

CONTROL SYSTEM FOR A BIDIRECTIONAL
SWITCH WITH TWO TRANSISTORS ✓

The present invention relates to a control system for a bidirectional switch for current monitoring circuits, in particular current monitoring circuits suitable for controlling the charge and discharge of rechargeable batteries. More particularly, the present invention concerns a control system for a bidirectional switch formed of a pair of MOFSET power transistors connected in anti-series, i.e. source to source or drain to drain.

Circuits allowing the bidirectional flow of a current to be controlled are used in numerous applications. Such circuits are used in particular to control the charge and discharge of rechargeable batteries (lithium, lithium-ion batteries, etc.), assuring the power supply of portable devices of various types (telephones, lap-top computers, timepieces, etc.).

It is known that rechargeable batteries of this type require protection against inadequate operating conditions (overcharging or undercharging of the battery, too high charging or discharging currents, too high operating temperature, etc.) which can appear when a load or charger is connected to the battery or during a short-circuit of the battery terminals. This protection is necessary to assure that the battery performance is not adversely affected.

These current monitoring circuits thus typically include current interruption means which are placed in series in the battery current path and respond to signals indicative of inadequate operating conditions, in order to interrupt the continuation of the charging or discharging of the battery or, generally, in order to interrupt the flow of a current in the battery which could have an adverse affect on the performance thereof. These current interruption means are commonly formed of switches made by means of MOFSET power transistors and controlled by circuits monitoring the level of charge or discharge of the battery, the value of the current passing through it or the battery temperature.

In numerous applications, these interruption means are formed of a switch including a pair of MOFSET power transistors connected in anti-series, i.e. connected source to source or alternatively drain to drain. Figures 1a to 1c illustrate three examples of such a bidirectional switch with two transistors. Figure 1a illustrates a pair of N-MOFSET transistors connected source to source, Figure 1b illustrates a pair of N-MOFSET transistors connected drain to drain, and Figure 1c illustrates a pair of P-MOFSET transistors connected source to source. Of course, a fourth solution, which is not illustrated here, consists in connecting a pair of P-MOFSET transistors drain to

drain. This type of switch is commonly called a "bidirectional switch" since it allows the current to be blocked as well as to flow in two directions.

In normal operation, the two transistors are at the "ON" state and a current can flow in both directions between terminals X and Y through the switch. When an
5 inadequate operating condition is detected, one or the other of the transistors is set to the "OFF" state in order to block the flow of current in the battery. It will be noted however that the current can still flow in the opposite direction through a parasitic diode or "body diode" formed between the drain and the source of each MOSFET power transistor, this parasitic diode being due to the fact that the substrate ("body")
10 and the source of the power transistor are connected together at the same potential.

Each transistor thus allows the current to be blocked in one direction while allowing a current to flow in the opposite direction through its parasitic diode. Used in a rechargeable battery charge and discharge monitoring circuit, one of the transistors thus allows the battery charging current to be interrupted, while the other transistor
15 allows the discharge current in the opposite direction to be interrupted.

There are two determining factors when such a bidirectional switch is selected and made. On the one hand, one wishes to limit as much as possible the value of the series resistance (or conduction resistance) R_{DS_ON} of the bidirectional switch. On the other hand, one wishes to minimise as much as possible the time necessary for
20 making the bidirectional switch conduct, hereinafter referred to as conduction delay time.

These two purposes are in fact intimately linked and opposite. Indeed, in order to reduce series resistance R_{DS_ON} of the bidirectional switch, the transistors need to be controlled with relatively high gate voltages, typically of the order of 10 to 15 volts
25 between the gate and the source of the transistor. The power transistors must thus necessarily bear these gate voltages through the gate oxide which consequently has a relatively large thickness and thus a large gate capacitance. This high gate capacitance thus leads to relatively long transistor conduction delay times.

The shortest possible conduction delay time of the bidirectional switch allows a
30 quick response to changes in conditions detected by the monitoring circuit. This is all the more important since in most applications, these circuits operate in a pulsed manner and must thus respond almost instantaneously to the detected conditions.

One object of the present invention is thus to provide a control system for a bidirectional switch with two transistors which, in particular, allows the two
35 aforementioned opposite purposes to be answered.

