14.8</td>
<td>−18.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>AuAl₂</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Monoclinic</td>
<td>P2₁/m</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>135.2⁣</td>
<td>−30</td>
<td>−19.8</td>
<td>−14.8</td>
<td>−18.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE II.** Thermosonic bonding parameters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bonding parameters</th>
<th>Level-1</th>
<th>Level-2</th>
<th>Level-3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standby power, DAC</td>
<td>7 (122.5 nm)⁣</td>
<td>10 (175.0 nm)</td>
<td>13 (227.5 nm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact power, DAC</td>
<td>3 (52.5 nm)</td>
<td>5 (87.5 nm)</td>
<td>7 (122.5 nm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact force, mN</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact time, s</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonding power, DAC</td>
<td>27 (472.5 nm)</td>
<td>35 (612.5 nm)</td>
<td>43 (752.5 nm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonding force, mN</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonding time, s</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substrate temperature, °C</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>175</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

⁣Ultrasonic amplitudes of capillary tip are listed in brackets.
effects on interfacial characteristics, the bonded samples were removed immediately from the work stage, but inevitably maintained a temperature near 175 °C for ~5 s.

Cross-sections of the Au–Al bonds were prepared by dual-beam focused ion beam thinning for scanning electron microscopy (STEM) and TEM. The native alumina film on the metal pad was studied with HRTEM before bonding. The nanostructure at the interface including alumina and IMCs, were investigated by TEM combined with energy dispersive x-ray spectrometry (EDX). TEM analysis was carried out using a JEOL 2100F system at 200 kV. A microprobe beam (0.7 nm diameter) was used for composition analysis with EDX in STEM mode. Fast Fourier transforms (FFTs) of lattice images calculated using IMAGET 1.42Q (Ref. 32) and selected area electron diffraction (SAD) were employed to identify Au–Al IMCs.

Shear tests were conducted with a DAGE 4000 microtester at a tool height of 3 μm to evaluate the bonding strength as a function of applied ultrasonic power. The shear strength was expressed as shear force per unit area.

III. RESULTS

A. Characterization of alumina film on Al pads prior to bonding

The typical uniform amorphous alumina film adhering to crystalline Al pads prior to bonding is approximately 5 nm thick (Fig. 1). Because the oxide overlayer is compact and uniform, further oxidation of the pad is passivated, but will be detrimental to bonding as it is a barrier to metal diffusion.

B. Interfacial characteristics of Au–Al bonds

In cross-section, the Au–Al interface consists of two regions, labeled A (without Au–Al IMCs) and B (with IMCs) [Fig. 2(a)]. Region A presents as an approximately 4 nm thick uniform layer between the metals [Fig. 2(b)], whose main constituents are aluminum and oxygen (Table III), consistent with the preservation of the amorphous alumina film, that limits interdiffusion and retards the formation of IMCs. Since the alumina/gold boundaries remain distinct at the atomic scale, limited interfacial diffusion is occurring. This is consistent with the mechanism of Chang et al.33 who derived a model based on Mott’s electron tunneling and ion migration, rather than the diffusion of neutral metal atoms that obey Fick’s law. The connectivity of alumina to gold will contribute to bond strength as discussed later, as will other defects induced during thermosonic bonding [Figs. 1 and 2(b)].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>O K (at. %)</th>
<th>Al K (at. %)</th>
<th>Au L (at. %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
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</tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In region B, chemical reactions dilate the interface to a trilayer 150–300 nm thick [Fig. 3(a)]. Near the pad is an aluminum-rich alloy IMC-1, while there is a gold-rich alloy IMC-2 abutting the Au wire with a distinct microstructure and morphology. In addition, there is a mid-region of relatively light contrast, confirmed as amorphous alumina [Fig. 3(b)]. These alumina remnants inside IMCs are fragmented and distinct from the uniform amorphous layer in the regions without IMCs [Fig. 2(b)], consistent with film disintegration during bonding that accompanied and facilitated the formation of IMC-1 and IMC-2. Karpel et al.\textsuperscript{34} reported a similar low contrast region with TEM, but without the benefit of chemical analysis, they characterized this feature as a void line. In the materials studied here, the Au–Al bond contains few cavities, and these only exist in the center of large relic alumina (≈20 nm) [Fig. 4(a)], but generally such debris were 5–10 nm in diameter and pore-free.

