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Ground-based mapping of SO$_2$ and HDO on Venus in the thermal infrared


(1) LESIA, Paris Observatory, PSL, France (therese.encrenaz@obspm.fr), (2) SwRI, San Antonio, TX, USA, (3) LATMOS, (4) Kyoto Sangyo University, Kyoto, Japan, (5) LMD, IPSL, Paris, France, (6) University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA, (7) University of Tokyo, Kashiba, Japan, (8) Hokkaido Information University, Hokkaido, Japan

Abstract

Since January 2012 we have been monitoring the behavior of sulfur dioxide and water on Venus, using the Texas Echelon Cross-Echelle Spectrograph (TEXES) imaging spectrometer at the NASA InfraRed Telescope Facility (IRTF, Mauna Kea Observatory). Data were recorded around 1345 cm$^{-1}$ (7.4 µm) and 530 cm$^{-1}$ (19 µm). The molecules SO$_2$, CO$_2$, and HDO (used as a proxy for H$_2$O) were observed at the cloudtop of Venus at 7.4 µm, and a few km below at 19 µm. The volume mixing ratio of SO$_2$ was estimated using the SO$_2$/CO$_2$ line depth ratios of weak transitions; the H$_2$O volume mixing ratio was derived from the HDO/CO$_2$ line depth ratio, assuming a D/H ratio of 200 times the terrestrial value (VSMOW). The SO$_2$ mixing ratio shows strong variations with time and over the disk, showing evidence for the formation of SO$_2$ plumes with a lifetime of a few hours; in contrast, the H$_2$O abundance is remarkably uniform over the disk and shows moderate variations as a function of time. We performed a statistical analysis of the behavior of the SO$_2$ plumes, using all TEXES data at 7.4 µm between 2012 and 2018. The plumes appear mostly located around the equator. Their distribution as a function of local time seems to show a depletion around noon, which remains to be confirmed. There is a good agreement between the TEXES results and those obtained in the UV range (SPICAV/Venus Express and UVI/Akatsuki) at a slightly higher altitude. A comparison of TEXES data at 7.4 and 19 µm can be used to retrieve information about the vertical distribution of SO$_2$, which shows a depletion above the cloudtop [1-4].

1. Short-term variations of SO$_2$

Figure 1 shows examples of SO$_2$ and HDO maps recorded with TEXES. The two pairs of SO$_2$ maps, separated by 2 hours, were taken on two consecutive days. It can be seen that the SO$_2$ distribution is very patchy; the SO$_2$ plumes sometimes follow the 4-day rotation of Venus at the cloudtop over a timescale of 2 hours, but disappear within 24 hours. In contrast, the HDO distribution is very uniform over the disk.

![Figure 1: Examples of TEXES maps of SO$_2$ (left and middle) and HDO (right)](image)

2. Long-term variations of SO$_2$ and H$_2$O

Figure 2 shows the variations of the disk-integrated mixing ratios of H$_2$O and SO$_2$ between January 2012 and September 2018. While the H$_2$O abundance shows a slow decrease by a factor of about 2 (from about 1 ppmv to 0.5 ppmv) between 2016 and 2018, the SO$_2$ abundance exhibits changes by as much as a factor 20, with a minimum of 30 ppbv in February 2014 and a maximum of 600 ppbv in July 2018.
3. Statistical analysis of the SO₂ plumes: comparison with space data

We have analyzed the behavior of the SO₂ plumes as a function of latitude, longitude and local time. This study has shown that they are mostly located around the equator, with a depletion around noon and two possible maxima around the terminators. More data will be needed to confirm the existence of a semi-diurnal wave. The depletion around noon is also observed in the SO₂ distribution retrieved in the UV by SPICAV/VEx [5] (Fig. 3); a very good agreement is also observed between the SO₂ measurements recorded by TEXES and the ones obtained in the UV by UVI/Akatsuki (Fig. 4). This comparison shows that the SO₂ measurements obtained in the thermal infrared can be used to complement, in the night side, the space data recorded in the UV on the dayside.

Figure 3: The SO₂ abundance recorded by SPICAV (top) and the probability of the SO₂ plume occurrence as measured by TEXES (bottom) as a function of local time.

Figure 4: The SO₂ abundance measured in the UV by UVI/Akatsuki (left) and in the IR by TEXES (right)

4. Vertical distribution of SO₂

Simultaneous observations of TEXES at 7.4 µm and 19 µm have allowed us to probe SO₂ at two different levels, at the cloudtop and a few kilometers below within the clouds. In addition, the widths of the SO₂ lines, broader than the CO₂ lines, have allowed us to constrain the SO₂ vertical profile which shows a clear depletion above the cloudtop [2]. By combining the use of weak and strong CO₂ lines, we have shown that, in the polar collars, the morning terminator is colder than the evening one, showing evidence for a cold diurnal longitudinal wave [2]. In a forthcoming study, we are going to analyze the whole TEXES dataset at 7.4 and 19 µm to refine the vertical distribution of SO₂ as a function of latitude and local time.

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