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# Sea surface freshening inferred from SMOS and ARGO salinity: impact of rain

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## Abstract

The sea surface salinity (SSS) measured from space by the Soil Moisture and Ocean Salinity (SMOS) mission has recently been revisited by the European Space Agency first campaign reprocessing. We show that, with respect to the previous version, biases close to land and ice greatly decrease. The accuracy of SMOS SSS averaged over 10 days  $100 \times 100 \text{ km}^2$  in the open ocean and estimated by comparison to ARGO SSS is on the order of 0.3–0.4 in tropical and subtropical regions and 0.5 in a cold region. The mean SSS  $-0.1$  bias observed in the Tropical Pacific Ocean between  $5^\circ \text{ N}$  and  $15^\circ \text{ N}$ , relatively to other regions, is suppressed when SMOS rainy events, as detected on SSMLs rain rates, are removed from the SMOS-ARGO comparisons. The SMOS freshening is linearly correlated to SSMLs rain rate with a slope estimated to  $-0.14 \text{ mm}^{-1} \text{ h}$ , after correction for rain atmospheric contribution. This tendency is the signature of the temporal SSS variability between the time of SMOS and ARGO measurements linked to rain variability and of the vertical salinity stratification between the first centimeter of the sea surface layer sampled by SMOS and the 5 m depth sampled by ARGO. However, given that the whole set of collocations includes situations with rainy ARGO measurements collocated with non rainy SMOS measurements, the mean  $-0.1$  bias and the negative skewness of the statistical distribution of SMOS minus ARGO SSS difference are very likely the mean signature of the vertical salinity stratification. In the future, the analysis of ongoing in situ salinity measurements in the top 50 cm of the sea surface and of Aquarius satellite SSS are expected to provide complementary information about the sea surface salinity stratification.

## 1 Introduction

There is increasing evidence that part of the multi-decadal trends observed on sea surface salinity (SSS), e.g. the Western Tropical Pacific has become fresher (Cravatte et al., 2009) and the subtropical North Atlantic has become saltier (Gordon and Giulivi,

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The SSS measured from space by microwave radiometers operating at L-band (1.4 GHz), like SMOS and Aquarius, is representative of the first centimetre of the sea surface. The goal of these missions is to provide an accuracy of 0.2 on SSS averaged over GODAE scales (typically  $200 \times 200 \text{ km}^2$  and 10 days or  $100 \times 100 \text{ km}^2$  and one month). The ocean haline skin layer due to surface evaporation is expected to be much thinner ( $\sim 60 \mu\text{m}$ ) than the electromagnetic penetration depth at L-band so that the effect of the sea surface salinity sublayer on satellite SSS is estimated to be less than 0.01, i.e. negligible compared to other error sources in SSS remote sensing (Zhang and Zhang, 2012). Hence, the main geophysical sources of variation between satellite and in situ salinity are expected to be linked to vertical salinity stratifications especially in rainy and river outflow regions and to sharp oceanic fronts. In this paper, we study the observed SMOS and ARGO salinity differences, as ARGO SSS are widely used for validating satellite SSS and we focus on differences observed in the rainy region of the InterTropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) of the Pacific Ocean.

After a description of the measurements and the methods (Sect. 2), a validation of SMOS SSS over the global ocean, and in four specific regions is presented (Sect. 3). Then, we detail the SMOS minus ARGO SSS differences with respect to satellite rain rate (Sect. 4). We discuss these results in view of error sources in Sect. 5; conclusions and perspectives are given in Sect. 6.

## 2 Data and methods

Our study concentrates on the period 1 July 2010 to 30 September 2010. This period follows the SMOS commissioning period during which the SMOS instrument configuration was varying (Mecklenburg et al., 2012). In addition, the influence of the galactic noise on SMOS measurements during ascending orbits is smaller during that period than during previous months.

## 2.1 SMOS

The SMOS mission (Kerr et al., 2010) has been launched in November 2009, on a sun-synchronous circular orbit with a local equator crossing time at 6 a.m. on ascending node. It carries an L-band interferometric radiometer. This new technology allows reconstructing bi-dimensional multiangular images of the L-band brightness temperatures,  $T_b$ , with a mean spatial resolution of 40 km. Individual measurements are very noisy so that retrieving a SSS with an accuracy acceptable for oceanographic studies is only possible owing to the combination of multiple  $T_b$  measurements acquired at the same ocean grid point at various incidence angles and polarisations over successive snapshots (Boutin et al., 2004); in addition to retrieving SSS, the multiangular and polarisation information is also used for adjusting wind speed. First assessment of SMOS SSS retrieved with ESA (European Space Agency) processing just after the commissioning phase and mapped at typical GODAE scales (Banks et al., 2012; Boutin et al., 2012) has shown good general agreement with respect to SSS climatology, ARGO and ocean model output. Although very encouraging, these studies also pointed out large SSS biases close to coast, close to radio frequency interferences sources and biases depending on the period and orientation of the orbit which have been shown to be linked to imperfections of the thermal antenna model (Kainulainen et al., 2012). Deficiencies of direct roughness models at high wind speeds lead to the development of new empirical or semi-empirical roughness models fitted to SMOS measurements (Guimbard et al., 2012; Yin et al., 2012). Using an improved image reconstruction algorithm, (Reul et al., 2012) found an accuracy on monthly,  $1^\circ \times 1^\circ$  SSS of 0.6 globally and 0.4 in the tropics for 90 % of the data and much larger biases in the vicinity of land.

