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RECEIVED 30 April 2024

ACCEPTED 11 June 2024

PUBLISHED 26 July 2024

CITATION

Yi S, Chen C, Yu M, Hao J and Wang Y (2024),
2D/2D Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructure with rapid
NO₂ gas detection.
Front. Chem. 12:1425693.
doi: 10.3389/fchem.2024.1425693

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2D/2D Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructure with rapid NO₂ gas detection

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Heterostructure engineering is crucial for enhancing gas sensing performance. However, achieving rapid response for room-temperature NO₂ sensing through rational heterostructure design remains a challenge. In this study, a Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ 2D/2D heterostructure was synthesized by hydrothermal method for the rapid detection of NO₂ at room temperature. By combining Bi₂Se₃ nanosheets with SnSe₂ nanosheets, the Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ sensor demonstrated the lowest detection limit for NO₂ a short response time (15 s) to 10 ppm NO₂ at room temperature, reaches 25 ppb. Furthermore the sensor demonstrates significantly larger response to NO₂ than to other interfering gases, including 10 ppm NO₂, H₂S, NH₃, CH₄, CO, and SO₂, demonstrating its outstanding selectivity. And we discuss the mechanism of related performance enhancement.

KEYWORDS

2D, NO₂ Sensing, heterostructure, room-temperature, flexible sensor

1 Introduction

Flexible sensors for pressure, temperature, humidity, strain, and heat flux have garnered significant attention in the fields of electronic skin, environmental monitoring, and body temperature monitoring (Ansari et al., 2023). Gas sensing has become a critical aspect in atmospheric environment monitoring, industrial production, and medical healthcare applications (Yang et al., 2023). NO₂ stands as one of the most prevalent air pollutants. Studies indicate that even brief exposure to concentrations as low as 3 ppm can cause eye and lung irritation in human, while also compromising respiratory infection resistance, potentially resulting in fatality in severe cases (Spiras et al., 1986; Qureshi et al., 2003; Rathi and Pal 2020). Therefore, the development of highly responsive and rapid gas sensing technologies for the detection of low-concentration NO₂ at routine temperatures assumes paramount importance in practical applications.

Two-dimensional metal chalcogenides (TMDs) have attracted considerable interest in gas sensing owing to their superior electrical properties, large surface area, and abundant adsorption sites (Zheng et al., 2016; Sardana et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024). Huang et al. modified two-dimensional material MoS₂ with zinc oxide nanoparticles to improve the response of MoS₂ to NO₂ (Han et al., 2018). While tin (Sn) is not classified as a transition metal, its selenide compound can adopt a 2D-layered hexagonal structure similar to that of TMDs (D'Olimpio et al., 2022; Harish and Sathyakam, 2022). Moreover heterostructures offer significant potential for a broad applications, including high-speed electronics and optoelectronic devices. By integrating SnS₂ nanosheets with the Ti₃C₂T_x skeleton platform, Han et al. achieved a good response to 50ppm triethylamine at room temperature (Han et al., 2023). So the fabrication of heterostructures has been widely utilized

to further enhance the sensing performance of gas sensors based on SnSe₂. For instance, Li et al. fabricated a chemiresistive sensor based on a SnSe₂/SnO₂ heterojunction using the thermal oxidation method for the detection of NO₂ gas (Li et al., 2020). While significant advancements have been achieved in enhancing the sensing capabilities of SnSe₂ for NO₂ detection, there is still a need for further improvement, particularly in terms of reducing the response time, as well as improving selectivity. An important limitation of two-dimensional materials for room temperature gas sensing is the long response recovery time due to the slow desorption process. It is well understood that in comparison to 0D/2D and 1D/2D heterostructures, 2D/2D heterostructures offer closer interfacial contacts, facilitating enhanced charge transfer and thereby improving sensing properties. It is anticipated that the development of these 2D/2D heterostructures on SnSe₂ could efficiently accelerate the response time.

Enhancing selectivity is a critical factor for gas sensing equipment. Current strategies employed to improve the selectivity of gas sensing devices encompass precious metal modification, heterostructural construction, ultraviolet irradiation, and external auxiliary heatin (Majhi

et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2016; Joshi et al., 2018) Bi₂Se₃, a representative 2D semiconductor, has gained significant interest across various fields like optoelectronic circuit, photocatalysis, and batteries due to its favorable bandgap, exceptional stability, and ease of synthesis (Huang et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022). Moreover, the lower work function of Bi₂Se₃ compared to SnSe₂ promotes facilitates electron migration from Bi₂Se₃ to SnSe₂, resulting in a decrease in the work function of SnSe₂. This reduced work function of SnSe₂ facilitates electron transfer to NO₂ molecules during sensing (Li et al., 2024). Additionally, the remarkable catalytic properties of Bi₂Se₃ contribute to lowering the activation energy needed for gas sensing, ultimately enhancing sensing performance, particularly in reducing response time and increasing selectivity. Consequently, the engineering of 2D/2D heterostructures by combining Bi₂Se₃ nanosheets and SnSe₂ holds promise for developing sensors with improved sensitivity and rapid response at room temperatures.

