

Spatial patterns of variability in Antarctic surface temperature: Connections to the Southern Hemisphere Annular Mode and the Southern Oscillation

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[1] The 17-year (1982–1998) trend in surface temperature shows a general cooling over the Antarctic continent, warming of the sea ice zone, with moderate changes over the oceans. Warming of the peripheral seas is associated with negative trends in the regional sea ice extent. Effects of the Southern Hemisphere Annular Mode (SAM) and the extrapolar Southern Oscillation (SO) on surface temperature are quantified through regression analysis. Positive polarities of the SAM are associated with cold anomalies over most of Antarctica, with the most notable exception of the Antarctic Peninsula. Positive temperature anomalies and ice edge retreat in the Pacific sector are associated with El-Niño episodes. Over the past two decades, the drift towards high polarity in the SAM and negative polarity in the SO indices couple to produce a spatial pattern with warmer temperatures in the Antarctic Peninsula and peripheral seas, and cooler temperatures over much of East Antarctica. *INDEX TERMS:* 3309 Meteorology and Atmospheric Dynamics: Climatology (1620)

1. Introduction

[2] While global temperatures rose by 0.3°C between 1978–1997 [Jones *et al.*, 1999], the spatial distribution of this trend is certainly not uniform. During the last 20 years, pronounced warming of the Antarctic Peninsula [King and Harangozo, 1998] has been contrasted by reported cooling at a number of weather stations on the coast and plateau of East and West Antarctica [Comiso, 2000]. Recently, the analysis of Doran *et al.* [2002] suggests a net cooling of the Antarctic continent between 1966 and 2000. Over approximately the same period, the warming trend of 0.09°C/yr (1980–1999) at Faraday Station at the northern tip of the Antarctic Peninsula can be compared to the cooling trends of 0.07°C/yr (1986–2000) at the McMurdo Dry Valleys and 0.05°C/yr at the South Pole (1980–1999).

[3] Surface temperature (ST) anomalies of the Antarctic are related to anomalies in atmospheric and ocean circulation, and the sea ice cover. A new 17-year (1982–1998) ST dataset [Comiso, 2000] allows us to identify the characteristic spatial patterns of variability in the Antarctic ST field and their relation to large-scale circulation patterns. In this paper, we explore the linear effects of the SAM and the

SO on the ST fields of the Antarctic. The SAM describes a predominantly zonally symmetric pattern and is characterized by sea-saws of atmospheric mass between the polar caps regions poleward of 60°S and the surrounding zonal ring centered along ~45°S, as manifested in the leading empirical orthogonal functions (EOFs) of the 850-hPa geopotential height field [Thompson and Wallace, 2002a]. This annular mode is also related to strong perturbations in temperature and total ozone column over the polar caps during the stratosphere's active season. Linkages between the well known SO, and the climate and sea ice anomalies of the Southern Ocean have been described by Kwok and Comiso [2002]. The SO plays a role in the regional pattern of Antarctic climate changes over the past 20-years. Here, the SO is discussed in the context of potential interactions between the two modes of atmospheric variability.

2. Data Sets and Circulation Indices

[4] The monthly ST fields used in this study are derived from AVHRR (A Very High Resolution Radiometer) infrared data. The dataset, on a 6.25 km grid, covers ocean and ice south of 50°S. STs at skin depth are generally close estimates of near surface air temperatures (SATs). In the extreme these temperatures maybe cooler by several degrees, compared to near SATs, under conditions with stable stratification over ice surfaces. As infrared observations of the surface are available only during cloud-free conditions, the temperatures may not properly reflect the monthly mean. When compared to monthly station data, the cloud-free averages are cooler than the true monthly mean by ~0.5 K. Details of the retrieval procedure and evaluation of the dataset can be found in Comiso [2000]. Uncertainties in the retrievals are estimated to be generally less than 3 K over ice-covered surfaces and less than 1 K over open ocean. The data are mapped onto the polar stereographic projection used in SSM/I (Special Sensor Microwave/Imager) data. Monthly anomaly ST fields are produced by removing the monthly climatology at each sample location.

[5] Indices of the SAM are those derived by Thompson and Wallace [2002a]. These are coefficients of the leading mode in the EOF expansion of the monthly 850-hPa geopotential height field, from 20–90S, [1958–1997] from the NCEP/NCAR Reanalysis [Kalnay *et al.*, 1996]. This mode explains ~27% of the variance of the monthly mean fields poleward of 20°S. The monthly SO indices used in this

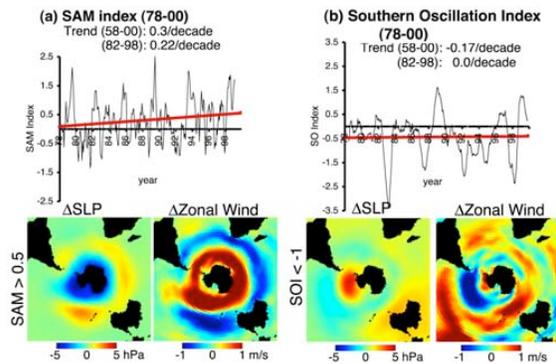


Figure 1. The indices of the SAM and the SO from 1978–2000, and the composites of SLP and zonal wind anomalies associated with their positive polarities (SAM index > 0.5 ; SO index < -1) of the indices. The SLP and wind anomalies are derived from NCEP/NCAR analyses. The trends (1958–2000) in the indices are also shown. The 17-year trend is shown in red.