In the present study, level 2 SMOS SSS are from the first SMOS/ESA annual re-processing campaign in which ESA level 1 v5.04 and level 2 v5.50 processors have been used. In these versions, significant improvements with respect to the flaws listed above have been implemented (see a complete description in the Algorithm Theoretical Basis Document (ATBD) available on <http://www.argans.co.uk/smos/docs/deliverables/>

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delivered/ATBD/SO-TN-ARG-GS-0007\_L2OS-ATBD\_v3.8\_111117.pdf). The level 2 retrieval schemes still uses the Levenberg and Marquardt iterative algorithm for retrieving SSS and adjusting wind speed; ECMWF forecasts are still used as priors. ESA level 2 SMOS SSS have a mean spatial resolution of 40 km and are over sampled on an ISEA grid at 15 km resolution.

Since these new SMOS SSS have been delivered very recently, no assessment of their accuracy has been published yet. Hence, we first present a global scale validation. We use similar methods as the ones described in Boutin et al. (2012). They are summarized below.

We use ESA level 2 SMOS SSS retrieved with model 1, which makes use of the new (Yin et al., 2012) roughness model; only ascending orbits are considered in order to minimize uncertainties linked to Faraday rotation and to diurnal sea surface temperature (SST) cycle. We build SMOS SSS maps at  $1^\circ \times 1^\circ$  resolution by taking the average of the ESA level 2 SMOS SSS weighted by the variance of the retrieved SSS error and by the mean spatial resolution of each SSS. Precise collocations with ARGO measurements are performed by taking SMOS SSS at  $\pm 50$  km and  $\pm 5$  days from ARGO floats. When averaged in these radii, SMOS SSS are weighted the same way as in the map production.

The filtering of the ESA level 2 SMOS SSS differs slightly from previous study as the definition of flags has changed (see ATBD). We retain grid points flagged as valid, further than 200 km from the coast, with successful retrieval, with a good fit between measured and modelled Tbs (tests on Chi2 and Chi2\_P as defined in ATBD), with less than 20 iterations of the Levenberg and Marquardt retrieval process, no suspect ice and not many outliers; only measurements with low sun glint, low galactic noise are used in the SSS retrieval and only SSS retrieved from more than 30 Tbs are considered. In addition, in order to (1) avoid too noisy retrievals at the edge of the swath and (2) imprecision due to lower accuracy of ECMWF forecasts and of our roughness model at very low and high wind speed, we only consider SMOS SSS retrieved in grid points with (1) more than 130 measurements coming from the alias free field of view region

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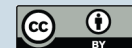
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(roughly corresponding to SSS retrieved at  $\pm 300$  km from the centre of the track) and (2) ECMWF wind speed between 3 and  $12 \text{ ms}^{-1}$ . When averaging ESA level 2 SMOS SSS, only averages made with more than 30 individual SSS are retained. With these criteria, a grid point is seen approximately once every 5 days, during ascending orbits.

## 2.2 ARGO

We use measurements from ARGO floats provided by the Coriolis data centre (<http://www.coriolis.eu.org/>). We downloaded 23 577 profiles with measurements between 4 m and 10 m depth between 1 July 2010 and 30 September 2010, as available on the Coriolis web site on 5 May 2012: during the studied period, 14 263 profiles have been quality checked (delayed time data). We only use ARGO measurements with a quality flag equal to 1, in agreement with real time quality checks and, for delayed time data, with statistical consistency checks (Carval et al., 2012).

During the ascent of the float, when the float is at about 5 m depth from the sea surface, the water pump is stopped in order to avoid damages linked to air pumping. This leads to inaccurate salinities above that depth. Some comparisons performed in surface layers of a well mixed area between pumped and non pumped salinity on an ARVOR float indicate a noise on the non-pumped salinity (at  $\sim 2$  m from the last pumped measurement) of 0.025 with respect to 0.005 on pumped salinities. In addition, in case of true salinity stratification linked to rain events, non pumped measurements would miss most of the freshening. In order to minimize this effect, and given that the pressure measurements of some ARGO floats (e.g. APEX) are not very precise (so that some measurements indicated as measured at 4 m depth may sometimes be pumped), for the present study we use the closest ARGO salinity to the sea surface, provided it is measured between 4m and 10 m depth. We will later refer to this measurement as ARGO SSS.