The present invention thus concerns a control system for a bidirectional switch with two transistors, whose features are listed in claim 1.

The present invention also concerns a control method for a bidirectional switch with two transistors, whose features are listed in claim 7.

According to the present invention, advantage is taken of the fact that the bidirectional switch is formed of two power transistors mounted in anti-series and that
5 only one of the transistors is set at the " OFF " state when one wishes to interrupt the flow of current through the battery, the other transistor always remaining at the " ON " state.

By coupling the power transistor gates at least temporarily when the transistor at the " OFF " state is made to conduct again, the charge present on the transistor
10 which remained at the " ON " state is shared with the other transistor and it is thus possible to substantially reduce the transistor conduction delay time. It is thus possible to improve the dynamic features of the bidirectional switch, namely essentially its conduction delay time, despite the use of high gate voltages allowing a low series resistance to be obtained for the switch.

15 Other features and advantages of the invention will appear more clearly upon reading the following detailed description, made with reference to the annexed drawings, which are given by way of non-limiting example and in which:

- Figures 1a to 1c already mentioned, illustrate three known embodiment examples of a bidirectional switch with two transistors;

- 20 - Figure 2 illustrates a schematic example of a current monitoring circuit or protective circuit for a rechargeable battery;

- Figure 3 illustrates an operating diagram of the control system for a bidirectional switch with two transistors according to the present invention;

- Figure 4 illustrates an embodiment in low voltage CMOS technology of a
25 control system for a bidirectional switch with two transistors according to the present invention; and

- Figures 5a to 5d illustrate a set of diagrams of the evolution of the control voltages of the control system illustrated in Figure 4, allowing the beneficial effects of the present invention to be shown.

30 With reference to Figure 2, a protective circuit 10 for a rechargeable battery 1 is shown. Battery 1 and protective circuit 10 form an assembly including two terminals a and b between which a load 2 or a charger 3 may be connected.

The protective circuit, which can be called more generally current monitoring circuit 10, includes current interruption means, formed of a bidirectional switch 20, and
35 possibly current measuring means 30 arranged in series with battery 1 between terminals a and b of the assembly. Thus, when a charge 2 is connected between terminals a and b of the assembly, a discharge current I_{DISCHG} flows from the positive

terminal of battery 1 via a charge 2 and bidirectional switch 20 to the negative terminal of battery 1. When a charger 3 is connected between terminals a and b of the assembly, a charge current I_{CHG} then flows in the opposite direction to discharge current I_{DISCHG} .

5 It is to be noted that measuring means 30 may be made in the form of a measuring resistor supplying a potential drop representing the current passing through it. Bidirectional switch 20 can however also form measuring means 30. In this case, the voltage across the terminals of bidirectional switch 20 is used to evaluate the value of charge current I_{CHG} or discharge current I_{DISCHG} passing through battery 1.

10 Current monitoring circuit 10 further includes detection and control means 40 coupled to battery 1 and, if necessary, to measuring means 30. Detection and control means 40 receive from battery 1 and measuring means 30 detection signals 100 and 300 respectively representing the level of charge of battery 1 and the value of the current passing through battery 1. In response to these detection signals 100 and 300,
15 detection and control means 40 supply one or more control signals 400 to bidirectional switch 20. The manner in which detection and control means 40 are made will not be described here in detail. It needs only be mentioned here that these means typically include, on the one hand, detection and comparison means allowing, in particular, the voltage across the battery terminals to be compared to different reference voltage
20 levels and to provide in response logic state activation signals, and , on the other hand, control means responding to these activation signals and forming the actual control system for bidirectional switch 20.

 In the following description, one will dwell essentially on the description of this control system for bidirectional switch 20.

25 The operating principle of the control system according to the present invention will now be described with reference to Figure 3. This Figure illustrates the operating diagram of the control system for a bidirectional switch with two MOFSET power transistors according to the present invention.

 Bidirectional switch 20 illustrated in this Figure is formed in this example of a
30 pair of N-MOFSET power transistors 210 and 220 connected source to source. Each of power transistors 210 and 220 includes a parasitic diode ("body diode") 215, 225 formed between the drain and the source of the transistors in parallel to the channel. The drains of power transistors 210 and 220 are connected as described previously so that the bidirectional switch is arranged in the path of the current the flow of which
35 must, if necessary, be interrupted.

