Update on the Temperature Corrections of Global Air-Sea CO_2 Flux Estimates

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Key points:

- The impact of the warm bias in an *in-situ* SST dataset and the cool skin effect on air-sea CO_2 flux estimates are re-visited
- The updated temperature corrections imply a smaller increase in net ocean CO_2 uptake (~35%) compared to a previous study (~50%)
- The revised observation-based CO_2 flux agrees well with the independent ocean carbon inventory

Abstract

The oceans are a major carbon sink. Sea surface temperature (SST) is a crucial variable in the calculation of the air-sea carbon dioxide (CO_2) flux from surface observations. Any bias in the SST or any upper ocean vertical temperature gradient (e.g., the cool skin effect) potentially generates a bias in the CO_2 flux estimates. A recent study suggested a substantial increase (~50% or ~0.9 Pg C yr^{-1}) in the global ocean CO_2 uptake due to this temperature effect. Here, we use a gold standard buoy SST dataset as the reference to assess the accuracy of *in-situ* SST used for flux calculation. A physical model is then used to estimate the cool skin effect, which varies with latitude. The bias-corrected SST (assessed by buoy SST) coupled with the physics-based cool skin correction increases the average ocean CO_2 uptake by ~35% (0.6 Pg C yr^{-1}) for 1982 to 2020, which is significantly smaller than the previous correction. After these temperature considerations, we estimate an average net ocean CO_2 uptake of 2.2 ± 0.4 Pg C yr^{-1} for 1994 to 2007 based on an ensemble of surface observation-based flux estimates, in line with the independent interior ocean carbon storage estimate corrected for the river induced natural outgassing flux (2.1 ± 0.4 Pg C yr^{-1}).

Plain Language Summary

The global oceans play a major role in taking up carbon dioxide (CO_2) released by human activity from the atmosphere. Accurate sea surface temperature (SST) measurements and quantification of any upper ocean temperature gradients (e.g., cool skin effect) are critical for ocean CO_2 uptake estimates. We determine a slight warm bias in the SST dataset used for CO_2 flux calculation by utilizing a gold standard reference buoy SST dataset. We then derive a physics-based temperature correction for the ubiquitous cool skin effect on the ocean surface. The temperature revised CO_2 flux bridges the gap between estimates from the surface observation-based air-sea CO_2 fluxes and from the independent ocean carbon inventory.

1 Introduction

Since the Industrial Revolution, humans have emitted large amounts of carbon dioxide (CO_2) to the atmosphere, which is the main reason for observed global warming. The oceans are a major CO_2 sink accounting for ~25% (~2.5 Pg C yr^{-1} for the last decade) of the annual anthropogenic CO_2 emissions (Friedlingstein et al., 2020) and ~40% of all anthropogenic CO_2 since industrialization (Gruber et al., 2019; Sabine et al., 2004).