Global ARGO SSS maps (D2CA1S2 re-analysis product) are provided by IFREMER/LPO, Laboratoire de physique des oceans (see a description on <http://wwz.ifremer.fr/lpo/SO-Argo-France/Products/Global-Ocean-T/S/>

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Monthly-fields-2004-2010). They are derived, after a thorough quality check of ARGO measurements, with the optimal interpolation method described in (Gaillard et al., 2009); they are named ARGO OI in the following. The choice for the time and space scales used in that method results from a compromise between what is known of ocean time and space scales and what can actually be resolved with the ARGO array ( $3^\circ$ , 10 days); two scale lengths are considered: the first one is isotropic and equal to 300 km, the second one is set equal to 4 times the average Rossby radius of the area. As a result, we expect these maps being smoother, especially in tropical areas, than SMOS SSS maps averaged over  $1^\circ \times 1^\circ$ .

### 2.3 SSIs rain rate

In July–September 2010, the local equator crossing time of the descending nodes of SSIs F17 and SSIs F16 missions are respectively approximately 20 mn before and 40 mn after SMOS ascending node. Hence, numerous SMOS level 2 are collocated with SSI rain rates (RR) within this range of time; only the SSI RR closest in time with SMOS SSS are kept. SSI F15 is also close in time to SMOS passes but we do not consider it in our statistical analysis because of its degradation after August 2006. Nevertheless we use SSI F15 RR qualitatively. SSI/Is RR version 7 are downloaded from [www.remss.com](http://www.remss.com).

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Validation of SMOS SSS over the global ocean

The SMOS SSS map averaged over July–September 2010 is compared to ARGO OI map averaged over the same period on Fig. 1. SSS spatial variability at large scale is well sensed by SMOS and, with respect to previous version (see for instance Fig. 4 of Boutin et al., 2012), the first ESA reprocessing greatly improves the SSS retrieved in the vicinity of land and ice. Nevertheless biases on the order of  $-0.5$  remain close to

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continents. SMOS measurements in the Northern Atlantic and Pacific Ocean and close to Asian coasts are sorted out by outliers and RFI sorting. Negative biases of SMOS SSS on the border of these regions indicate that RFI sorting remains insufficient. Large positive biases occur in the Eastern Equatorial Pacific Ocean; the origin of such biases, already observed in the previous version, is still under investigation. In regions with strong SSS gradients, like the Amazon plume, positive and negative biases are very likely due to the smoothing of ARGO OI map with respect to SMOS SSS map. A mean negative bias is observed in a latitudinal band around 10° N in the Tropical Pacific Ocean.

In order to distinguish the biases linked to the smoothing of the ARGO OI map from SMOS SSS flaws, we further look at differences between individual ARGO float salinity data and ARGO OI map (Fig. 2, top right) and at differences between collocated SMOS and ARGO SSS (Fig. 2, bottom). As expected, differences between ARGO SSS and ARGO OI map are often outside the  $-0.5, 0.5$  range in frontal areas like the Amazon plume, the South Atlantic confluence region, south of the subtropical zone in the Southern Indian Ocean; in all these areas the differences between collocated SMOS and ARGO SSS (Fig. 2, bottom) are usually smaller than SMOS minus ARGO OI (Fig. 2, top, left), showing that SMOS brings complementary information with respect to ARGO OI about SSS variability at 100 km–10 day resolution. Comparisons between ARGO SSS and collocated SMOS SSS are detailed on Fig. 3 and Table 1 in four regions chosen as being far from land and covering various SST conditions and previously studied in Boutin et al. (2012). Standard deviations of the differences are very similar to the ones reported in Boutin et al. (2012); the rms error, rmse, is on the order of 0.3–0.4 in tropical regions and 0.5 in cold regions. The mean bias is  $\sim 0.1$  lower in the Tropical Pacific Ocean than in other regions.

### 3.2 Influence of rain

In the Northern Tropical Pacific region that includes the InterTropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), for 5 collocations, both ARGO SSS and 10 day–100 km SMOS SSS are

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and SSIMs F16 and F17 passes within a temporal interval of  $-40$  mn and  $+80$  mn, we colocate level 2 SMOS SSS with the closest SSIMs RR and we classify the SMOS-ARGO differences (without any averaging of level 2 SMOS SSS) as a function of the closest SSIMs RR. The expected error on the level 2 SMOS SSS derived by the retrieval algorithm from the Tb measurement theoretical error is 0.5. Without any RR sorting, the statistical distribution of the differences is skewed towards negative differences (Fig. 6 and Table 2); when only SMOS non rainy cases are considered, the negative skewness disappears, and statistics of the SMOS-ARGO differences in the Tropical Pacific Ocean and in the subtropical Atlantic Ocean become closer, although the mean bias remains more negative in the Tropical Pacific Ocean (Table 2). When only SMOS rainy cases are considered the statistical distribution is more skewed towards negative differences. For these rainy SMOS cases, we find a negative dependency of the SMOS-ARGO SSS differences with respect to SSIMs RR of  $-0.17 \text{ mm}^{-1} \text{ h}$ , that is a freshening of 1.7 for a RR of  $10 \text{ mm h}^{-1}$ .