 In the application example used here by way of non-limiting example, since bidirectional switch 20 is arranged in series in the battery current path (not shown in

this Figure), a first current, namely a charge current I_{CHG} is able to flow through bidirectional switch 20 as is indicated by the direction of the arrow in the Figure, and a second current with the opposite direction to the first current, namely a discharge current I_{DISCHG} , is able to flow through bidirectional switch 20 as is indicated by the direction of the other arrow.

Gates 211 and 221 of power transistors 210 and 220 are respectively connected to control means 50 supplying first and second gate voltages V_{GATE_CHG} and V_{GATE_DISCHG} to gates 211 and 221, respectively of power transistors 210 and 220. When one or the other of these gate voltages V_{GATE_CHG} and V_{GATE_DISCHG} is substantially equal to the voltage present at the node formed by the sources of transistors 210 and 220, which is earth here, the corresponding power transistor is made non conductive, i.e. set at the " OFF " state. In order to set these transistors to the " ON " state again, the gate voltage is brought to a level such that the voltage between the gate and the source of the transistor is greater than the threshold voltage (typically from 0.7 to 2.5 volts) of the transistor.

Preferably, as was already mentioned in the preamble of this description, in order to reduce the value of the series resistance R_{DS_ON} (or the conduction resistance) of each of power transistors 210 and 220, gate voltages V_{GATE_CHG} and V_{GATE_DISCHG} are preferably brought to levels such that the gate-source voltage of each of the transistors is substantially greater than the threshold voltage (typically 5 to 15 volts above the threshold voltage). In order to do this, control means 50 preferably include two charge pumps 510 and 520 respectively connected to gates 211 and 221 of MOFSET power transistors 210 and 220. These charge pumps are well known in the art and generate a higher output voltage than their input voltage. Typically, these charge pumps are able to double or triple their input voltage. It is to be noted that this type of device is also known by the name of voltage doubler or tripler. In the application example used here, it will be mentioned that the charge pumps are thus typically adapted to triple an input voltage V_{dd} defined as the voltage of the rechargeable battery.

As is illustrated in Figure 3, two blocking switches SW_{CHG} and SW_{DISCHG} arranged respectively in first and second branches 500a and 500b allow each of gates 211 and 221 to be connected to earth in order, if required, to set the corresponding power transistor to the " OFF " state. It will be mentioned however that it is perfectly possible to envisage additionally or alternatively that charge pumps 510 and 520 are deactivated when the corresponding transistor has to be set to the " OFF " state. Blocking switches SW_{CHG} and SW_{DISCHG} can then be directly integrated in charge pumps 510 and 520.

According to an essential feature of the present invention, control means 50 further include coupling means connected between gates 211 and 221 of MOFSET power transistors 210 and 220. These coupling means can easily be made in the form of a coupling switch SW_{CPL} adapted to connect gates 211 and 221 of the power transistors, as is illustrated in Figure 3.

According to the present invention, this coupling switch SW_{CPL} is adapted to couple, at least temporarily, gates 211 and 221 of power transistors 210 and 220 when one or the other of these transistors, which had previously been set to the " OFF " state to interrupt the flow of a current, has to be reset to the " ON " state.

By coupling, at least temporarily, gates 211 and 221 of MOFSET power transistors 210 and 220 when the transistor at the " OFF " state is again made to conduct, the charges present on the transistor gate which remained at the " ON " state are shared with the other transistor and it is thus possible to substantially reduce the conduction delay time of this transistor and thereby the conduction delay time or switching to the " ON " state time of bidirectional switch 20. According to the present invention, advantage is thus taken of the fact that only one of MOFSET power transistors 210 or 220 is set to the " OFF " state when one wishes to interrupt the flow of the current through the battery, the other transistor always remaining in the " ON " state.