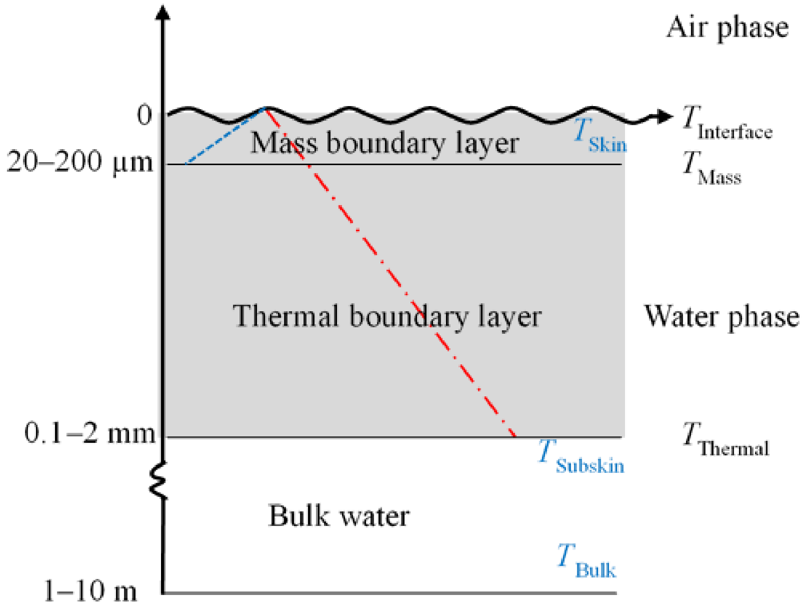

Figure 1. A schematic of the upper ocean (0–10 m depth) using an example where temperature is influenced by a positive (ocean heat loss) sensible heat flux and CO_2 is being taken up by the ocean. The grey shaded area represents the thermal boundary layer (TBL), and the red line represents the temperature gradient in the TBL. The mass (in this case, CO_2) boundary layer (MBL) is embedded within the TBL. The blue line corresponds to the CO_2 concentration gradient within the MBL. The TBL is characteristically ten times thicker than the MBL because heat is transferred about an order of magnitude quicker than CO_2 (Jähne, 2009). $T_{\mathrm{Interface}}$: the temperature at the air-sea interface; T_{Skin}: the skin temperature at ~10 μm depth measured by an infrared radiometer; T_{Mass}: the temperature at the base of the MBL (20–200 μm depth); T_{Thermal}: the temperature at the base of the TBL (0.1–2 mm depth); T_{Subskin}: the temperature of seawater below the TBL at a depth of ~0.1–1 m such as measured by drifting buoys; T_{Bulk}: the temperature at 1–10 m depth as measured at the typical depth of a ship's seawater intake. $T_{\mathrm{Interface}}$, T_{Mass}, and T_{Thermal} are conceptual, whereas T_{Skin}, T_{Subskin}, and T_{Bulk} are from actual measurements (practical). Sea surface temperature (SST) is a general term for all temperatures mentioned above. Figure developed from Donlon et al. (2007).

The global air-sea CO_2 flux is often estimated by the bulk method combining *in-situ* fCO_{2w} (fugacity of CO_2 in seawater) measurements (e.g., from the Surface Ocean CO_2 Atlas, SOCAT; Bakker et al., 2016) with a wind speed-dependent gas transfer velocity (e.g., Wanninkhof, 2014; see Methods). Thanks to the SOCAT (http://www.socat.info/) community, a key dataset of

fCO_{2w} has been available since 2011 (Pfeil et al., 2013; Sabine et al., 2013). The latest SOCAT version, SOCAT v2021, contains 30.6 million quality-controlled fCO_{2w} observations from 1957 to 2020 with an accuracy better than 5 µatm (Bakker et al., 2016, 2021).

Sea surface temperature (SST) is key for bulk air-sea CO_2 flux estimates. Takahashi et al. (2009) reported a 13% increase in ocean CO_2 uptake by correcting for a 0.08 K warm bias in SST. CO_2 is a water-side controlled gas (Liss & Slater, 1974), and thus air-sea CO_2 exchange is mainly limited by transfer within the ~20–200 µm mass boundary layer (MBL, Figure 1; Jähne, 2009). The MBL temperature should be used for the CO_2 flux calculation, but it is impractical to measure *in-situ* SST within the very thin MBL. The bulk *in-situ* seawater temperature (T_{Bulk}) measured concurrently with fCO_{2w} (typically at ~5 m depth) in SOCAT is often used for the bulk air-sea CO_2 flux calculation by assuming a well-mixed upper ocean (top ~10 m) without any vertical temperature gradients.

However, there are two issues with using the SOCAT SST. Firstly, many processes can generate vertical temperature gradients in the upper ocean. There is a temperature gradient (red line in Figure 1) in the thermal boundary layer (TBL, grey shaded area) relating to air-sea heat exchange. Infrared radiometer measurements indicate that the skin temperature at ~10 µm depth (T_{Skin}) is on average ~0.17 K (Donlon et al., 2002) lower than the subskin temperature (T_{Subskin}, at ~0.1–1 m depth) because the ocean surface generally loses heat through longwave radiation, and latent and sensible heat fluxes (the so-called cool skin effect; e.g., Donlon et al., 2007, 2002; Minnett et al., 2011; Robertson & Watson, 1992; Zhang et al., 2020). Another process that might create an upper ocean temperature gradient is the diurnal warm layer effect. Water close to the surface (e.g., at 0.5 m depth) is sometimes warmer than deeper water (e.g., at 5 m depth) due to daytime solar insolation, especially under conditions of clear sky and low wind speed (Gentemann & Minnett, 2008; Prytherch et al., 2013; Ward et al., 2004). The warming leads to stabilization of the surface layer and thus helps maintain a layered upper ocean structure. The diurnal warm layer effect is not as ubiquitous as the cool skin effect, and the warm layer is complex to characterize. In the absence of the warm layer effect, the bulk seawater temperature (T_{Bulk}) is approximately equal to T_{Subskin}, and T_{Thermal} (temperature at the base of the TBL) because the water below the TBL is well-mixed by turbulence.