#### 4 Error sources

In ESA SMOS SSS processing, no correction is applied for the atmospheric contribution of liquid clouds and rain as there is no simultaneous measurements onboard the satellite of the necessary parameters; in addition, SSIMs RR and ECMWF RR collocated in SMOS pixels are very poorly correlated ( $R^2 = 0.02$ ) indicating that ECMWF RR is a very poor indicator of local rain and cannot be used for estimating rain atmospheric contribution in the SMOS SSS processing. Nevertheless, the contribution of atmospheric absorption and scattering by clouds and rain to the radiometric signal is much smaller at L-band than at higher frequency and the Rayleigh approximation for estimating the absorption and scattering by raindrops is estimated to remain valid for RR up to  $10 \text{ mm h}^{-1}$  (Ulaby et al., 1981). Using this approximation, studies prior to SMOS and Aquarius launch (Peichl et al., 2004; Wentz, 2005) show that the atmospheric correction should be a positive bias of about 0.22 K on first Stokes parameter

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for a RR of  $10 \text{ mm h}^{-1}$ ; given the sea surface temperature of the Tropical Pacific Ocean, this translates to a negative bias on the SSS of about  $-0.3$  for a RR of  $10 \text{ mm h}^{-1}$ . Hence, taking into account this effect would reduce the slope of  $d\text{SSS}/d\text{RR}$  shown on Fig. 7 to  $-0.14 \text{ mm}^{-1} \text{ h}$ , which remains non negligible.

The modification of ocean surface waves by rain leads to both an enhancement of the ocean backscattering due to rain splash and rain created ring waves and a rain damping effect; the formers dominate the backscattering at Ku, Ka and C-band whereas the latter influences backscattering at C-band and is the dominant effect on L-band backscattering (Contreras and Plant, 2006). The L-band  $T_b$  are mainly affected by scattering by centimeter and decameter wavelengths (Dinnat, 2003), so that the effect of rain on L-band  $T_b$  is expected to be much smaller than at higher frequencies, but it may be non negligible for our purpose and is likely to depend on the geometry of the measurement. If the rain damping was the dominant factor affecting L-band  $T_b$ , it would bring a  $T_b$  decrease (i.e. an increase of SSS) which is not what we observe. However, more work is needed to quantify this effect.

ECMWF wind speed has been shown, when compared with buoy data, to be less precise in presence of rain (Portabella et al., 2012). In order to explain a  $-1.4$  bias on the SSS (as the one we find at  $10 \text{ mm h}^{-1}$  after correcting for the atmospheric effect), the retrieved SMOS wind speed should be systematically biased high by  $5 \text{ ms}^{-1}$ . Looking at the differences between ECMWF wind speed (used as prior in the SMOS SSS retrieval) and SMOS retrieved wind speed, we did not find any significant trend correlated with SSM/Is RR ( $R^2 = 0.04$ ). Although in presence of rain (Portabella et al., 2012) indicate an increase of noise in ECMWF wind speed, no systematic bias of several  $\text{ms}^{-1}$  has been demonstrated, so that the deficiencies of ECMWF wind speed in presence of rain cannot explain systematically low biased SSS.

Although the spatial variability of rain within a satellite pixel may be large, this effect should have a relatively small impact in our study because the spatial resolution of SSM/I RR (nominally 32 km) is comparable to SMOS spatial resolution ( $\sim 40 \text{ km}$ ).

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Rain is often associated with a cooling of the sea surface of a few tenths of degrees (Reverdin et al., 2012). However, in the warm tropical waters, a cooling of 0.2 °C would result to an increase of  $T_b$  of the order of 0.02 K, leading to a decrease of  $\sim 0.03$  in SMOS retrieved salinity. This effect is an order of magnitude smaller than what we observe.

The variation of the surface salinity after a rain event is expected to be the strongest during the hour following a rain event and to vary with the measurement depth (e.g. Reverdin et al., 2012) so that it would have been better to look at the stratification effect between 1 cm and 5 m depth using SMOS and ARGO SSS collocated within an hour. However, during the time period of the present study, there were no collocations of SMOS and ARGO SSS within a radius of one hour.

## 5 Conclusions and perspectives

Satellite L-band radiometry provides for the first time a measure of salinity in the first centimetre of the sea surface and a synoptic coverage better than the one of ARGO at the expense of the precision of SSS individual measurements.