In order to take advantage of this fact, the gates of the power transistors have to be connected at least temporarily for a sufficient time interval for the power transistor which was at the " OFF " state to become conductive again. It will be understood however that the gates of MOFSET power transistors 210 and 220 can perfectly well be permanently coupled to each other for as long as it is desirable to keep both transistors at the " ON " state. Of course, these coupling means must necessarily be adapted to uncouple the transistor gates when one of power transistors 210 or 220 of bidirectional switch 20 has to be made non-conductive.

According to this principle, it will be understood that coupling switch SW_{CPL} forming the coupling means can be controlled by a control signal formed of a logic combination of the activation signals respectively controlling switches SW_{CHG} and SW_{DISCHG} . Thus, if one assumes that the activation signals $CONTCHG$ and $CONTDISCHG$ are used to control respectively switches SW_{CHG} and SW_{DISCHG} , these activation signals being at the " high " logic state when the power transistors have to be set to the " ON " state, the control signal of coupling switch SW_{CPL} can be defined as the AND logic combination of these activation signals $CONTCHG$ and $CONTDISCHG$.

It will be mentioned that switches SW_{CPL} , SW_{CHG} and SW_{DISCHG} have to be adapted to switch between relatively high voltages (of the order of the gate voltage applied to power transistors 210 and 220, namely ten or so volts). One may envisage making these switches by means of MOFSET transistors adapted to resist such switching voltages. However, it will be understood that the response time of coupling switch SW_{CPL} is determining for the time it takes bidirectional switch 20 to switch to the " ON " state. It is thus preferable to minimise the time it takes coupling switch SW_{CPL} to switch to the " ON " state, i.e. to use low voltage MOFSET transistors having a low gate capacitance.

10 In order to make the control system according to the present invention using low voltage CMOS technology, several modifications must thus be made to the system which has just been described. Figure 4 illustrates an embodiment of a control system for a bidirectional switch with two transistors made using low voltage CMOS technology. Identical numerical references have been used in this Figure to designate the elements common to this embodiment and to the operating diagram of Figure 3.

15 With reference to Figure 4, bidirectional switch 20 formed of the pair of N-MOFSET power transistors 210 and 220 is thus controlled by control means 50 including in particular charge pumps 510 and 520 respectively supplying equivalent gate voltages V_{GATE_CHG} and V_{GATE_DISCHG} , in this embodiment, at three times input voltage V_{dd} supplied by the battery.

20 According to this embodiment, the first branch 500a including blocking switch SW_{CHG} allows gate 211 of MOFSET power transistor 210 to be earthed in order to set it to the " OFF " state. Likewise, the second branch 500b including blocking switch SW_{DISCHG} allows gate 221 of MOFSET power transistor 220 to be earthed in order to set it to the " OFF " state. Blocking transistors SW_{CHG} and SW_{DISCHG} are formed of MOFSET transistors 511 and 512, respectively, one of whose terminals is connected to earth. The gates of these MOFSET transistors 511 and 512 are respectively controlled by inverted activation signals $CONTCHG$ and $CONTDISCHG$.

25 Branches 500a and 500b each further include first and second protective transistors 501a and 502a, respectively, 501a and 501b, connected in series between the gate of the corresponding MOFSET power transistor and the corresponding blocking switch, namely respectively between gate 211 of power transistor 210 and switch SW_{CHG} on the one hand, and between gate 221 of power transistor 220 and switch SW_{DISCHG} on the other hand.

30 The gates of first protective transistors 501a and 501b are connected to each other and controlled by a first control voltage V_1 . The gates of second protective

transistors 502a and 502b are connected to each other and controlled by a second control voltage V_2 .

Coupling switch SW_{CPL} formed in this example by a MOFSET coupling transistor 510, is connected between the connection node of first and second protective transistors 501a and 502a of first branch 500a, and the connection node of first and second protective transistors 501b and 502b of second branch 500b. The gate of coupling transistor 510 forming the coupling switch is controlled by a control voltage V_{CPL} representing activation signals $CONTCHG$ and $CONTDISCHG$ of blocking switches SW_{CHG} and SW_{DISCHG} . In this embodiment, this control voltage V_{CPL} is substantially 0 so as to uncouple gates 211 and 221 of power transistors 210 and 220 when one of activation signals $CONTCHG$ and $CONTDISCHG$ indicates that one of these power transistors has to be set to the " OFF " state. Conversely, in order to couple gates 211 and 221 of power transistors 210 and 220 so as to allow the blocked transistor to be rapidly switched on, control voltage V_{CPL} of the gate of coupling transistor 510 is brought to a value substantially equal to the gate voltage of power transistors 210 and 220.