In this study, 2D/2D heterostructures of SnSe₂/Bi₂Se₃ were synthesized using a combination of colloidal method and solvothermal method with a laminated stack structure. The optimized SnSe₂/Bi₂Se₃ sensor demonstrated a notable reduction in response time for 10 ppm NO₂, dropping from 73 to 15 s, and a

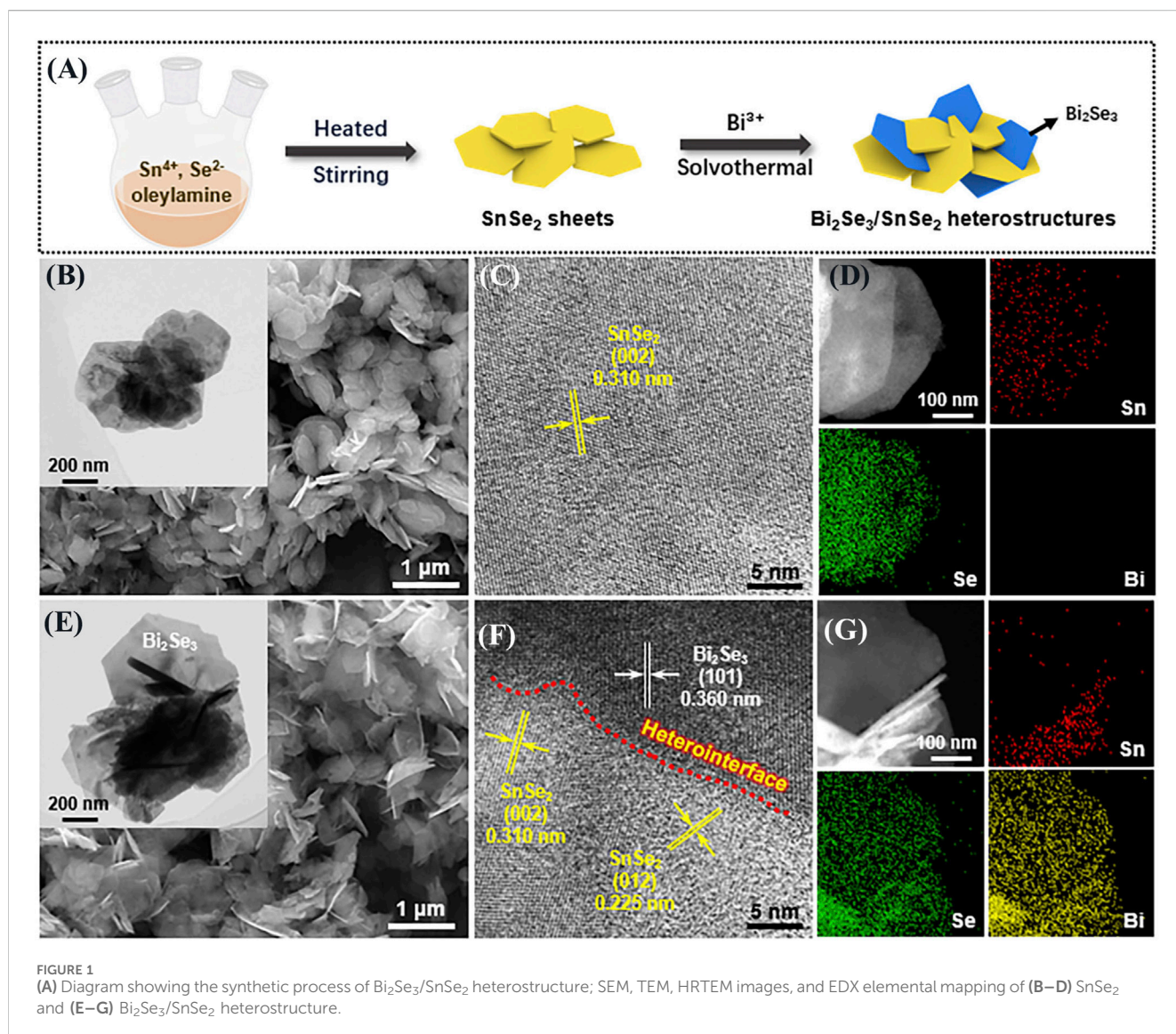
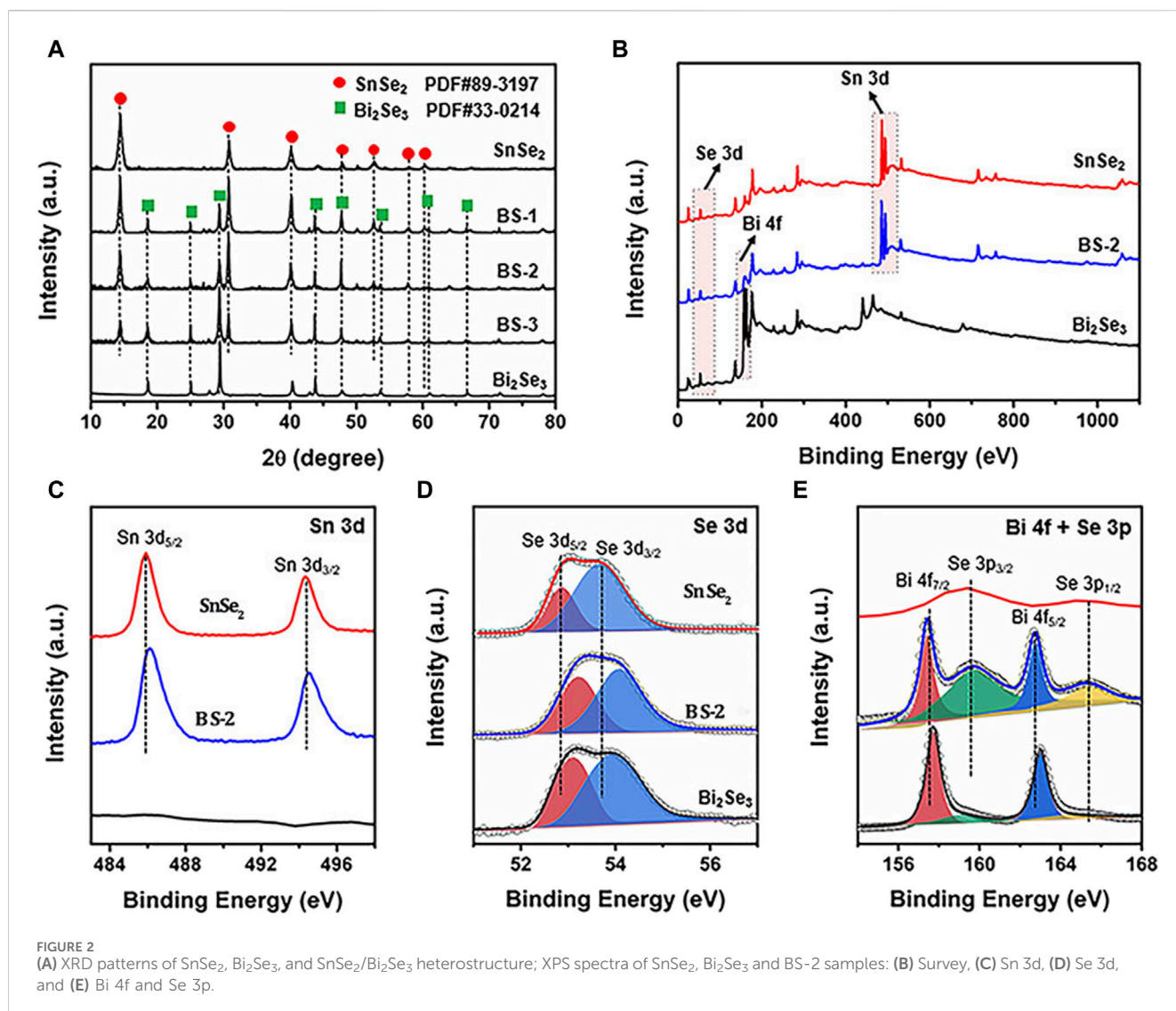