### C. Identification of IMCs formed at the interface

In IMC-1 [Fig. 3(a)] two locations with ordered atomic arrays were selected (B-B and B-C) and lattice images collected [Figs. 5(a) and 5(b)]. FFT analysis was consistent with AuAl\textsubscript{2} [001] (\textit{Fm\bar{3}m}, a=5.9988 Å) (Ref. \textsuperscript{22}) joined with Al (\textit{Fm\bar{3}m}, a=4.0496 Å) (Ref. \textsuperscript{35}) in B-B, while in B-C, AuAl\textsubscript{2} [101] is linked to alumina; the change in IMC texture may be related to preferential growth during bonding. As further confirmation, SAD of IMC-1 was found to be polycrystalline AuAl\textsubscript{2} (although inevitably coexisting with Al reflections as the patterns were collected from a diameter of ∼100 nm) [Fig. 6(a)]. In IMC-2 the ring patterns could be indexed as Au\textsubscript{4}Al [Fig. 6(b)]. These combined crystallochemical analyses demonstrate that IMC-1 is an aluminum-rich alloy (AuAl\textsubscript{2}) and IMC-2 a gold-rich alloy (Au\textsubscript{4}Al).

**FIG. 3.** (a) Details of region B-1 in Fig. 2(a) presenting IMCs formed after ultrasonic bonding. (b) Higher magnification of region B-A showing an alumina remnant encapsulated by IMC-1 (AuAl\textsubscript{2}) and IMC-2 (Au\textsubscript{4}Al).

**FIG. 4.** Voids sometimes form within large relic alumina particles, due to shrinkage of the oxide that accompany partial redaction and inclusion of Al in the IMCs or loss of oxygen.

**FIG. 5.** HRTEM images and Fourier reconstructed patterns of (a) region B-B in Fig. 3(a) with AuAl\textsubscript{2} [001] and (b) region B-C in Fig. 3(a) with AuAl\textsubscript{2} [101].
D. Effect of ultrasonic power

The interfaces of Au/Al formed using three ultrasonic settings are presented in Fig. 7, with the quantity of IMCs at the interfaces increasing significantly at higher ultrasonic power levels. In particular, level 3 resulted in an almost continuous layer of IMCs, as compared to levels 1 and 2, where slightly enhanced connected areas may be due to softening. There is obvious shear strength enhancement with increasing ultrasonic power Fig. 8.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Effect of alumina film on thermosonic Au wire bonding

In an analogous manner to copper wire bonding on Al pads, Au–Al bonds also consist of two types of interfacial connection: (i) a continuous and compact alumina film—a native oxide initially present on Al pads—in contact directly with Au [region A, Fig. 2(a)] and (ii) regions containing IMCs (150–300 nm thick) with residual alumina at their core [region B, Fig. 2(a)]. The alumina film in the former case remains intact, indicating that thermosonic bonding did not perturb those regions significantly, without fracturing and relocation of the overlayer. It is possible that alumina/gold interfaces are detrimental toward bonding strength, as IMCs are absent because Au and Al cannot penetrate the alumina barrier [Fig. 2(b)]. However, intense ultrasonic treatment displaces and fragments the alumina film which opens diffusion paths for the metals to migrate and react. In this manner, ultrasonic treatment initiates localized IMC formation and significantly enhances overall bond strength.

B. Effect of ultrasonic power

The application of ultrasonics improves interfacial bonding and adhesion, by initiating alumina disintegration, thereby increasing Al and Au mobility and the rate of IMC formation. This is attributed to the local disintegration of alumina, that determines the rate of formation of IMCs. The ease of IMC interfacial crystallization increases in tandem with ultrasonic power (Fig. 7), and as does bonding strength (Fig. 8). Areas of direct contact of alumina with Au will contribute to bonding but is less significant than the role played by IMCs.

