Tunable Loop Microstrip (TLM) Coil Array with Decoupling Capacitors

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INTRODUCTION
Minimizing the mutual coupling among coil elements is necessary for parallel MRI. Preamplifiers with extremely low input-impedance [1] and capacitive decoupling networks [2,3] have become the primary techniques for decoupling arbitrarily placed coil arrays. However, the low input-impedance preamplifier is not suitable in transmit mode, and capacitive decoupling networks may cause design difficulties for large number of elements [4]. In this paper, we show that the tunable loop microstrip (TLM) coil array [5,6] with decoupling circuit can achieve more than -20dB element isolation. The decoupling circuit in our design is quite simple, only n decoupling capacitors are needed for n elements. Thus, it is suitable for arrays with large number of coils and for transceivers.

METHOD
The TLM coil array shown in Fig.1 is a series of TLM coils linked by decoupling capacitors. Each TLM coil consists of a conductive loop and ground plane separated by low loss dielectric material. The section in the square box of Fig.1 illustrates the decoupling method, where \( C_T \) and \( C_D \) are tuning and decoupling capacitors, \( M \) and \( L \) denote the mutual inductance and equivalent self-inductance of each coil respectively. According to even/odd mode analysis, when two resonant mode frequencies \( f_a = f_o \), the mutual inductive coupling of adjacent elements diminishes [7]. Then, the required \( C_D \) can be calculated as:

\[
C_D = 2C_T M (L - M) \quad (1)
\]

The mutual coupling among non-adjacent elements is much weaker than that of the adjacent pair. If the spacing of the non-adjacent elements is large enough to satisfy the broadband decoupling condition [5], they can be intrinsically decoupled. Thus only n-1 decoupling capacitors are needed for n elements of planar structure.

EXPERIMENT AND RESULT
We built a 4-element receive-only TLM coil array at 1.5T, which is shown in Fig.2. The coils were 9cm×9cm in size with 2.9cm coil spacing. All coils were built using 1.27cm wide copper tape and 10mm thick teflon as substrate. Without decoupling circuit, the adjacent elements are strong coupled and their frequencies split, which is shown in Fig.3 (a). After mounting and varying decoupling capacitor \( C_D \) only the \( f_a \) is shifted with \( C_D \). Fig.3 (b) and Fig.3(c) show that \( f_a \) keeps at 63.88MHz while \( f_o \) is shifted. This characteristic is much helpful for decoupling adjusting especially when the number of elements is large. Fig.3 (d) shows that after decoupling, the S21 between adjacent elements was better than -20dB. S21 between any elements range from -20dB to -35dB. This 4-element coil array was tested in GE 1.5T system. Phantom (0.9% sodium chloride) with the size of 5.5×8×8cm² was placed above each element of the TLM coil array. Fig.4 shows excellent decoupling performance between the neighbor elements. When the left element was excited, only 5.6% signal power was transferred to its nearest neighbor.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION
The TLM coil array with decoupling capacitors has been introduced in the paper. It can be not only used for receive-only mode, but an excellent choice for transceivers as well for parallel MRI. The decoupling circuit is quite simple and easy to be adjusted, so it is suitable for arrays with large number of elements. Besides planar structure, it could be wrapped around a cylinder to form a volume coil array.

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REFERENCES