FIGURE 1 (A) Diagram showing the synthetic process of Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructure; SEM, TEM, HRTEM images, and EDX elemental mapping of (B–D) SnSe₂ and (E–G) Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructure.



decrease in recovery time from 300 to 110 s. The optimized sensor also exhibits a high response to NO₂, with a high response rate of 130% to 10ppm of NO₂. These improved sensing capabilities can be ascribed to enhanced transfer of charges and the larger number of adsorption sites, which are both enabled by the SnSe₂/Bi₂Se₃ 2D/2D heterostructures. Additionally, the fatigue tests of the sensor after 100, 500, and 1,000 cycles of bending and relaxation showed no significant decrease in response values, demonstrating its excellent mechanical performance. These findings present a novel and effective strategy for developing a practical NO₂ gas sensor based on SnSe₂.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 Synthesis of SnSe₂ nanoplates

Firstly, 0.5 mmol SnCl₄·5H₂O, 1.5 mmol SeO₂, and 0.5 mmol 1, 10 -phenanthroline were dissolved in a three-neck flask. The mixture was stirred for 10 min under a highly pure N₂

atmosphere at room temperature. Following a 10-min N₂ degassing, the solution underwent heating to 110 °C while being stirred magnetically for an additional 10 min. Then, further increased to 260 °C and maintained for another 30 min with continuous stirring. Cooling down to room temperature, the resulting products were collected and centrifuged under three rounds of washing: first with cyclohexane and then with ethanol. Ultimately, the products were kept at 70°C for 10 h.

2.2 Synthesis of Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructures

The preparation of Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructures involved a simple solvothermal method. Its synthesis process is shown in Figure 1A. Precisely, 0.2 mmol of the pre-synthesized SnSe₂ was gently dispersed in 20 mL ethanol and stirred for 0.5 h. Subsequently, a specific quantity of Bi(NO₃)₃·5H₂O was added to the suspension and vigorously stirred for another 0.5 h. The resulting mixture was then moved to a 25 mL Teflon-lined

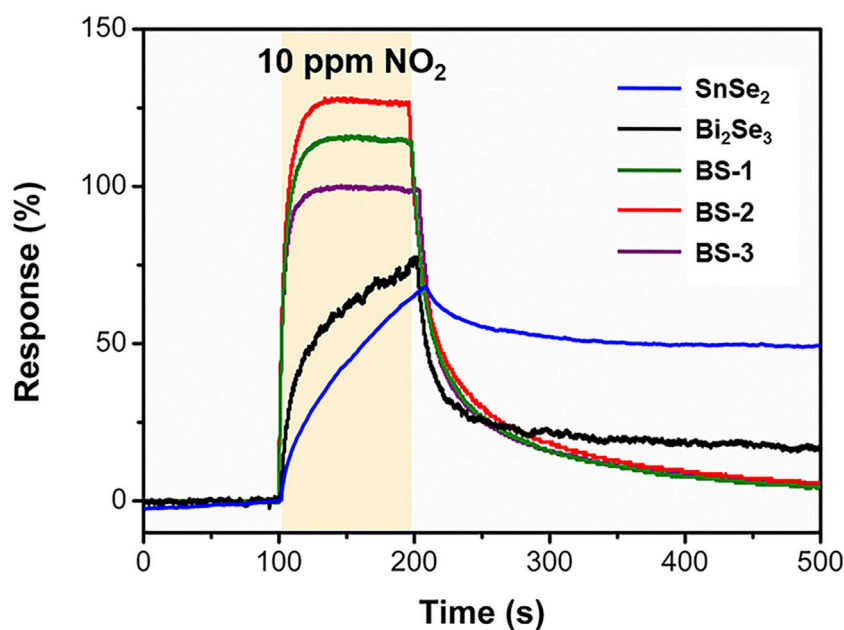


FIGURE 3 Response curves of the sensors based on SnSe₂, Bi₂Se₃ and Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructures to 10 ppm NO₂ at room-temperature.

autoclave and the solvothermal reaction was performed at 180 °C for 12 h. Finally, the resulting product was collected and subjected to three washes with ethanol and water.