The optimal interpolation of ARGO salinity sampled approximately every 3° and 10 days smoothes the SSS variability measured by individual ARGO floats; locally, in frontal and rainy regions, the SSS variability is larger than 0.5 (see Fig. 2) and it is consistently recorded by ARGO measurements and SMOS SSS averaged over 10 days and  $100 \times 100 \text{ km}^2$ . We estimate SMOS SSS accuracy to be 0.3–0.4 in tropical and subtropical regions and 0.5 in cold regions; a bias of  $\sim -0.5$  remains close to continents.

Both ARGO and SMOS measurements in the Tropical Pacific Ocean show that SSS vary by more than 0.5 within 10 days in case of rainy events. The non sorting of SMOS rainy measurements in SMOS-ARGO collocations within 10 days and 100 km is responsible for (1) a mean  $-0.1$  negative bias over 3 months between 5° N and 15° N in the Tropical Pacific region with respect to non rainy conditions and with respect to the

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The combination of new satellite SSS and in situ salinity measured deeper provides new information about salinity stratification in the upper ocean which should contribute to a better understanding of air–sea interaction processes. These processes should be taken into account by ocean models before assimilating satellite SSS under rainy conditions.

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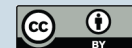
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**Table 1.** Comparison of SMOS SSS (10day,  $100 \times 100 \text{ km}^2$  average) collocated with ARGO SSS in the various regions indicated on Fig. 1.

	Mean ( $\Delta\text{SSS}$ )	Std ( $\Delta\text{SSS}$ )	Rmse	<i>N</i>
Subtropical Atlantic Ocean (15° N–30° N; 45° W–30° W)	–0.13	0.28	0.31	206
Tropical Pacific Ocean (5° N–15° N; 180° W–110° W)	–0.23	0.35	0.42	692
Southern Indian Ocean (40° S–30° S; 70° E–90° E)	0.04	0.39	0.39	114
Southern Pacific Ocean (50° S–40° S; 180° W–100° W)	–0.08	0.51	0.52	467

$\Delta\text{SSS} = \text{SSS}_{\text{smos}} - \text{SSS}_{\text{argo}}$

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**Table 2.** Statistics of SMOS level 2 SSS minus ARGO SSS (matchups at  $\pm 50$  km and  $\pm 80$  mn from SSM/I rain rates).

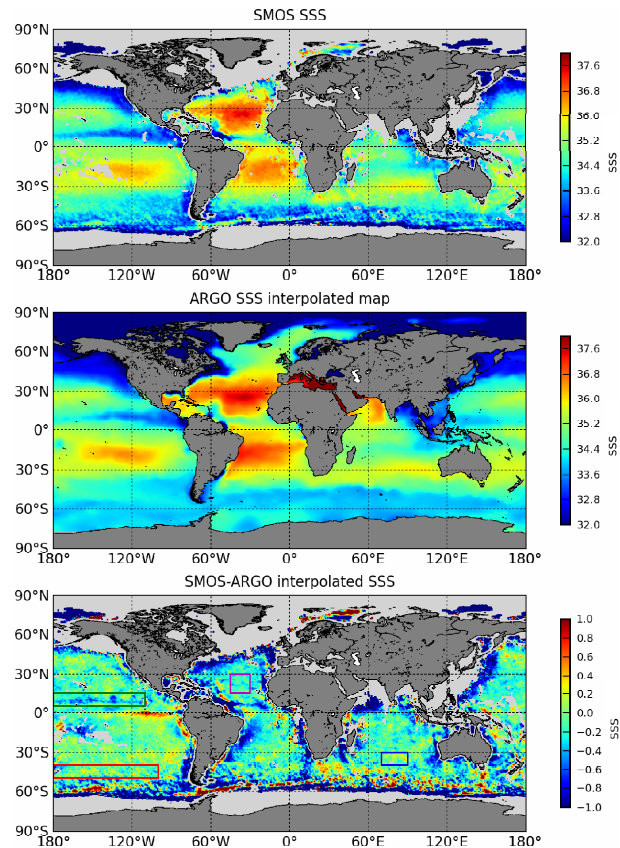
	Mean ( $\Delta$ SSS)	Std ( $\Delta$ SSS)	Skew ( $\Delta$ SSS)	<i>N</i>
Tropical Pacific ( $5^{\circ}$ N– $15^{\circ}$ N; $110^{\circ}$ W– $180^{\circ}$ W)				
All colocations	–0.20	0.62	–0.38	38 543
No Rain ( $RR < 0.1 \text{ mm h}^{-1}$ )	–0.13	0.56	0.01	29 084
Rainy ( $RR \geq 0.1 \text{ mm h}^{-1}$ )	–0.40	0.73	–0.58	9459
Subtropical Atlantic ( $15^{\circ}$ N– $30^{\circ}$ N; $45^{\circ}$ W– $30^{\circ}$ W)				
All colocations	–0.08	0.57	–0.04	12 728
No Rain ( $RR < 0.1 \text{ mm h}^{-1}$ )	–0.06	0.56	0.03	12 122
Rainy ( $RR \geq 0.1 \text{ mm h}^{-1}$ )	–0.38	0.63	–0.52	606