In order to assure that none of the transistors forming control means 50 has too high a voltage across its terminals, the gates of first protective transistors 501a and 501b as well as the gates of second protective transistors 502a and 502b are controlled in the following manner.

In normal operation, i.e. when both MOFSET power transistors 210 and 220 forming bidirectional switch 20 are at the " ON " state ($CONTCHG = CONTDISCHG = 1$), first control voltage V_1 of first protective transistors 501a and 501b is brought to a value substantially equal to the gate voltage of power transistors 210 and 220, i.e. approximately three times the input voltage V_{dd} . Second control voltage V_2 of second protective transistors 502a and 502b is brought to a value substantially equal to twice input voltage V_{dd} .

When one or the other of MOFSET power transistors 210 or 220 has to set to the " OFF " state in order to interrupt the flow of a current through bidirectional switch 20 ($CONTCHG = " 0 "$ or $CONTDISCHG = " 0 "$), first control voltage V_1 is reduced to a voltage substantially equal to twice input voltage V_{dd} , while second control voltage V_2 is reduced to a voltage substantially equal to input voltage V_{dd} .

This control method for the gates of protective transistors 501a, 502a, 501b and 502b thus ensures that none of the transistors has too high a voltage across its terminals, which could lead to the breakdown thereof.

Figures 5a to 5d illustrate four diagrams of the evolution of the various control voltages of the control system of Figure 4 in response to activation signals $CONTCHG$

and CONTDISCHG, allowing the beneficial effects of the present invention to be seen. A situation is shown here in which the bidirectional switch blocks, in a first period (phase A in the Figures), the continuation of the battery discharge (CONTCHG = " 1 " ; CONTDISCHG = " 0 "), then in a second period (phase B), is rest to normal operation (CONTCHG = CONTDISCHG = " 1 "), and, in a third period (phase C), again blocks the continuation of the discharge (CONTCHG = " 1 " , CONTDISCHG = " 0 ").

Figure 5a thus shows a first diagram in which activation signals CONTCHG and CONTDISCHG are illustrated. Figure 5b shows a second diagram illustrating a first curve a representative of the evolution of the double of voltage V_{dd} supplied by the battery and a second curve b representative of the evolution of second control voltage V_2 of second protective transistors 502a and 502b of Figure 4. Figure 5c shows a third diagram illustrating a third curve c representative of the evolution of first control voltage V_1 of first protective transistors 501a and 501b of Figure 4, and a fourth curve d representative of the evolution of control voltage V_{CPL} of coupling transistor 510. Figure 5d shows a fourth diagram illustrating fifth and sixth curves e and f respectively representative of the evolution of gate voltages V_{GATE_CHG} and V_{GATE_DISCHG} of MOFSET power transistors 210 and 220.

It is thus to be noted in these Figures that during phase A and phase C (CONTCHG = " 1 " ; CONTDISCHG = " 0 "), gate voltage V_{GATE_DISCHG} of MOFSET power transistor 220 is substantially equal to 0 so that this transistor is set at the " OFF " state in order to interrupt any continuation of the battery discharge. MOFSET power transistor 210 is kept at the " ON " state by applying gate voltage V_{GATE_CHG} equivalent to approximately three times voltage V_{dd} . In this case, as mentioned hereinbefore, first and second control voltages V_1 and V_2 have a value of approximately twice and respectively once voltage V_{dd} . Control voltage V_{CPL} of coupling transistor 510 is kept substantially at 0 so that the gates of MOFSET power transistors 210 and 220 of Figure 4 are kept uncoupled.