For simplicity, the Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructures were labeled as BS-1, BS-2, and BS-5, reflecting the amounts of Bi salt added (0.020, 0.025, and 0.040 mmol) respectively. In contrast, the synthesis of pure Bi₂Se₃ involved the addition of 1 mmol Bi₂O₃, 3 mmol SeO₂, and 0.4 g NaOH into 40 mL of ethylene glycol. After being vigorously stirred for 1 h, the resulting suspension was placed in a Teflon-lined autoclave and the reaction was performed at 180 °C for 7 h. Subsequently, the resultant products were collected, subjected to multiple washes with ethanol and deionized water, and finally dried at 60 °C for 10 h.

2.3 Characterization of materials

The morphologies of the samples were inspected using both FESEM (SIRION 200) and TEM (JEOL-1400). Elemental composition was characterized by EDX and elemental mapping, while crystal structure was analyzed by XRD measurements (Bruker D8 Advance). The chemical states were determined through XPS analysis using an ESCALAB 250 spectrometer.

2.4 Gas-sensing properties

The gas sensors were produced through applying a solution of sensing materials through drop-casting (10 mg/mL in ethanol) onto Ag-Pd interdigital electrodes on an alumina substrate measuring 6.6 × 6.0 mm. To evaluate the gas sensing performance, a homemade sensor-testing system was employed, and a simplified experimental setup is depicted in Supplementary Figure S1. The real-time changes

in conductivity of the sensors was collected via the electrochemical workstation (CHI 630E). In the sensing experiments, a precise volume of test gas was injected into the 4 L test chamber via a syringe. The relative humidity levels were regulated using a CK-80G commercial humidity chamber by Kingjo. All tests were performed in room air at 25 °C with a relative humidity of 40%–50%. The sensing response (S) was determined using the equation of $S = (R_g - R_a)/R_a$, where R_g and R_a represented the sensor resistance in the target gas and in air, respectively. The response and recovery times represent the duration it takes for the sensor to reach 90% of the resistance change after a target gas was injected and released, respectively.

2.5 Manufacturing of flexible chemical sensor

The flexible chemical sensor, incorporating Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructures, was intricately applied to a polyethylene terephthalate substrate with interdigital gold patterns. The fabrication procedure for the device is meticulous and mirrors a method similar to the one previously documented. (Wang et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017).

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Material structure and morphology

Characterized by SEM, TEM, and HRTEM. Figures 1B, E display the SEM images of SnSe₂ and BS-2 samples, respectively, and their insets are the corresponding TEM images. The SnSe₂ exhibits nanoplates morphology with the uniform dimension of