$\Delta$ SSS = SSS<sub>smos</sub> – SSS<sub>argo</sub>

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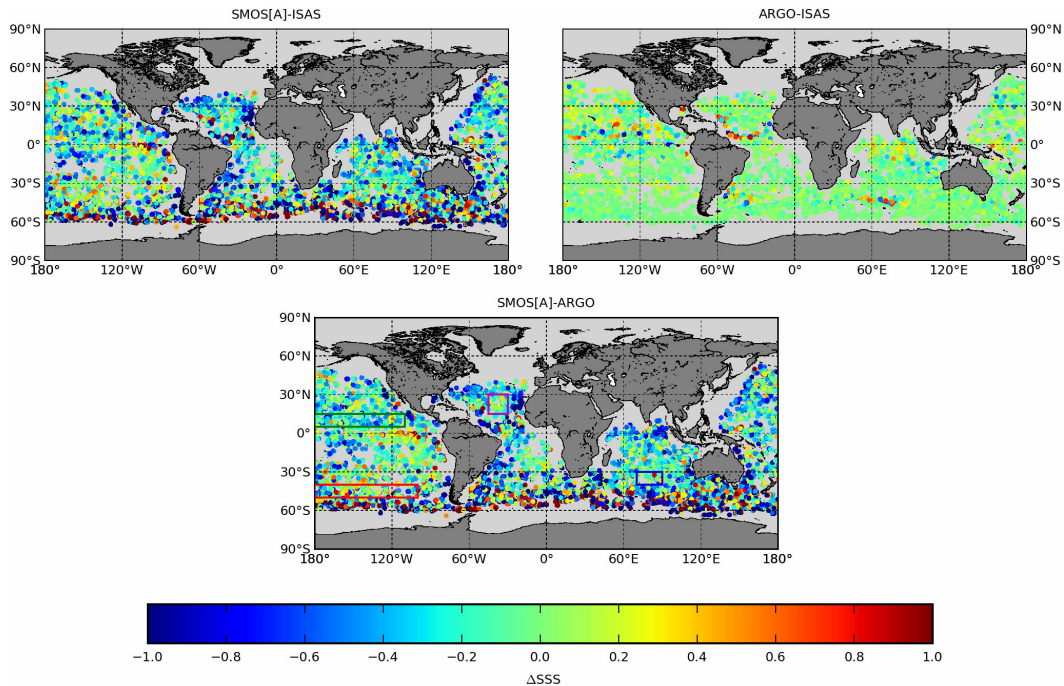
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**Fig. 1.** Maps of SSS averaged from July to September 2010, derived from (top) SMOS ascending orbits, (middle) ARGO OI, (bottom) difference between SMOS and ARGO OI maps. Color rectangles indicate regions where precise comparisons with ARGO have been performed.

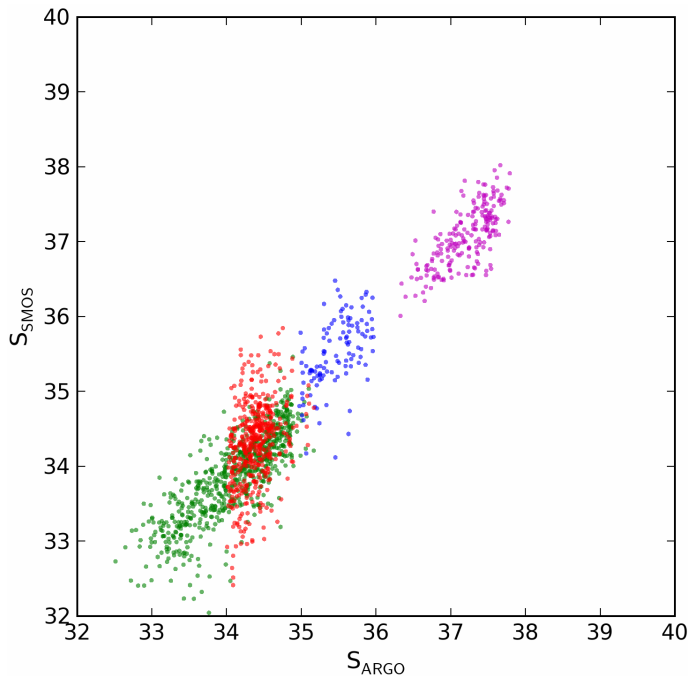
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**Fig. 2.** SSS difference between (top, left) 10-day-100 km SMOS SSS collocated with individual ARGO SSS minus ARGO OI map, (top, right) ARGO SSS minus ARGO OI map, (bottom) 10-day-100 km SMOS SSS minus ARGO SSS. Color rectangles indicate regions where precise comparisons with ARGO data have been performed (see Fig. 3 and Table 1).