C. Kinetics of Au–Al bond formation

The thermodynamics and kinetics of Au–Al bond formation are difficult to evaluate in situ and poorly understood. If IMC growth during annealing is diffusion-limited it follows a parabolic law\(^\text{28,29,37}\) such that,

\[ x = (Dt)^{1/2} \]  

and

\[ D = D_0 \exp(-Q/RT), \]

where \(x\) is the IMC thickness at time \(t\), \(D\) the growth rate constant, \(D_0\) a prefactor, \(Q\) the activation energy, \(R\) the molar gas constant, and \(T\) the absolute temperature.

According to Philofsky,\(^\text{37}\) \(Q = 66.5 \text{ KJ/mol}\) and \(D_0 = 5.2 \times 10^{-8} \text{ m}^2/\text{s}\) for the growth of Au–Al IMCs in butt-welded (635 \(\mu\text{m}\) gold wire to 635 \(\mu\text{m}\) aluminum wire) diffusion couples during annealing at 200–460 °C. By introducing these parameters to the present work, where \(T = 175 °C\) and \(t=5 \text{ s}\), the IMC thickness \(x\) can be estimated as 60–70 nm. However, the observed layer was much thicker.
6.5

3.3

/H20849

gold in liquid aluminum, the diffusion rates of Cu, Ni, Fe, Co, and Ga in this medium at 661 °C are 5.1 \times 10^{-9} \text{ m}^2/\text{s}, 3.3 \times 10^{-9} \text{ m}^2/\text{s}, 2.5 \times 10^{-9} \text{ m}^2/\text{s}, 2.4 \times 10^{-9} \text{ m}^2/\text{s}, and 6.5 \times 10^{-9} \text{ m}^2/\text{s}, respectively. Moreover, it is known that Au (atomic radius=0.1442 nm) diffusion in Al (0.1432 nm) is much quicker than Cu (0.1278 nm) due to the similarity in atomic size. From this it may be inferred that the diffusion rate of Au in liquid Al (at 661 °C) will be larger than 5.1 \times 10^{-9} \text{ m}^2/\text{s}, but during wire bonding, which is a solid state process, it is likely to be three (or four) orders of magnitude as smaller (5.0 \times 10^{-12} \text{ m}^2/\text{s}).

If the values of Q and D_0 from Philofsky et al. are valid for bonding, the effective (or equivalent) temperature obtained from Eq. (2) is 619 °C and includes a thermal contribution arising from mechanical vibration plus a decrease in Q from ultrasonic action. An \textit{in situ} measurement of interfacial temperature using K-type thin film thermocouples yielded 320 °C, the highest found for wire bonding. This is in contrast to the present estimate for small local regions after IMCs reached a significant thickness, while the thermo-couple result averages over a large area (20 \text{ μm} wide, 1 \text{ μm} thick). In any case, the actual interface temperature must not exceed the melting point of aluminum (660 °C) and the lowest eutectic (525 °C at Au 78 at. %). Consequently, the high effective temperature derived from Eqs. (1) and (2) must be accounted for by a reduction in Q.

Ultrasonics may lower \( Q \) if microslip between the Au ball and substrate creates vacancies by increasing the average thermal displacements and diffusivity of atoms. This can also produce large numbers of grain boundaries and dislocations in the IMCs, gold ball and aluminum pad, that provide pathways for rapid metal migration, as grain boundary diffusion invariably has a smaller activation energy than for the bulk diffusion. Below the Tamman temperature (about one-half to two-thirds the melting point in kelvin), atomic diffusion is not principally a bulk process, but is controlled by grain boundaries and other defects. For growth of IMCs (AuAl_2 and Au_4Al), this critical temperature is estimated (using the AuAl_2 melting point of 1060 °C) to be 394–615 °C, close to or higher than the real interfacial temperature, so grain boundary diffusion may be the rate limiting mechanism. Initially, amorphous alumina is oxidized by ultrasonic vibration, exposing fresh Al surfaces that directly contact Au, and promote crystallization of IMCs; further growth requires metal migration through the IMCs. Xu et al. found that Au is the predominant diffusant in the Au–Al system by tracking movements of oxygen in the interface using secondary ion mass spectrometry depth profiling. Therefore, Au diffusion through IMCs ultimately governs their growth which will be accelerated if more boundaries are available. IMC crystals formed during ultrasonic bonding are small (a few tens of nanometers), resulting in large grain boundary surfaces for atomic diffusion. In addition, there may be synergistic effects that dynamically create interfacial vacancies to accelerate diffusion.