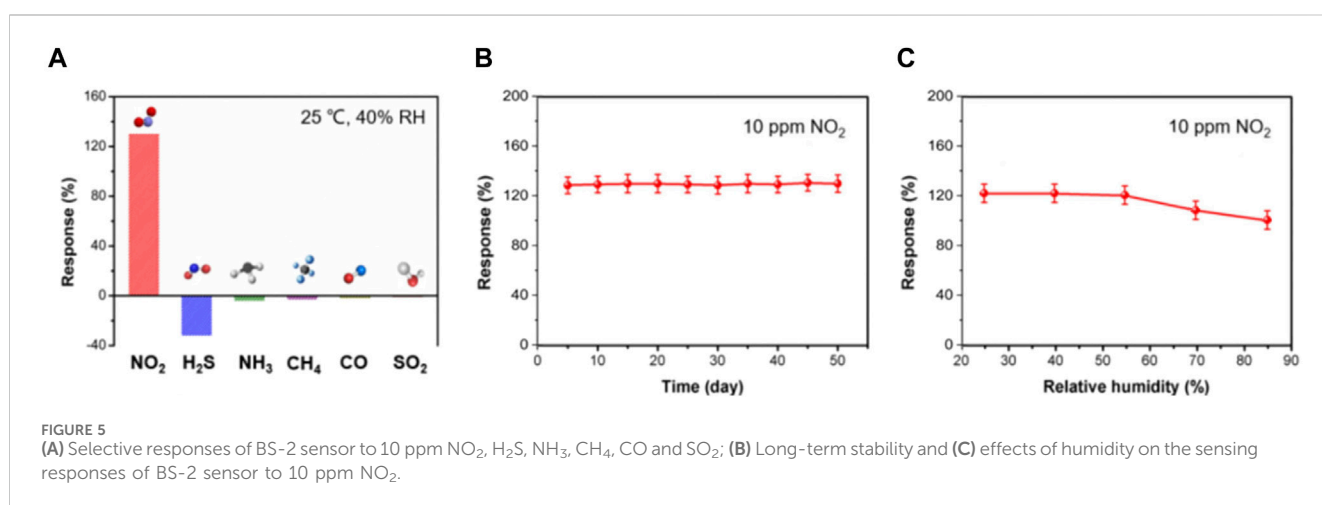
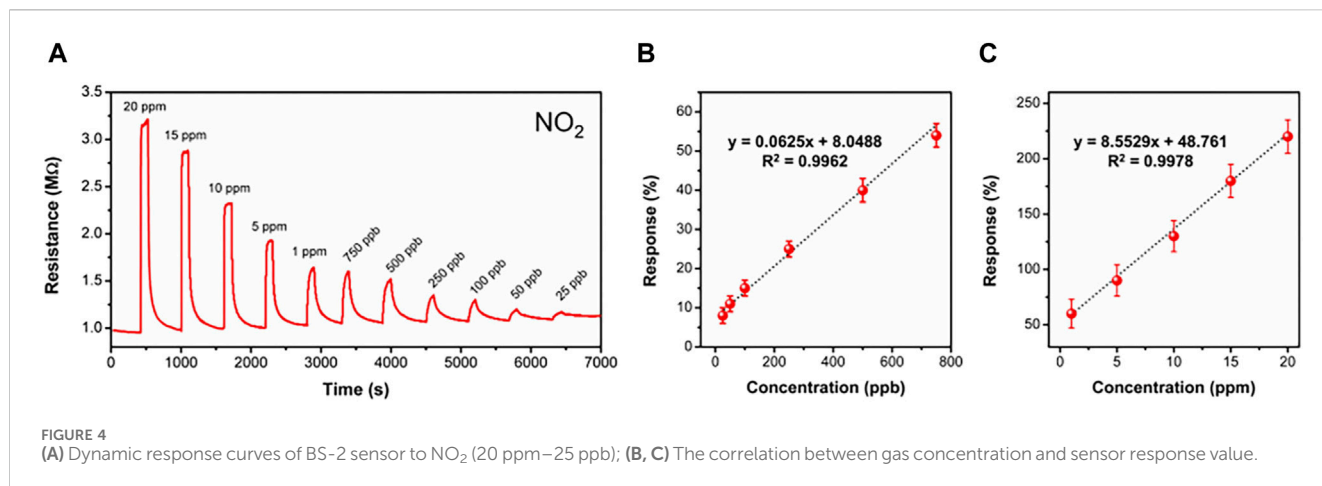
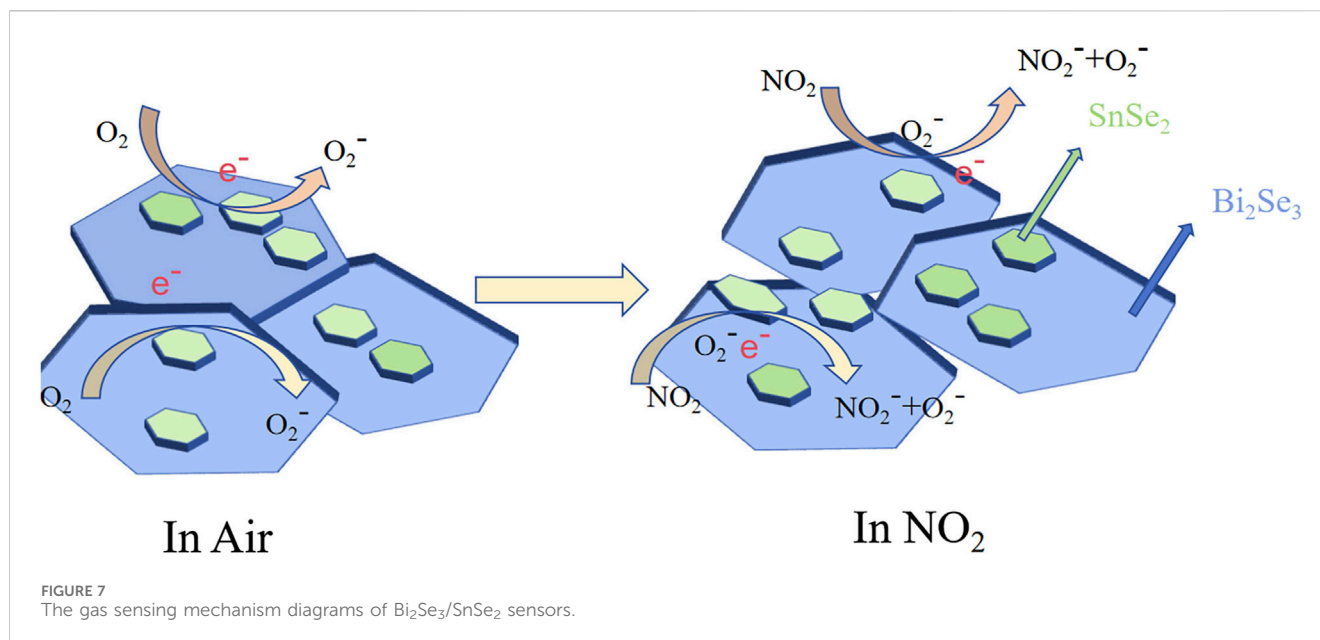
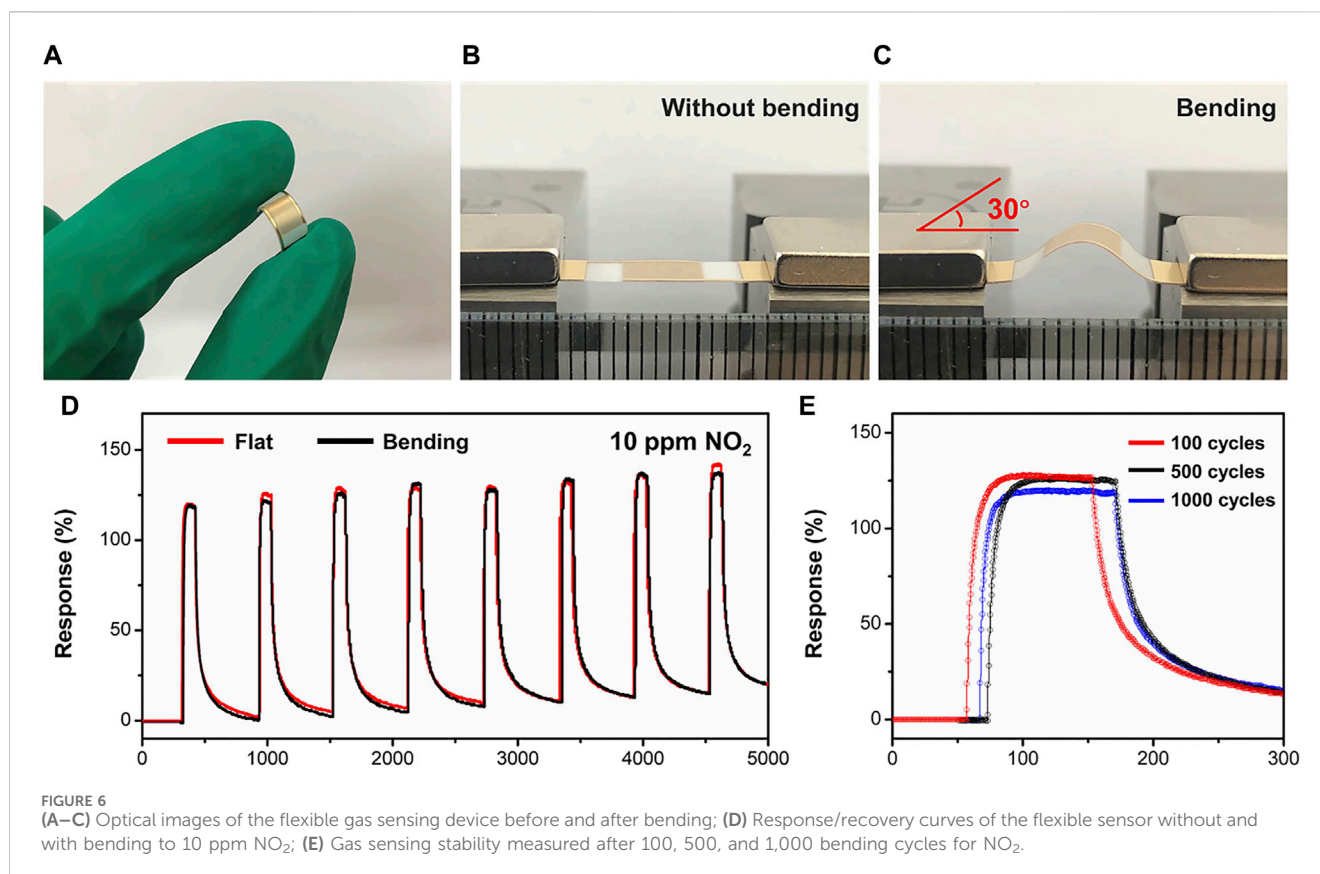


