

Ultrathin WSe₂ Metasurfaces For Efficient Nonlinear Nanophotonics: A COMSOL Multiphysics Study

Mohsen Bagheri Tabar¹, Hessam Shahbazi¹, Zizwe Chase¹

¹University of Illinois Chicago

Abstract

1. Introduction

In on-chip nonlinear optical devices, a critical challenge lies in achieving high-efficiency second-order nonlinear processes, such as second-harmonic generation (SHG), in ultrathin materials, which is essential for development of efficient modern nanophotonics. Transition metal dichalcogenides (TMDs) like WSe₂ offer promising optical nonlinearities due to their broken inversion symmetry in monolayer form, but their nanometric thickness limits conversion efficiencies. Bulk WSe₂, while centrosymmetric, can be engineered into metasurfaces to exploit quasi-bound states in the continuum (q-BICs) for field enhancement. While using thicker, multilayer WSe₂ could increase the interaction volume, the common and most stable 2H crystal phase is centrosymmetric, which forbids second-order nonlinear effects in the bulk. However, fabrication imperfections, such as edge roughness, introduce scattering losses that degrade high-Q resonances essential for boosting SHG.

2. Device structure

The device structure consists of an ultrathin WSe₂ flake with a thickness of 0.7 nm placed on a transparent glass substrate. The flake is patterned into a square lattice with a pitch of approximately 500 nm, where each unit cell contains a nanohole. Initially defined as circular holes with diameters of 300 nm, the features are transformed into equilateral triangular holes with side lengths of 375 nm. This geometry provides broken in-plane symmetry while maintaining subwavelength dimensions, enabling strong optical confinement and efficient nonlinear response.

3. Results

This work addresses the problem by designing and simulating ultrathin WSe₂ metasurfaces with atomically precise triangular edges, achieved via anisotropic wet etching of pre-patterned circular holes, to break in-plane symmetry and enable q-BIC resonances for over three orders of magnitude SHG enhancement. Two metasurface designs are investigated: Figure 1: (i) circular nanohole arrays with C₄ in-plane symmetry, and (ii) triangular nanohole arrays produced by breaking C₂/C₄ symmetry. Simulation results reveal that while circular holes support symmetry-protected BICs that are challenging to excite from the far field, triangular arrays enable direct coupling to q-BIC resonances under normal incidence. Optimized triangular WSe₂ metasurfaces with a thickness of 0.7 nm, pitch of ~500 nm, and triangular side lengths of 375 nm demonstrate SHG enhancements exceeding three orders of magnitude compared to bare flakes. The peak nonlinear conversion efficiency approaches 10⁻³ at pump wavelengths in the 800-850 nm range, in close agreement with reported experimental values for TMD-based metasurfaces. Furthermore, the triangular geometry yields cleaner resonances and reduced scattering losses due to sharper edges, as confirmed by near-field distribution plots and quality factor analysis within COMSOL.

We utilized COMSOL Multiphysics® software to model and optimize the metasurface design. The problem was set up using the Wave Optics Module within COMSOL Multiphysics® version 6.3. A 2D periodic unit cell geometry was created to represent the square lattice of triangular holes in WSe₂ on a glass substrate, with parameters including lattice pitch ($\Lambda = 500$ nm), hole side length ($a_{tri} = 375$ nm), and flake thickness ($h = 0.7$ nm). The Electromagnetic Waves, Frequency Domain interface simulated light propagation, incorporating WSe₂'s anisotropic refractive index ($n > 4$) and second-order susceptibility χ_2 (~10-10 m/V) from literature data. Boundary conditions included Floquet periodicity for the lattice and perfectly matched layers to mimic infinite extent. We solved for reflection spectra and electric field distributions at pump wavelengths (800-1050 nm) to identify q-BIC modes around 1.5 eV.

Simulations predicted SHG enhancements up to 1500-fold at resonant wavelengths (~810 nm), with q-BIC modes showing quality factors >1000, compared to bare WSe₂ flakes. Obtained results matched experimental trends, validating edge sharpness in reducing losses.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, these findings highlight the capability of COMSOL Multiphysics® to model and optimize ultrathin nonlinear metasurfaces, providing predictive insights into geometry-dependent SHG enhancement. The results indicate that WSe₂, with its strong χ_2 response and high refractive index, is a highly attractive platform for realizing compact frequency converters, electro-optical modulators, and integrated quantum photonic devices. In future work, the models will be extended to investigate active tuning of SHG via electrostatic gating, strain engineering, and hybrid coupling with localized quantum emitters.

Reference

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Figures used in the abstract