IMC formation may also be mediated by dislocation diffusion. Li et al. demonstrated that ultrasonic vibration during wire bonding generated dislocations in aluminum pads that may promote migration. However, in this study, local IMC formation did not always accompany the creation of a dislocation network in aluminum, as alloys could be absent from nearby areas (Fig. 2(b)). An alternative explanation is that the initial formation of IMCs depends on oxide rupture by vibration at certain pressures and temperatures, and alloy growth is sustained by Au and Al migration along grain boundaries and dislocations within the alloys themselves.

The sequence of IMC crystallization may be related to their respective effective heats of formation, that reflect the free energy change for the system, as the entropy during solid state interaction will be almost constant. Pretorius et al. propose that the first-formed phase will process the most negative effective heat of formation at the composition with the lowest eutectic temperature (or liquidus). This is termed the effective composition and in the Au–Al joint corresponds to 78 at. % Au and 22 at. % Al. The calculated effective heats of formation \( \Delta H \) obtained by Pretorius et al. for Au_5Al_2, Au_4Al, Au_2Al, AuAl, and AuAl_2 are listed in Table I. As the difference between Au_5Al_2 (–20.0 kJ/mol) and Au_2Al (–19.8 kJ/mol) is negligibly small thermodynamically, either could be the preferable and primary intermetallic. In thin film studies (where Al and Au films were deposited one by one without breaking the vacuum) x-ray diffraction and Rutherford backscattering spectrometry found Au_5Al_2 was the formed initially, while elsewhere Au_4Al and Au_2Al reportedly grew simultaneously. During annealing, Majni et al. found that Au_2Al was the second phase to appear while Xu et al. showed that Au_4Al was formed after Au_5Al_2. Although there is uncertainty regarding the order of the IMC crystallization, Au_5Al_2, Au_4Al, and Au_2Al are undoubtedly the dominant phases formed in thin solid film systems. It is reported that AuAl_2 is not favored, and observed only after prolonged annealing of thin Au on bulk Al, however, the present study found that AuAl and AuAl_2 simultaneously encase the alumina remnants (Fig. 4).

Interfacial reaction during wire bonding is inherently nonequilibrium, aggravated through the application of ultra-
sonic vibration, with chemical gradients influenced by oxides, defects, and atomic mobility. The coexistence of AuAl$_2$ and Au$_4$Al is a consequence of relic alumina separating IMC interfaces, which limit Au diffusion and to a lesser extent Al mobility. Thus, the effective concentration of Au at the growth interface adjacent to Al is lower than in an ideal thin film system$^{28-30}$ By supposing the effective concentration of Au at the Al interface is 33 at.%, the effective heat of formation for AuAl$_2$, Au$_4$Al, Au$_2$Al, Au$_5$Al$_2$, and Au$_4$Al can be recalculated using the model of Pretorius$^{27,49}$ (Table I). Thus, Au$_4$Al$_2$ ($\Delta H^s = -30.7$ kJ/mol) is favored between aluminum and alumina remnant. Similarly, the higher effective concentration of Au at the growth interface adjacent to Au results in Au$_5$Al$_2$ ($\Delta H^s = -19.0$ kJ/mol) readily forming (Table I). Although $\Delta H$ is a reasonable indirect measure of Gibbs’-free energy release during interfacial reactions, the role of nucleation barriers and kinetics$^{27,45,48-50}$ are of most consequence in predicating the phase assemblage in the bond. Pretorius et al.$^{41}$ stated that the more atoms in a unit cell, the more difficult and less energetically favorable it is to crystallize. Au$_5$Al$_2$ has 44 atoms per unit cell and longer range order, and will not readily form, especially in the nonequilibrium situation of ultrasonic wire bonding, where growth occurs at a moving interface. (As noted earlier Au$_5$Al$_2$ is probably equivalent to Au$_5$Al$_{2.3}$) Taking nucleation into consideration, it is reasonable to believe AuAl$_2$ and Au$_4$Al are formed first during wire bonding, while earlier reports of Au$_5$Al$_2$/Au$_4$Al remain speculative, as the characterization of the latter were not substantiated by diffraction analysis. Furthermore, differentiating Au$_5$Al$_2$ from Au$_4$Al by microanalysis would be challenging as the crystals produced during bonding are smaller than the analytical volume.