TABLE 1 Comparison of NO₂ responses of Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ sensor with that of other materials reported in literature.

Sensing materials	Working temperature/°C	Response (%) / concentration (ppm)	Detection limit/ppb	T _{res} / T _{rec} (s)	References
MoS ₂ nanosheets	25	24.8/10	1,000	50/234	Liu et al. (2020)
trilayer WSe ₂	25	<64/10	/	-/-	Guo et al. (2019)
WSe ₂ /WS ₂	25	66/10	—	-/1,500	Kim et al. (2020)
WSe ₂ /MoS ₂	25	25/500	—	-/-	Kim et al. (2020)
This work	25	230/10	25	15/110	

500–800 nm. After the solvothermal process, the SnSe₂ still retain its original shape, and the hexagonal Bi₂Se₃ nanoplates grow on the surface of SnSe₂, forming a heterostructure with intimate contact. The HRTEM images in Figures 1C, F clearly demonstrate the presence of a heterojunction interface. The lattice spacings of 0.310 and 0.225 nm belong to the (002) and (012) planes of SnSe₂, respectively, while the 0.360 nm spacing corresponds to the (101) plane of Bi₂Se₃. In addition, the EDX mapping results demonstrate the uniform distribution of Sn, Se, and Bi elements (Figures 1D, G), which further indicates the formation of interconnected structures between SnSe₂ and Bi₂Se₃.

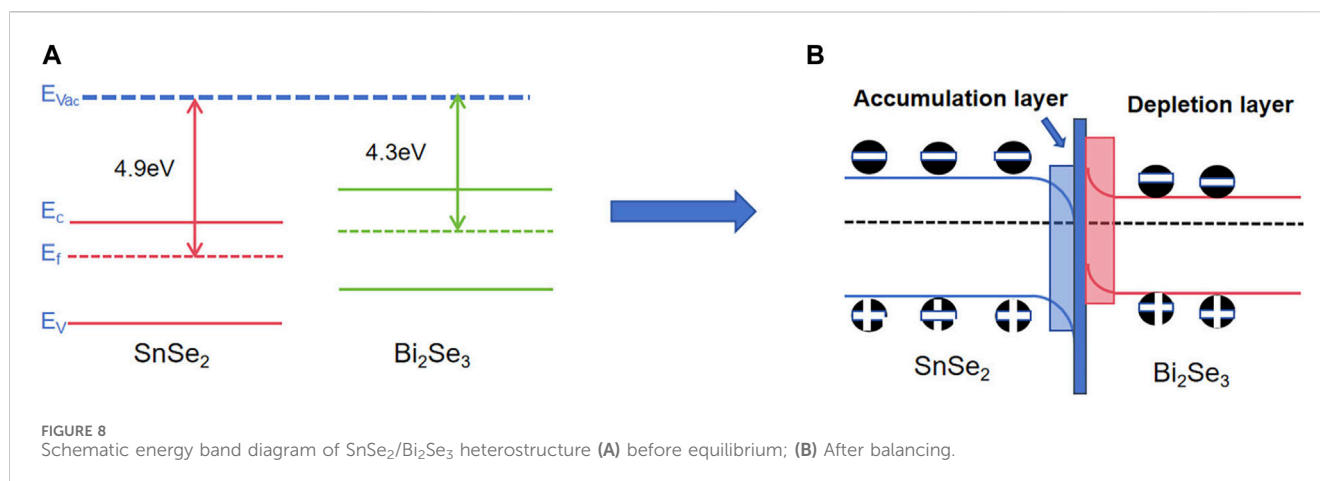
A control sample of nanoplate-like Bi₂Se₃ was synthesized employing a solvothermal method for comparative analysis (Supplementary Figure S2). The crystalline characteristics of SnSe₂, Bi₂Se₃, and the Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructures were investigated via XRD analysis, with the resulting patterns depicted in Figure 2A. The diffraction peaks observed in the pristine samples were unambiguously assigned to hexagonal SnSe₂ (JCPDS 89-3197) and hexagonal Bi₂Se₃ (JCPDS 33-0214). Specifically, the well-aligned distinct peaks at 14.41°, 30.73°, 40.08°, 47.69°, 52.57°, 57.81°, and 64.00° corresponded favorably to the (001), (011), (012), (110), (103), (201), and (202) crystallographic