The second issue is the potential warm bias in the SOCAT SST. The SST community has identified a warm bias in shipboard SST measurements in the ICOADS (International Comprehensive Ocean-Atmosphere Data Set; Huang et al., 2021; Kennedy et al., 2011, 2019;

Reynolds & Chelton, 2010). This might be because ship SST measurements are affected by engine room warming (Kennedy et al., 2019). The SSTs in SOCAT were almost exclusively measured by shipboard systems (98%), meaning that a warm bias could also exist in the SOCAT SST dataset.

Satellite observation of SST represents a consistent estimate of subskin temperature and avoids the diurnal warm layer effect and any potential warm bias issue. Satellite SST thus has been proposed as an alternative to calculate the bulk air-sea CO_2 flux (Goddijn-Murphy et al., 2015; Shutler et al., 2019; Watson et al., 2020; Woolf et al., 2016). Results, based on a satellite SST dataset suggest a ~25% increase (i.e., warm bias correction; cool skin correction results in another ~25% increase) in ocean CO_2 uptake compared to the flux estimate based on the SOCAT SST (Watson et al., 2020). However, satellite SST is not measured concurrently with the fCO_{2w}. Co-locating the 1° × 1°, monthly gridded satellite SSTs with individual fCO_{2w} in SOCAT might introduce extra uncertainties. In addition, various issues in satellite SSTs (e.g., cloud masking, impact of aerosol, diurnal variability, uncertainty estimation, and validation) have not been fully resolved, especially at high latitudes and in coastal and highly dynamic regions (O'Carroll et al., 2019). A comparison of eight global gap-free satellite/blended SST products showed that their global mean ranged from 20.02 °C to 20.17 °C for the period 2003–2018 (at a 95% confidence level; Yang et al., 2021).

SST observations from drifting buoys are unaffected by engine room warming, and are expected to provide the best-quality reference temperature to assess bias in the ship SST, and satellite SST retrievals (Huang et al., 2021; Kennedy et al., 2011, 2019; Kent et al., 2017; Merchant et al., 2019; Reynolds & Chelton, 2010). This work utilizes drifting buoy SST as the reference temperature to determine the accuracy of the SOCAT SST, and to correct for any bias in the SOCAT SST dataset.

Subskin temperature with a cool skin correction represents the skin temperature, which can be used to calculate air-sea CO_2 flux. Watson et al. (2020) reported a ~25% increase in ocean CO_2 uptake by considering a constant cool skin effect (-0.17 K, Donlon et al., 2002) for 1982 to 2020. In this study, the cool skin effect estimated by a physical model (Fairall et al., 1996) and by an empirical model (Donlon et al., 2002) are compared at a global scale. The updated temperature corrections are then used to estimate their impact on the global air-sea CO_2 flux. The revised global air-sea CO_2 flux based on an ensemble of CO_2 flux products (Fay et al., 2021) is then compared with the ocean carbon inventory (Gruber et al., 2019).