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**Fig. 3.** Scatter plot of SMOS SSS versus ARGO SSS for the various regions indicated on Fig. 1 and in Table 1 (green: Tropical Pacific Ocean; purple: subtropical Atlantic Ocean; blue: Southern Indian Ocean; red: Southern Pacific Ocean)

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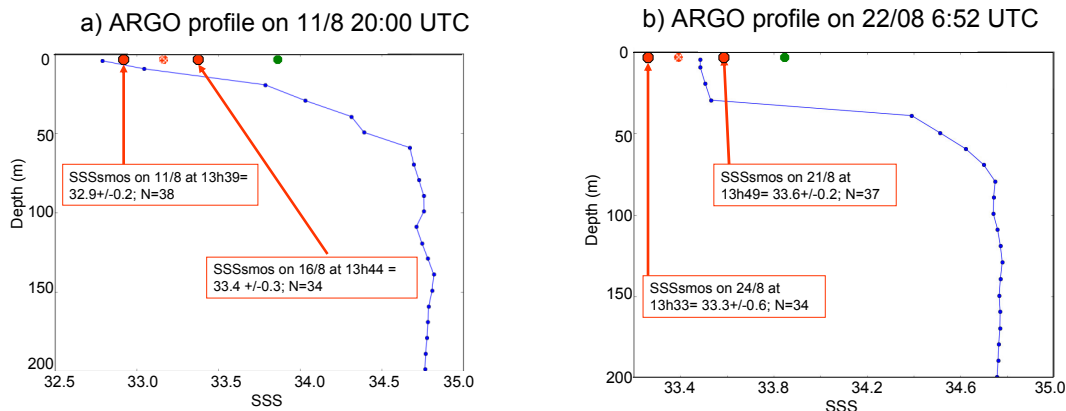
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**Fig. 4.** Two successive ARGO profiles taken by float 4900325 (blue curve) on **(a)** 11 August 20:00 UTC (latitude =  $12.4^\circ$  N; longitude =  $117.6^\circ$  W) and **(b)** 22 August 6:52 UTC (latitude:  $12.2^\circ$  N; longitude:  $117.8^\circ$  W). Mean SMOS SSS collocated with these profiles in a radii of 5 day and 50 km are indicated by red dashed point. In each case, two SMOS passes have participated to these collocations: mean SMOS SSS corresponding to each pass is indicated as red filled point. The corresponding ARGO OI SSS in August is indicated by the green point. Satellite RR corresponding to these periods are indicated on Fig. 5.

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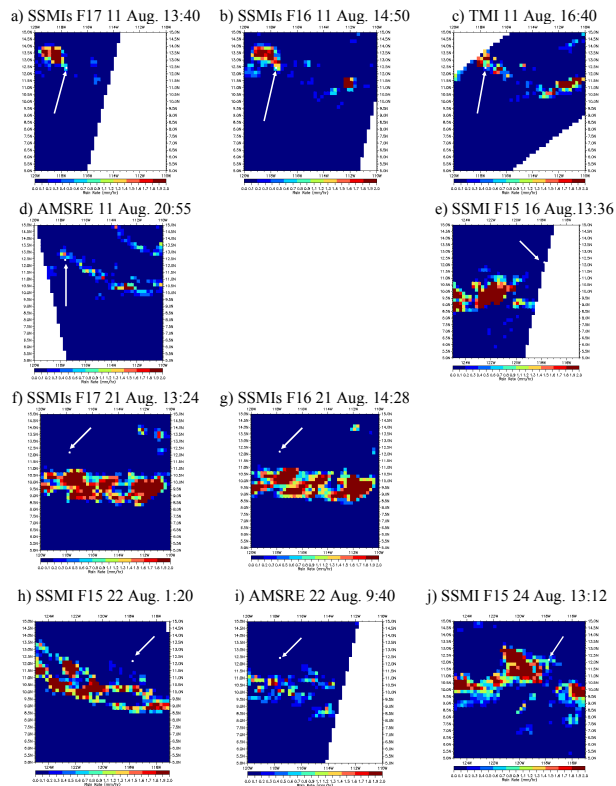
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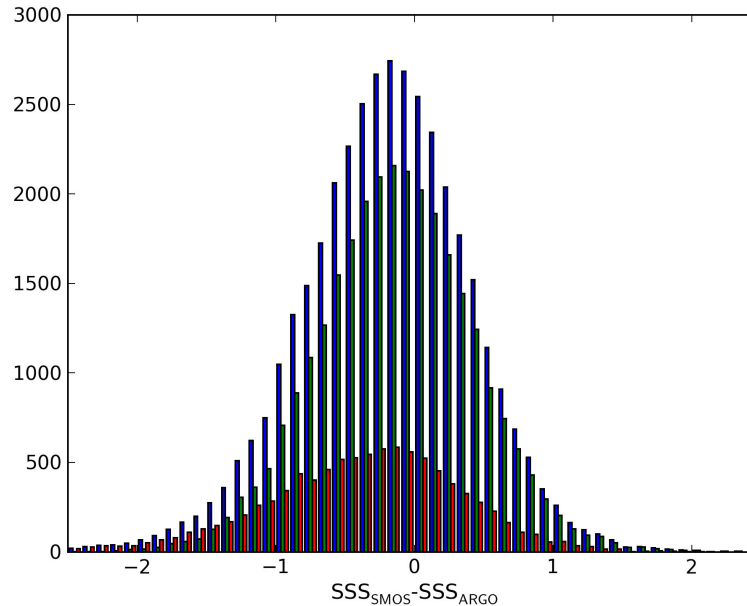