study are those of the Climate Analysis Center. The time series of the two indices and the mean SLP and wind anomaly patterns associated with the positive polarity of the SAM and negative polarity of the SO indices are shown in Figure 1. The most striking features associated with the positive polarity of the SAM index are the lowered SLP within the circumpolar trough, enhancement of the westerlies north of 70°S , and negative anomalies in the meridional wind west of the Antarctic Peninsula. For the positive polarity of the SO, lowered SLP is found centered over the Amundsen and Bellingshausen Seas, with corresponding meridional and zonal wind anomalies. Opposite polarities of the SAM and SO indices exhibit the same spatial patterns but with anomalies of opposite sign.

3. Results and Discussion

[6] The 17-year (1982–1998) trends of the ST and ice edge (IE) anomalies are shown in Figure 2. The most pronounced feature on the map is the warming of the sea ice zone around Antarctica. It should be emphasized that the trend over sea ice should be interpreted with care, as the retrievals over sea ice are highly variable because the STs are dependent on ice thickness and concentration. The ST of thin ice is closer to the freezing point at the bottom boundary (sea water at $\sim -1.8^{\circ}\text{C}$) while the ST of thick ice is closer to that of the SATs. With sea ice in the 0–1 meter range, as is typical in the Southern Ocean, there could be significant contrasts between ice and air temperatures. Ice concentration anomalies are results of openings and closings of the ice cover due to gradients in ice motion. Thus, the overall trend may be potentially interpreted as expressions of lower ice concentration and/or a thinner ice cover. In the warming over the Amundsen/Bellingshausen Seas, there are no significant trends in the sea ice concentration [Kwok and Comiso, 2002] but observations show significant negative trends in the IE (shown in Figure 1) and decreases in the sea ice season [Parkinson, 1998]. Thus, the increase in ST could be partially attributable to the increase

the area of thinner first year ice in winter and longer periods with open water in summer. Regions with negative trend in the IE are coincident with areas with warming. The two sectors, west of the Ross Sea and east of the Antarctic Peninsula in the Weddell Sea, showing cooling trends are coincident with positive trends in the IE.

4. Conclusions

[12] Observed changes in the ST of the Antarctic appear to be linked to variations in the extratropical SH annular mode and the extrapolar Southern Oscillation. Spatially, it is clear from Figure 2 that the SAM and SO indices do not explain the same ST variances, as the two indices are almost uncorrelated. The SAM plays an important role in the circulation pattern and the spatial temperature distribution of the Antarctic sea ice and ice sheet. In surface temperature, positive (negative) polarities of the SAM indices are associated with the positive (negative) temperature anomalies over the Antarctic Peninsula and negative (positive) temperature anomalies over much of the continent. The regions of extremes in correlation with the SO indices are found in the SST fields off the Ross Sea (negative correlation) and sector off the George V and Oakes coasts (positive correlation). Warmer (cooler) SSTs off the Ross Sea is associated with the negative (positive) polarity of SO index, with the opposite behavior found in the other region. This analysis serves to illustrate the importance of the circulation changes associated with the SAM and SO in determining the spatial pattern of surface temperature anomalies.

[13] The upward trend in the SAM index accounts partially for the observed warming over the Antarctic Peninsula during the past 17-years while the negative bias in the SO index accounts for the retreat of the ice edge in the Bellingshausen Sea west of the Antarctic Peninsula. The significant and prolonged positive trend and bias in the difference between the SAM and SO indices (positive SAM and negative SO) during the past 17-years gave rise to this regional pattern with positive ST anomaly and reduced sea ice cover. We suggest perhaps that the total observed warming of the Antarctic Peninsula can be associated with the potential coupling of the modes of atmospheric variability described by the two indices through regional positive temperature/sea ice feedback. Regardless of the cause, the changes in the circulation since the early 80s have resulted in a particular ST anomaly pattern that has amplified warming of the Antarctic Peninsula because of the interactions between ice and ocean.

[14] The source of variability of the SAM has not been established. It is interesting to note that the variability of the tropospheric SH annular mode has been shown to be related to changes in the lower stratosphere [Thompson and Wallace, 2000b]. The high index polarity of the SH annular mode is associated with the trend toward a cooling and strengthening of the SH stratospheric polar vortex during the stratosphere’s relatively short active season in November, and ozone depletion. A causal mechanism was suggested by recent Antarctic data showing a strong cooling trend in the lower stratosphere that is consistent with recent ozone depletions [Randel and Wu, 1999]. However, the primary mechanism responsible for the recent trend in the SH annular mode remains to be determined.