2 Methods

2.1 Global Air-Sea CO_2 Flux Estimates

The bulk air-sea CO_2 flux equation is:

$$F = K_{660}(Sc/660)^{-0.5}(\alpha_w f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w}} - \alpha_i f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{a}}) \quad (1)$$

where F (mmol m^{-2} day^{-1}) is the air-sea CO_2 flux and K_{660} (cm h^{-1}) is the gas transfer velocity (e.g., Wanninkhof, 2014) normalized to a *Sc* (Schmidt number) of 660. The *Sc* is defined as the ratio of the kinematic viscosity of water (m^2 s^{-1}) and the molecular diffusivity of CO_2 (m^2 s^{-1}). The CO_2 solubility (mol L^{-1} atm^{-1}) at the base of the MBL and at the air-sea interface are represented by α_w and α_i, respectively (Figure 1). *Sc* and α are calculated from seawater temperature and salinity (Wanninkhof et al., 2009; Weiss, 1974). *Sc* is equal to 660 for CO_2 at 20 °C and 35 psu seawater. The CO_2 fugacity (µatm) at the base of the MBL and just above the air-sea interface are represented by $f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w}}$ and $f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{a}}$, respectively.

To calculate the global air-sea CO_2 flux, $f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w}}$ measured at the equilibrator temperature is first corrected to the *in-situ* bulk temperature (SOCAT SST). Seawater at ~5 m depth (ranging from 1–10 m depth) is sampled from the ship's underway water intake and is pumped through an equilibrator. The equilibrated CO_2 mole fraction in the air of the headspace ($\chi\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w}}$) is measured in a gas analyzer. $\chi\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w}}$ is then converted to equilibrator fugacity ($f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w\_equ}}$) (Text S1 in Supporting Information S1). $f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w\_equ}}$ is further corrected by the chemical temperature normalization (Takahashi et al., 1993) to obtain $f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w}}$ in the bulk seawater:

$$f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w}} = f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w\_equ}}\, e^{0.0423(T_{\mathrm{w\_bulk}} - T_{\mathrm{equ}})} \quad (2)$$

where $T_{\mathrm{w\_bulk}}$ is the seawater temperature measured concurrently with $f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w}}$ at the ship's water intake at typically 5 m depth. Seawater $f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w}}$ measurements are then interpolated to obtain a global gap-free $f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w}}$ product (at 1° × 1°, monthly resolution, e.g., Landschützer et al., 2013). A global gap-free SST dataset is generally one of the independent input variables for the $f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w}}$ interpolation process. Other variables in Equation 1 are calculated using a global gap-free SST product and related datasets (e.g., mole fraction of atmospheric CO_2 for the calculation of $f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{a}}$). Finally, globally mapped $f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{w}}$, $f\mathrm{CO}_{2\mathrm{a}}$, *Sc*, α_w, α_i, and gas transfer velocity (K_{660}, estimated using a global gap-free wind speed dataset) are used for the CO_2 flux calculation via Equation 1.

Table 1. Variables and relevant sea surface temperature (SST) types for global air-sea CO_2 flux estimates and their relative importance for the flux estimate (after Woolf et al., 2016). The back-of-the-envelope calculation in the last column is for fCO_{2w} of ~380 µatm, fCO_{2a} of ~390 µatm, and ΔfCO_2 of -10 µatm, values typical for the last decade (Landschützer et al., 2020).

Variable (x)	**Conceptual SST**	**Practical SST product**	$\frac{\partial \ln(x)}{\partial T}$	$\frac{\partial \ln(flux)}{\partial T}$
$\boldsymbol{Sc^{-0.5}}$	T_{Bulk}	Global gap-free T_{Subskin}	2.5% K^{-1}	2.5% K^{-1}
$\boldsymbol{\alpha_i}$	$T_{\mathrm{Interface}}$	T_{Skin} (Global gap-free T_{Subskin} with a cool skin correction)	-2.5% K^{-1}	100% K^{-1}
$\boldsymbol{fCO_{2a}}$	$T_{\mathrm{Interface}}$	T_{Skin} (Global gap-free T_{Subskin} with a cool skin correction)	-0.2% K^{-1}	10% K^{-1}
$\boldsymbol{\alpha_w}$	T_{Thermal}	Global gap-free T_{Subskin}	-2.5% K^{-1}	-100% K^{-1}
Individual $\boldsymbol{fCO_{2w}}$	T_{Thermal}	Individual T_{Subskin} (*In-situ* T_{Bulk} with any bias correction)	4.23% K^{-1}	160% K^{-1}
Mapped $\boldsymbol{fCO_{2w}}$	T_{Thermal}	Global gap-free T_{Subskin}	< 4.23% K^{-1}*	< 160% K^{-1}*

*The interpolation method (e.g., MPI-SOMFFN neural network technique; Landschützer et al., 2013) can largely dampen the effect of SST on mapped fCO_{2w}.