planes of SnSe₂, respectively. Similarly, the peaks observed at 18.56°, 25.00°, 29.36°, 43.69°, 47.84°, and 53.54° were unequivocally attributed to the (006), (012), (015), (110), (116), and (205) crystallographic planes of Bi₂Se₃. With respect to the Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructures, an increase in the amount of added Bi salt led to an augmentation in the diffraction peaks of Bi₂Se₃ and

a simultaneous decrease in the peak assigned to SnSe₂, without any noticeable impurities, thus indicating the high purity of these synthesized products.

XPS measurement was performed to analyze the chemical compositions and chemical states of the samples. The survey spectra of the BS-2 sample demonstrates the co-existence of Sn,



Se, and Bi elements (Figure 2B), which is in line with the findings from the EDX mapping. In the detailed XPS spectrum of Sn 3d, peaks at 485.9 and 494.3 eV are corresponding to Sn 3d_{5/2} and Sn 3d_{3/2} (Figure 2C), respectively, indicating the presence of Sn⁴⁺ in SnSe₂. Two peaks around 52.8 and 53.6 eV belong to the 3d_{5/2} and 3d_{3/2} of Se²⁻ species (Figure 2D), respectively. In the Bi 4f and Se 3p spectra presented in Figure 2E, the distinctive peaks at 157.8 and 162.8 eV are indicative of Bi 4f_{7/2} and Bi 4f_{5/2}, respectively, indicating the chemical state of Bi³⁺. The peaks that located at 159.7 and 165.4 eV could be separately assigned to the Se 3p_{3/2} and Se 3p_{1/2} orbitals of Se²⁻ (Xu et al., 2019). Notably, in comparison with pristine SnSe₂, the binding energy of Sn 3d in BS-2 slightly shifts to higher energy, while the binding energy of Bi 4f in BS-2 are slightly lower than that of pure Bi₂Se₃. Such migration shifts of the binding energies may be ascribed to the change in electron density on the surfaces of the samples, and the above results confirm that the electrons in the heterostructure transfer from SnSe₂ to Bi₂Se₃. The analyses conducted affirm the successful creation of Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructures.

3.2 Gas sensing properties

The NO₂ sensing capabilities of Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructures were examined through testing the change in resistance upon exposed to target gases. The initial investigation focused on assessing the influence of the Bi₂Se₃ to SnSe₂ ratio on the sensing performance of the heterostructures. As the ratio of Bi₂Se₃ increased, the sensing response increases first then decreased (Figure 3). The BS-2 performs the most significant sensing response to NO₂. By contrast, the sensors based on pure SnSe₂ and Bi₂Se₃ exhibit inadequate response and sluggish recovery. The significantly improved sensing performance may be credited to the formed heterointerface between SnSe₂ and Bi₂Se₃, which facilitates charge transfer and provides abundant active sites. According to the detailed sensing characteristics outlined in Supplementary Table S1, the Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂-2 sensor has been chosen for further research due to its impressive performance, showing the largest response rate of 130% and the shortest response/recovery times of 15/110 s to 10 ppm NO₂.

The dynamic response curve of BS-2 sensor toward different NO₂ concentration was further measured. As illustrated in

Figure 4A, the sensor shows excellent response and recover ability, and the lowest detection limit for NO₂ reaches 25 ppb. Besides, the correlation equation relating response value to gas concentration at ppb (Figure 4B) and ppm level (Figure 4C) could be separately calculated as a good linear relationship, which suggests its promising potential for sensor calibration purpose. Additionally, the wide detection range of the BS-2 sensor enables it to have a broad range of applications.

The selectivity of the BS-2 sensor was studied upon exposure to different analytes, including 10 ppm NO₂, H₂S, NH₃, CH₄, CO, and SO₂. As shown in Figure 5A, the sensor demonstrates significantly larger response to NO₂ than to other interfering gases, demonstrating its outstanding selectivity. To assess long-term stability, the responses of the BS-2 sensor to 10 ppm NO₂ were recorded at a 5-day interval. The sensor exhibits a slight response recession (Figure 5B) and nearly identical sensing behaviors toward target gases within 50 days (Supplementary Figure S3), thereby affirming its significant stability and reliability. In addition, the BS-2 sensor presents notable stability when working in moderate humidity levels (25%–55%), making it suitable for practical applications (Figure 5C).

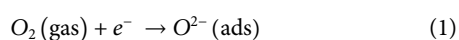
For a comprehensive assessment of sensing ability, Table 1 sums up a comparison between the optimal sensor in this study and other reported sensors based on 2D materials. The Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ sensor shows superior NO₂ sensing performance, featuring minimal power usage and heightened sensitivity, and notable response/recovery characteristics.