**Fig. 5.** (a) SSMIs F17 11 August 13:40 (b) SSMIs F16 11 August 14:50 (c) TMI 11 August 16:40 (d) AMSRE 11 August 20:55 (e) SSMI F15 16 August 13:36 (f) SSMIs F17 21 August 13:24 (g) SSMIs F16 21 August 14:28 (h) SSMI F15 22 August 1:20 (i) AMSRE 22 August 9:40 (j) SSMI F15 24 August 13:12. Satellite RR close in space and time to ARGO profiles and SMOS passes shown in Fig. 4. The location of the ARGO float is indicated by a white point and a white arrow.

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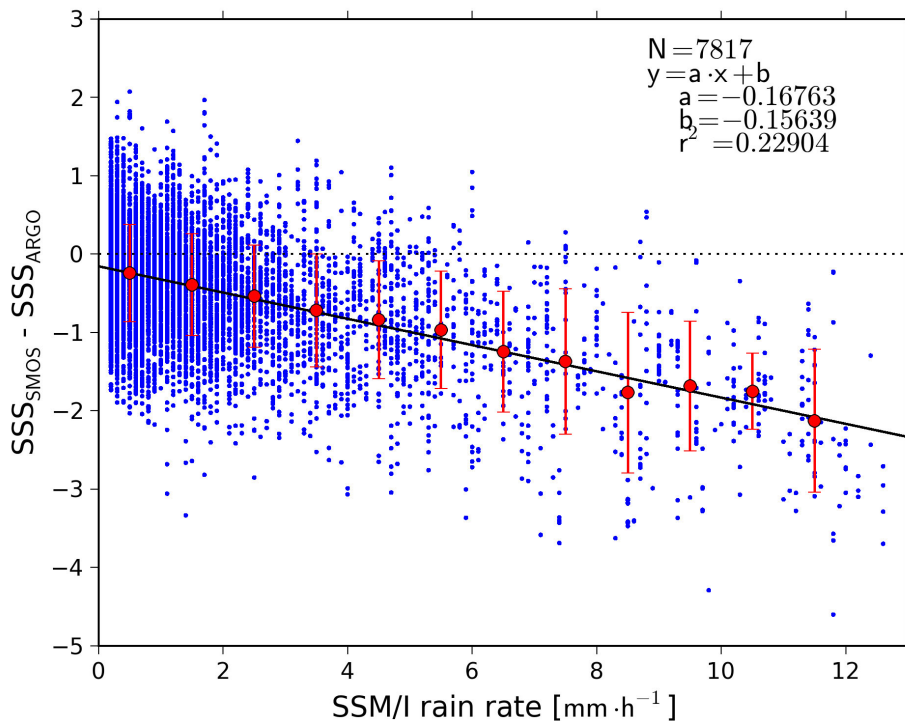
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**Fig. 6.** Statistical distribution of  $SSS_{smos}$  minus  $SSS_{argo}$  in the Tropical Pacific Ocean for various sortings on SSM/I rain rates: blue: all collocations (without any rain sorting); green: for non rainy cases (SSM/I rain rates less than  $0.1 \text{ mm h}^{-1}$ ); red: for rainy cases (SSM/I rain rates larger than  $0.1 \text{ mm h}^{-1}$ ). Corresponding statistics are indicated in Table 1.

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**Fig. 7.** SMOS level 2 SSS minus ARGO SSS as a function of SSMI RR in the Tropical Pacific region. Only pairs with SSMI RR larger than  $0.1 \text{ mm h}^{-1}$  are plotted. Mean and standard deviation of the differences per RR classes are indicated as red points and error bars. The least squares fit derived from individual measurements (black line) closely follows the mean tendency in RR classes; it indicates a slope of  $-0.17 \text{ per mm h}^{-1}$  and a  $R^2$  coefficient of 0.23.

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