Table 1 summarizes the SST types that should be used to calculate variables in Equation 1. *Sc* should be calculated from the temperature utilized to derive K_{660} (e.g., T_{Bulk} for the K_{660} derived from the dual-tracer method; e.g., Ho et al., 2006; Nightingale et al., 2000). The air-sea interface temperature ($T_{\mathrm{Interface}}$) should be used for the calculation of fCO_{2a} and α_i, while the temperature at the base of the MBL (T_{Mass}) should be employed to calculate fCO_{2w} (via Equation 2) and α_w. However, Woolf et al. (2016) suggested that T_{Thermal} might be a better temperature for calculating fCO_{2w} and α_w. The seawater carbonate system creates a unique situation for air-sea CO_2 exchange, which does not exist for other gases. Seawater temperature changes cause chemical repartitioning of the carbonate species (CO_2, carbonic acid, bicarbonate, and carbonate; Zeebe & Wolf-Gladrow, 2001). We find that the timescale of this repartitioning equilibration (e-folding time > 10 s for typical seawater; Johnson, 1982; Zeebe & Wolf-Gladrow, 2001) is much longer than the timescale (~1 s) of water mixing below the MBL but within the TBL, where viscous dissipation dominates the water mixing (Jähne, 2009; Jähne et al., 1987; Woolf et al., 2016). The explanation of the timescales is detailed in Text 2 in Supporting Information S1. Although there is a temperature gradient in the TBL due to the cool skin effect, the carbonate species are not expected to have time to thermally adjust, which suggests that T_{Thermal} is the optimal temperature for calculating fCO_{2w} and α_w.

T_{Thermal}, T_{Mass}, and $T_{\text{Interface}}$ are conceptual temperatures, which can be approximated by practical temperatures (Figure 1). Satellite SST, which represents the subskin temperature, is a good approximation for T_{Thermal} (Shutler et al., 2019; Watson et al., 2020; Woolf et al., 2016). A satellite T_{Subskin} product can be used to calculate α_w and Sc, and to map fCO_{2w} for the global ocean. T_{Subskin} with a cool skin correction can then be utilized to calculate global fCO_{2a}, and α_i. *In-situ* T_{Subskin} should ideally be used to correct fCO_{2w} from the equilibrator temperature to the subskin seawater temperature. However, the *in-situ* temperature measured concurrently with the fCO_{2w} in SOCAT is T_{Bulk}, and *in-situ* T_{Subskin} measurements are unavailable to exactly match the SOCAT space and time-stamp. Using *in-situ* T_{Bulk} (i.e., SOCAT SST) to correct fCO_{2w} is reasonable in the absence of a warm layer effect, but it is important to account for the potential warm bias in the SOCAT SST.

Table 1 also summarizes the influence of SST and the corresponding importance for the variables used to make air-sea CO_2 flux estimates (after Woolf et al., 2016). The Sc and fCO_{2a} variations due to the bias in the SST product have a small influence on the global air-sea CO_2 flux. However, any bias in the SST data used for the calculation of α_w, α_i, and especially fCO_{2w} can result in a considerable bias in the flux. The temperature influence on the fCO_{2w} mapping should be significantly dampened by the interpolation process. The most significant influence on the CO_2 flux due to temperature bias comes from individual fCO_{2w} (~160% K^{-1}, Table 1). An average bias of 0.1 K could results in a bias in fCO_{2w} of ~1.6 µatm, which corresponds to ~16% of the net air-sea CO_2 flux for the last decade (Landschützer et al., 2020).

The skin temperature should be used for the calculation of α_i and fCO_{2a}. The T_{Skin} can be obtained from T_{Subskin} with a cool skin correction. If T_{Subskin} is used rather than T_{Skin} for the calculation of α_i, and fCO_{2a}, the ocean CO_2 uptake is in theory underestimated by ~19% for the last decade with a mean cool skin effect of 0.17 K (Donlon et al., 2002).