The sensor based on Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ demonstrates outstanding NO₂ sensing performance, showcasing minimal power usage and heightened sensitivity and remarkable response/recovery characteristics. To explore the potential capability, the mechanical flexibility properties of the BS-2 sensor were further studied. The flexible gas sensor was produced by depositing the Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructures onto a PET substrate with gold interdigitated electrodes (Figures 6A–C). The gas sensing characteristics of the sensor under bending angle of 30° were then determined. As displays in Figure 6D the dynamic response and recovery curves in each trial are consistent with the flat condition. Furthermore, the fatigue test of the sensor after 100, 500, and 1,000 cycles bending and relaxing processes shows no significant degradation in response values (Figure 6E). The results presented above showcase the promising

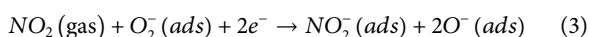
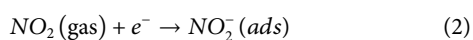
application potential of the flexible Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ sensor in wearable sensing devices.

3.3 Gas sensing mechanism

The gas sensing mechanism of semiconductive materials is established on the modification of resistance caused by the interaction between gas molecules and the sensing materials. (Zappa et al., 2018; Bag and Lee, 2019). The sensing mechanism of SnSe₂ has been extensively discussed in the literature. As depicted in Figure 7, when exposed to air, O₂ molecules adhere to the surface of n-type SnSe₂, resulting in the creation of O²⁻ (ads) by capturing free electrons from the conduction band of SnSe₂. At temperatures below 100°C, the main form of adsorbed oxygen is O²⁻. The redox reaction described above is illustrated in Eq. 1. (Kim et al., 2017).



When SnSe₂ is exposed to NO₂, the gas molecules can efficiently capture electrons from the conduction band of SnSe₂ owing to the greater electronegativity of NO₂ in comparison to O₂. Furthermore, the reaction process can be delineated by Eqs 2, 3 below. Nevertheless, unmodified SnSe₂ demonstrates a diminished response when compared to Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂. This phenomenon arises from the relatively low coverage of chemisorbed oxygen on the pristine SnSe₂ surface. Consequently, NO₂ can directly withdraw electrons from SnSe₂. (Li et al., 2020). As a result, physical adsorption (Eq. 3) predominantly influences the sensing process.



The superior NO₂ sensing properties of Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructures are primarily attributed to the following factors building upon the foundational sensing mechanism discussed earlier:

Initially, the created n–n heterojunction between Bi₂Se₃ and SnSe₂ plays a vital part in boosting the sensing response of the heterostructures. The electronic effects resulting from the construction of the SnSe₂/Bi₂Se₃ heterojunction heterostructure are primarily attributed to band alignment. As depicted in Figure 8, the work function of Bi₂Se₃ is 4.3 eV, while the work function of SnSe₂ is 4.9 eV. Therefore, the Fermi level of Bi₂Se₃ is notably higher than that of SnSe₂. Consequently, upon the formation of the heterojunction, electrons transfer from Bi₂Se₃ to SnSe₂, and holes transfer from SnSe₂ to Bi₂Se₃, leading to the separation of holes and electrons. This results in the generation of an electron accumulation layer on the SnSe₂ side and an electron depletion layer on the Bi₂Se₃ side, leading to electron accumulation on one side of SnSe₂ and an improvement in the electronic structure at the interface.

During the sensing process of NO₂ gas-sensitive materials, when NO₂ gas molecules come into contact with the material surface in a detection gas environment, the gas is first adsorbed by the material. Due to the oxidizing nature of NO₂, it then captures electrons from the surface of material, resulting in a change in the carrier concentration and leading to variations in

resistance and circuit current. The sensing process can be divided into two primary steps: gas adsorption, where active sites on the material surface adsorb gas, and electron reaction, where gas interacts with electrons on the material surface. (Gong et al., 2019).

In the 2D-2D SnSe₂/Bi₂Se₃ heterostructure material, where the sensing material remains SnSe₂, the aggregation of electrons on the surface of SnSe₂ after heterostructure equilibrium is achieved enhances the interaction between NO₂ gas and the material. This leads to a larger change in resistance signal, thereby improving the sensitivity of the material to NO₂ gas. The synthesized Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ 2D/2D heterostructure is lamellae-stacked, which has relatively more adsorption sites and large specific surface area, which is conducive to the adsorption and desorption of NO₂. Moreover, the heterostructure exhibits significantly reduced response and recovery time due to the enhanced electron transfer rate within the material.

4 Conclusion

In summary, Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ 2D/2D heterostructures are successfully synthesized and used for NO₂ detection. The optimized Bi₂Se₃/SnSe₂ heterostructure exhibited rapid response towards NO₂ gas. Compared to pure SnSe₂, the response time was significantly reduced from 73 to 15 s (10 ppm). The enhanced sensing performance is a direct result of the abundant n–n heterojunctions, improved interface charge transfer, and increased active sites that are inherent in the SnSe₂/Bi₂Se₃ heterostructure. Furthermore, the sensor displayed excellent selectivity, with a low detection limit of 10 ppb and a broad detection range from 10 ppb to 20 ppm. Furthermore, the fatigue test of the sensor after 100, 500, and 1,000 cycles bending and relaxing processes shows no significant degradation in response values. These results offer important insights for selecting materials and designing heterostructures to achieve effective room temperature gas detection in a range of applications.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding authors.

Author contributions

SY: Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Writing—original draft. CC: Data curation, Formal Analysis, Methodology, Writing—original draft. MY: Investigation, Methodology, Writing—original draft. JH: Funding acquisition, Project administration, Supervision, Writing—review and editing. YW: Funding acquisition, Resources, Supervision, Writing—review and editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. This work was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (Nos. 52272147 and 52072093), Heilongjiang Touyan Team (HITTY-20190034), and the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (No. 2022FRFK02015).

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fchem.2024.1425693/full#supplementary-material>

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