**D. Thermosonic bonding mechanism**

To summarize, the mechanism of thermosonic gold wire bonding is illustrated in Fig. 9. Ideally, both the aluminum pad and gold wire are perfectly clean and when joined thermally there is greater diffusion of Au into Al; this yields a gold-rich alloy that is notionally Au$_5$Al$_2$ ($Pm\bar{3}m$) but more likely a disordered cubic ($Fm\bar{3}m$) solid solution. Ultrasonic power creates dislocations and grain boundaries in the pad and wire as well as the IMCs that accelerate metal migration leading to thicker IMC layers and stronger bonds. In real systems the surface of the pad is invariably oxidized and the amorphous alumina will act as a barrier to Au and Al interdiffusion. It is shown that:

1. A compact amorphous alumina layer ~5 nm thick is present on aluminum prior to bonding and acts as a barrier to Au and Al interdiffusion.
2. Ultrasonic vibration partially disrupts the continuity of the alumina film to create favorable diffusion pathways that promote the local formation of IMCs. At higher ultrasonic energies, alumina fragmentation is greater, metal mobility accelerates, and IMCs more readily form in the contact area, resulting in a stronger bond. The dominant alloys are Au$_4$Al and Au$_5$Al$_2$ (total thickness of 150–300 nm), with remnant alumina encapsulated in these IMCs.
3. With the simplifying assumption that IMC formation during bonding is diffusion controlled, we estimate the ultrasonic effect in the current work to be equivalent to heating the interface to >600 °C, while the overall average temperature is probably near 320 °C. This arises because ultrasonic vibration increases the real local temperature and simultaneously produces numerous diffusion pathways via grain boundaries and dislocations that lower activation energies.

**V. CONCLUSIONS**

The crystallochemical and physical interfacial characteristics of interconnects (alumina, IMCs and defects) during thermosonic bonding of gold wires on aluminum pads were correlated with ultrasonic energy, interfacial structure and bonding strength. It is shown that:

1. A compact amorphous alumina layer ~5 nm thick is present on aluminum prior to bonding and acts as a barrier to Au and Al interdiffusion.
2. Ultrasonic vibration partially disrupts the continuity of the alumina film to create favorable diffusion pathways that promote the local formation of IMCs. At higher ultrasonic energies, alumina fragmentation is greater, metal mobility accelerates, and IMCs more readily form in the contact area, resulting in a stronger bond. The dominant alloys are Au$_4$Al and Au$_5$Al$_2$ (total thickness of 150–300 nm), with remnant alumina encapsulated in these IMCs.
3. With the simplifying assumption that IMC formation during bonding is diffusion controlled, we estimate the ultrasonic effect in the current work to be equivalent to heating the interface to >600 °C, while the overall average temperature is probably near 320 °C. This arises because ultrasonic vibration increases the real local temperature and simultaneously produces numerous diffusion pathways via grain boundaries and dislocations that lower activation energies.
The coexistence of Au₄Al and AuAl₂ is due to a native alumina overlayer that attenuates Au and Al interdiffusion. This reduces the effective concentration of Au at the growth interface adjacent to Al and that of Al at the interface near Au.

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