2.2 Bias Assessment

The *in-situ* bulk SST in SOCAT is generally used to correct individual fCO_{2w} observations from the equilibrator temperature to the seawater temperature (e.g., studies in Table S1 in

Supporting Information S1). However, a warm bias might exist in the SOCAT SST due to heating in the engine room. Watson et al. (2020) co-located the DOISST v2.0 (NOAA Daily Optimum Interpolation SST dataset; Reynolds et al., 2007) with individual *in-situ* SST measurements in SOCAT. They found that the SOCAT SST is on average 0.13 ± 0.78 K higher than the co-located DOISST v2.0. However, Huang et al. (2021) pointed out that there might be a cold bias in the DOISST v2.0 and DOISST v2.1 products (the difference between DOISST v2.0 and v2.1 can be seen in Text S4 in Supporting Information S1) .

This study uses accurate SST observed by drifting buoys to assess the potential cold bias in the DOISST v2.1 and the warm bias in SOCAT SST. A drifting buoy SST dataset from iQuam (*in situ* SST Quality Monitor v2.10; Xu & Ignatov, 2014) with high accuracy (quality level = 5) is used for the assessment. The buoy SST is first gridded (1° × 1°, monthly) and then compared with the resampled DOISST v2.1 (1/4° × 1/4°, daily data are resampled to 1° × 1°, monthly resolution) and the gridded SST (1° × 1°, monthly) in SOCAT v2021.

2.3 Cool Skin Effect Estimate

The cool skin effect is ubiquitous in the ocean (Donlon et al., 2002) and should be considered when estimating air-sea CO_2 fluxes. Watson et al. (2020) used a constant value (-0.17 K) to account for the impact of the cool skin effect on air-sea CO_2 fluxes. However, the cool skin effect is affected by many environmental processes. Donlon et al. (2002) proposed a wind speed-dependent cool skin effect based on skin and bulk temperature measurements (Donlon02, hereafter). A physical model for the cool skin effect proposed by Saunders (1967) and developed by Fairall et al. (1996) considers wind speed, longwave radiation, heat flux, and solar radiation (Fairall96, hereafter). Fairall96 has been included in the COARE 3.5 model (Edson et al., 2013) and recent studies (Alappattu et al., 2017; Embury et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2020) suggest that Fairall96 better accounts for the cool skin effect than the parameterization dependent upon a single variable (wind speed).

We employ the ERA5 wind speed data (Hersbach et al., 2020) to estimate the Donlon02 cool skin effect. The COARE 3.5 model is used to estimate the Fairall96 cool skin effect. The following model inputs are used: CCI SST v2.1 (European Space Agency Climate Change Initiative SST product;Merchant et al., 2019; Merchant & Embury, 2020), NCEP sea level pressure (Kalnay et al., 1996), ERA5 monthly averaged reanalysis datasets (Hersbach et al.,

2020) for wind speed, 2 m above mean sea level (AMSL) air temperature, relative humidity (calculated from 2 m AMSL air temperature and dewpoint temperature using the August-Roche-Magnus approximation), downward shortwave radiation, downward longwave radiation, and boundary layer height.

2.4 Global Air-Sea CO_2 Flux Estimates with the Temperature Correction

We use two different methods to account for the bias in the SOCAT SST for the global air-sea CO_2 flux estimates. For the first method, we use the buoy SST as the reference temperature to assess the bias in SOCAT SST (bias_buoy, hereafter). We correct the 1° × 1°, monthly fCO_{2w} in SOCAT v2021 via Equation 2 (i.e., $fCO_{2w\_corrected} = fCO_{2w}\ e^{-0.0423 * \Delta SST}$) by the temperature difference (ΔSST) between SOCAT SST and buoy SST. The ΔSST varies with latitude (with a 10° latitude running mean, see the orange line in Figure 2b) but does not vary over time. The number of matched data points between SOCAT SST and buoy SST is small in most years, so ΔSST is averaged over 1982 to 2020. In addition, only fCO_{2w} data within 70°S to 70°N are corrected because of the small number of measurements in the polar oceans. For the second method, the co-located DOISST v2.1 replaces SOCAT SST in Equation 2 to reanalyze fCO_{2w} (bias_OI, hereafter; Watson et al., 2020). The reanalyzed fCO_{2w} is used for the flux calculation (see Goddijn-Murphy et al., 2015 and Holding et al., 2019 for the reanalysis process).

