LONG-TERM DYNAMICS OF THE NORTH WATER POLYNYA BY MEANS OF PASSIVE MICROWAVE AND THERMAL INFRARED IMAGERY

Andreas Preusser (Dept. of Environmental Meteorology, Fac. of Regional and Environmental Sciences, University of Trier, Germany)
Guenther Heinemann (Dept. of Environmental Meteorology, Fac. of Regional and Environmental Sciences, University of Trier, Germany)
Sascha Willmes (Dept. of Environmental Meteorology, Fac. of Regional and Environmental Sciences, University of Trier, Germany)
Stephan Paul (Dept. of Environmental Meteorology, Fac. of Regional and Environmental Sciences, University of Trier, Germany)

preusser@uni-trier.de

The North Water (NOW) polynya is a regularly forming area of open-water and thin-ice, located between north-western Greenland and Ellesmere Island (Canada) at the northern tip of Baffin Bay. Due to its large spatial extent, it is of high importance for a variety of physical and biological processes, especially in wintertime.

Here, we present a long-term remote sensing study for the winter-seasons 1978/1979 to 2013/2014. Polynya characteristics are inferred from (1) sea-ice concentrations (SIC) and brightness temperatures ($T_b$) from passive microwave satellite sensors (AMSR-E, SMMR, SSM/I), and (2) thin-ice thickness (TIT) distributions, which are calculated using MODIS ice-surface temperatures (IST) and ECMWF atmospheric reanalysis data in a 1-D thermodynamic energy balance model. Daily ice production rates are retrieved for each winter season from 2002/2003 to 2013/2014, assuming that all heat loss at the ice surface is balanced by ice growth. A coverage-correctation scheme is applied on daily polynya area (POLA) and ice production (IP) values to account for cloud gaps in the daily MODIS composites.

Our results indicate that the NOW-polynya experienced significant seasonal changes over the last three decades considering the overall frequency of polynya-occurrences as well as their spatial extent. In the 1980s, there were prolonged periods of a more or less closed ice cover in northern Baffin Bay in winter. This changed towards an average opening on more than 85% of the days between November and March during the last decade. Noticeably, the sea-ice cover in the NOW-polynya region shows signs of a later-appearing fall freeze-up over the investigated period.

Different methods to obtain daily polynya area using microwave AMSR-E data and SSM/I data were applied: PSSM (Polynya Signature Simulation Method) and a SIC-threshold. A comparison with MODIS data (TIT ≤ 20 cm) shows that the wintertime POLA estimates derived by MODIS are about 20% larger than those derived using PSSM with AMSR-E data. In turn, the POLA difference between PSSM and a SIC-threshold of 70% is fairly low (approx. 10%) when applied to AMSR-E data. For the coarse-resolution SSM/I data, this difference is much larger, particularly in November and December.

The calculated ice production reaches an average value of 268 km$^3$ (2002/2003-2013/2014) and shows a non-significant trend of 6.2 km$^3$/yr. This underlines the importance of the NOW-polynya considering its contribution to local deep water formation.