During transition to phase B (CONTCHG = CONTDISCHG = " 1 "), control voltage V_{CPL} of coupling transistor 510 passes to approximately three times voltage V_{dd} so that the gates of MOFSET power transistors 210 and 220 are coupled. Simultaneously, first and second control voltages V_1 and V_2 of the protective transistors pass respectively to three and two times voltage V_{dd} . As is clear from the diagram of Figure 5d, it follows that the charges present on the gate of MOFSET power transistor 210 which remained at the " ON " state are shared with MOFSET power transistor 220. The gate of MOFSET power transistor 220 is thus very rapidly charged to a sufficient level to make it conductive by the transfer of a portion of the charges of MOFSET power transistor 210 which remained at the " ON " state. Since

the conduction threshold of the MOFSET power transistors is located at approximately 1 volt, it will thus be noted that MOFSET power transistor 220 is set to the " ON " state practically instantaneously. Once the gates are coupled, the charge of the gates of the MOFSET power transistors represented by curves e and f of Figure 5d follow a normal
5 evolution.

Everything which has just been described may of course apply in a similar manner in the situation in which the bidirectional switch blocks the continuation of the battery charge, i.e. the situation in which MOFSET power transistor 210 is set at the " OFF " state (CONTCHG = " 0 ", CONTDISCHG = " 1 ").

10 It will also be easily understood that the control system according to the invention may be subject to numerous modifications and/or improvements without departing from the scope of the claims. In particular, those skilled in the art are perfectly capable of modifying the control system according to the present invention to adapt it to lower or higher control voltages according to the particular application. It will
15 be recalled moreover, that the control system for a bidirectional switch according to the present invention may also be applied to different circuits to the protective battery circuits which were taken here as examples.



CLAIMS

1. Control system for a bidirectional switch (20) formed of a pair of MOFSET power transistors (210, 220) mounted in anti-series source to source or drain to drain, this control system including control means (50) allowing the state of conduction of said power transistors (210, 220) to be controlled, one or the other of said power
5 transistors being able to be set to the " OFF " state in order to assure the interruption of a current (I_{CHG} , I_{DISCHG}) through said switch (20), characterised in that this control system includes coupling means (SW_{CPL} , 510) enabling the gate (211; 221) of the power transistor at the " ON " state to be coupled at least temporarily with the gate (221, 211) of the power transistor at the " OFF " state when said switch (20) is
10 switched on.
2. Control system according to claim 1, characterised in that said coupling means (SW_{CPL} , 510) permanently couples the gates (211, 221) of said power transistors (210, 220) when the latter are at the " ON " state.
3. Control system according to claim 1 or 2, characterised in that said
15 control means (50) include two charge pumps (510, 520) respectively connected to the gates (211, 221) of said power transistors (210, 220) and first and second branches (500a, 500b) respectively connected to the gates (211, 221) of said power transistors (210, 220) and each including a blocking transistor (SW_{CHG} , SW_{DISCHG} ; 511, 512) enabling the corresponding power transistor (210, 220) to be set to the " OFF " state.
- 20 4. Control system according to claim 3, characterised in that each of said branches (500a, 500b) further includes first (501a, 501b) and second (502a, 502b) protective transistors connected in series between the gate (211, 221) of the corresponding power transistor (210, 220) and the blocking switch (SW_{CHG} , SW_{DISCHG} ; 511, 512), said coupling means (SW_{CPL} , 510) being connected between
25 the connection node of the first and second protective transistors (501a, 502a) of the first branch (500a), and the connection node of the first and second protective transistors (501b, 502b) of the second branch (500b).
5. Control system according to claim 3 or 4, characterised in that said blocking switches (SW_{CHG} , SW_{DISCHG} ; 511, 512) are MOFSET transistors.
- 30 6. Control system according to any of the preceding claims, characterised in that said coupling means are a MOFSET transistor.
7. Control method for a bidirectional switch (20) formed of a pair of MOFSET power transistors (210, 220) mounted in anti-series source to source or drain to drain, and controlled by control means (50), one or the other of said power
35 transistors (210, 220) being able to be set to the " OFF " state in order to assure the



interruption of a current (I_{CHG} , I_{DISCHG}) through said switch (20), wherein, when said switch (20) is switched on, the gate (211; 221) of the power transistor at the " ON " state is at least temporarily coupled with the gate (221, 211) of the power transistor at the " OFF " state.

- 5 8. Control method according to claim 7, wherein the gates (211, 221) of said power transistors (210, 220) are permanently coupled when the latter are at the " ON " state.