We employ the MPI-SOMFFN neural network technique (Landschützer et al., 2013) to interpolate the $fCO_{2w\_corrected}$ and the reanalyzed fCO_{2w} to the global ocean from 1982 through 2020, using a set of input variables. We use the same datasets as Landschützer et al. (2014) for the neural network inputs, except for the SST product. The CCI SST (Merchant et al., 2019) represents the subskin temperature and is independent of *in-situ* SST measurements, so we utilize the 1° × 1°, monthly CCI SST v2.1 for the neural network training process. The CCI SST v2.1 is also used to calculate Sc and α_w, while the CCI SST v2.1 with a cool skin correction is employed to calculate α_i and fCO_{2a}.

We use two models (Fairall96 and Donlon02) to estimate the cool skin effect. Both Fairall96 and Donlon02 cool skin effect estimates are applied to the CCI SST v2.1 to calculate α_i and fCO_{2a}, respectively. The quadratic wind speed-dependent formulation ($K_{660} = a\ U_{10}^2$; Ho et al., 2006; Wanninkhof, 2014) is used to calculate gas transfer velocity. The 1° × 1°, monthly ERA5 wind speed data from 1982 to 2020 is utilized to scale the transfer coefficient a to match to a global mean K_{660} of 18.2 cm h^{-1} from the ^{14}C inventory method (Naegler, 2009). It is worth noting that the cool skin effect and the warm layer effect do not impact the global mean K_{660} calculated from the ^{14}C inventory because the air-sea ^{14}C concentration difference ($\Delta^{14}C$) is very large (Naegler, 2009; Sweeney et al., 2007), and the upper ocean temperature gradients only result in a minor change in $\Delta^{14}C$. In the end, we substitute all variables above into Equation 1 to calculate the global air-sea CO_2 flux.

3. Results

3.1 Warm Bias in the *In-situ* SOCAT SST

The temperature assessment using the buoy SST suggests a cold bias in the DOISST v2.1 (0.09 K on average) and a small warm bias (0.02 K on average) in the SOCAT SST, which indicates that while a warm bias exists in the SOCAT SST, using the co-located DOISST would overestimate this bias in SOCAT SST (Figure 2a).

Figure 2b shows the latitudinal variation of the bias in SOCAT SST. The number of grid cells with both SOCAT and buoy data (green bars in Figure. 2b) is small and the standard error for the temperature difference (grey shading) is large in the high latitude oceans. Therefore, we only consider data between 70°S and 70°N. The SOCAT SST minus buoy SST (ΔSST, orange line in Figure 2b) shows apparent variation with latitude. ΔSST is on average positive, but is slightly negative at 35°N and 30°S. In the northern hemisphere, ΔSST is +0.04 K near the equator and increases by +0.1 K to a maximum at 25°N and then decreases to -0.05 K at 35°N. ΔSST also increases from 35°N to a maximum of +0.15 K at 50°N and then decreases further north. The ΔSST pattern in the southern hemisphere roughly mirrors that in the northern hemisphere with a 5° northward shift.

It is worth noting that under-sampling affects these bias assessments for SOCAT SST. If we consider all paired cells with both buoy and SOCAT SST measurements, the warm bias is on average +0.02 K. If we only consider cells with at least ten buoy SST and ten SOCAT SST measurements, the warm bias is on average +0.03 K (Figure S2a in Supporting Information S1). The latitudinal variation of the bias is very similar no matter considering how many measurements are within a cell (Figure S2b in Supporting Information S1).

It is important to consider latitudinal variation when correcting for bias in SOCAT SST. For instance, SOCAT SST has a relatively large warm bias (thus a large bias in the fCO_{2w}) in the

Southern Ocean (south of 35°S, Figure 2b), which coupled with a high K_{660} and a large surface ocean area (Figure 2c) results in a substantial bias in Southern Ocean CO_2 flux estimates. This study uses a latitude-varying temperature bias (i.e., the orange line in Figure 2b) to correct the air-sea CO_2 flux between70°S and 70°N (see Section 2.4).

