



Reconstruction of the Gulf Stream since 1900 and correlation with the North Atlantic Oscillation

Sylvain Watelet (1), Jean-Marie Beckers (2), and Alexander Barth (3)

(1) GHER, ULg, Liège, Belgium (swatelet@doct.ulg.ac.be), (2) GHER, ULg, Liège, Belgium (JM.Beckers@ulg.ac.be), (3) GHER, ULg, Liège, Belgium (a.barth@ulg.ac.be)

Prevailing winds over the North Atlantic (NA) have a direct influence on the location and intensity of the Gulf Stream (GS) by the transfer of momentum between atmosphere and ocean. Therefore, the study of interannual variability of the GS requires the identification of sources of variability within the atmospheric circulation.

Various studies have highlighted the impact of the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO) on the variability of the GS transport. However, there is still no scientific consensus thereupon. On the one hand, several scientific papers exhibit a decrease of the GS transport during low NAO periods, as well as a higher transport during high NAO phases. On the second hand, other authors suggest a lower transport during positive phases of the NAO. Finally, one study obtained a more complex conclusion, whereby the influence of the NAO is different upstream and downstream of Cape Hatteras. Considering the influence of the NAO on the GS position, studies are more convergent and show a more northern GS during a high NAO phase, while discrepancies remains on the existence and the quantification of the time lag between a specific NAO phase and its consequence on the GS position.

This currently limited understanding of the links between the NAO and the GS impels us to further analyze the spatial and temporal distribution of the GS. Our main purpose in this study is to reconstruct a spatially continuous field of ocean (sub)surface circulation in the NA from in situ time series of discrete steps, in order to accurately quantify the position and intensity of the GS since 1900. From there, we are able to examine the correlation of this current with the NAO.

To this end, we used the DIVA (Data-Interpolating Variational Analysis) tool, which is a numerical implementation of the variational inverse method (VIM) using the finite elements method to reconstruct continuous fields from discrete measurements. These measurements of temperature and salinity since the beginning of the last century originate from several data bases, such as WOD (NOAA), SeaDataNet, ICES, Hydrobase3 and ARGO buoys but also from the Norwegian Marine Data centre (NMD).

The exact duplicates have been removed from these data sets, while the near duplicates (considering space and time) have been subjected to a specific algorithm removing the vast majority of them. The type of instrument (CTD, XBT,...) was also taken into account when attributing the relative weights to observations, following the accuracy of these ones. The signal-to-noise ratio as well as the correlation length have been optimized for each vertical level (15 layers, from 0 to 3000 m depth) and filtered vertically to avoid unrealistic discontinuity. Then, a reference field has been created with DIVA for the whole period (1900-2013) in order to work with anomalies with respect to this averaged field. After the handling of Arctic sea ice, the analyzes of temperature and salinity gives us high-resolution gridded fields for every month since 1900, which allow us to reconstruct the evolution of the GS position and intensity.

A normalized GS position index based on our DIVA SST product has been successfully compared to the same index based on a satellite SST product for the period 1982-2012. In both cases, the index exhibits a significant correlation with the NAO when a time lag of 1 year is considered. In order to increase the confidence level of the correlation, the whole period 1900-2012 was considered, by using various strategies to increase the reliability of our product before 1940 when the measurements are sparse. First results indicates a higher and even more significant correlation between the NAO and the GS latitude during 1940-2012 than during the satellite period. Over the whole 1900-2012 period, the correlation is slightly lower due to the measurements scarcity before 1940, but still remains significant. The time lag of 1 year is confirmed over these longer periods.