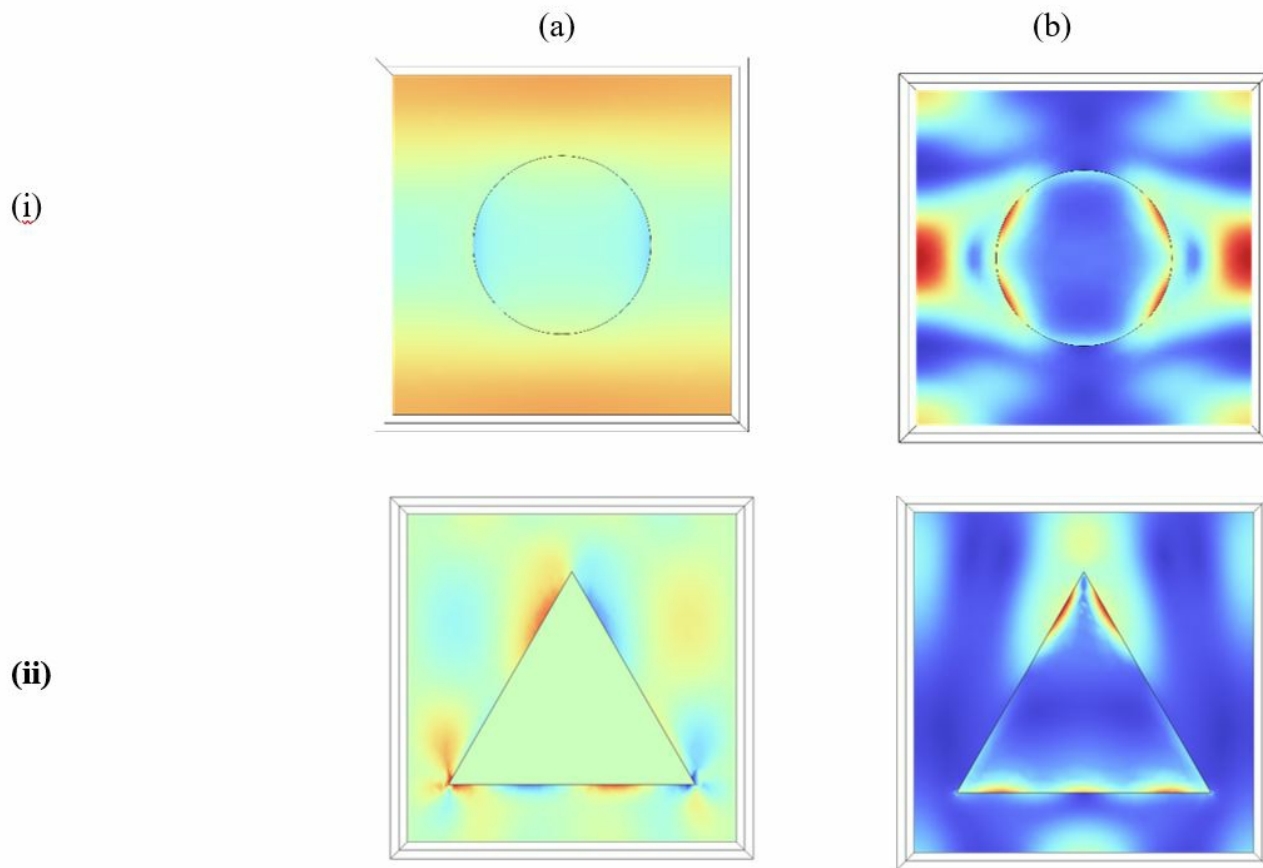


Figure 1 : (i) Circular nanohole arrays (ii) triangular nanohole arrays (a) First Electromagnetic Waves (b) Second Electromagnetic Waves

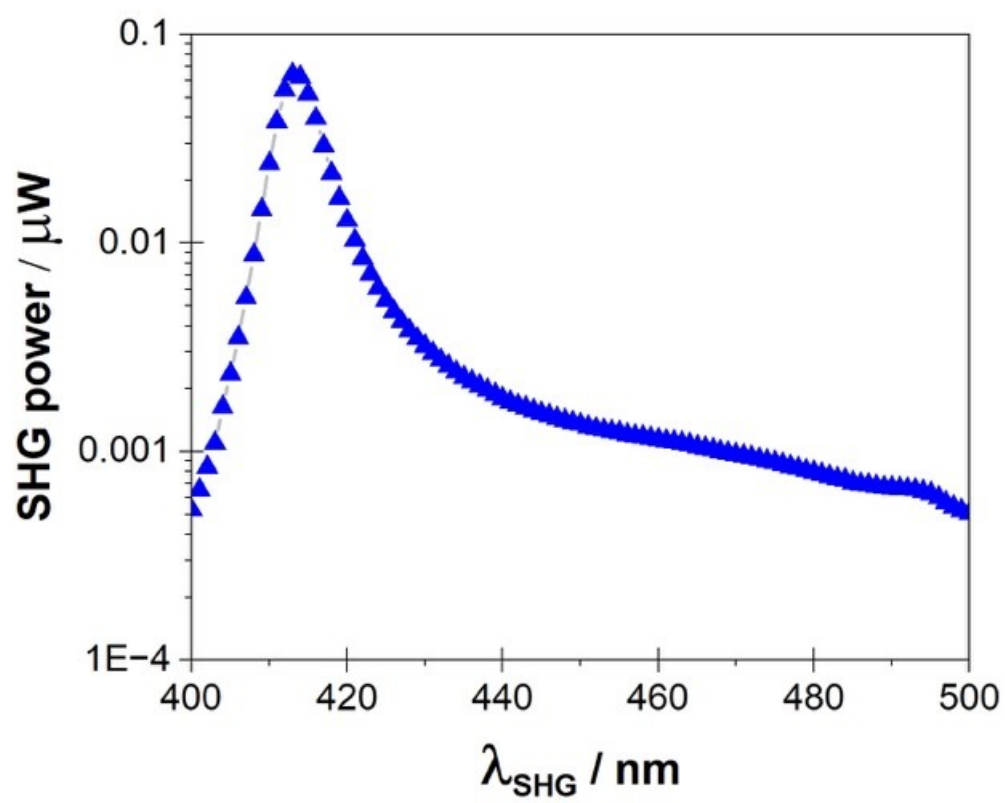


Figure 2 : SHG spectrum of triangular nanohole arrays showing a maximum second-harmonic intensity