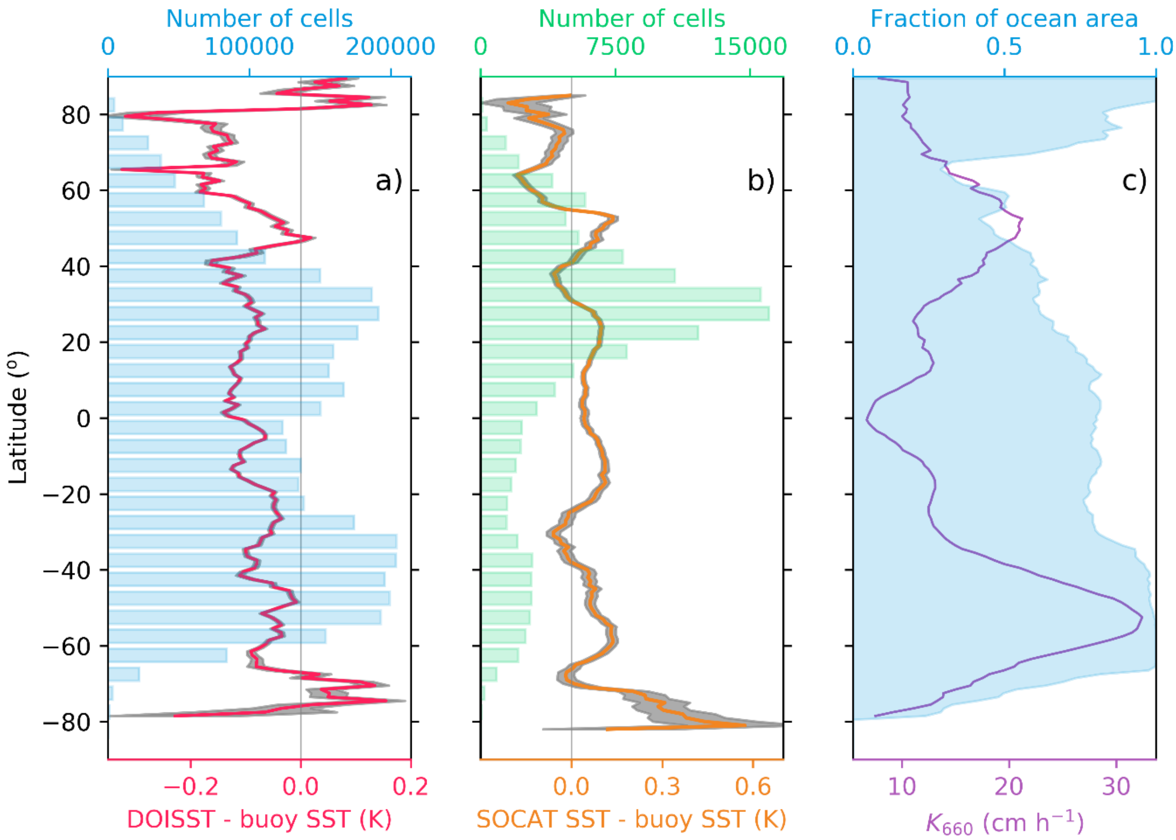

Figure 2. Latitudinal variation in SST differences, number of matched grid cells, the gas transfer velocity (K_{660}) and the fraction of the globe surface area covered by ocean: (a) 1° latitude average temperature difference between DOISST v2.1 and buoy SST (red line) ± 1 standard error (grey shading). The input data are from 1982 to 2020 and have a 1° × 1°, monthly resolution, Blue bars show the number of cells (5° latitude bin) containing both DOISST and buoy SST data; (b) 10° latitude running mean of the temperature difference between SOCAT SST (from SOCATv2021) and buoy SST (orange line, i.e., ΔSST in the main text) ± 1 standard error (grey shading). Green bars correspond to the number of cells (5° latitude bin) containing both gridded SOCAT and buoy SST; (c) 1° latitude average K_{660} (purple line) calculated with a wind speed-dependent parameterization (Ho et al., 2006) using the ERA5 wind speed data (Hersbach et al., 2020) for the global ocean. The blue shaded area corresponds to the fraction of ocean area in different latitudes (1° latitude average).

3.2 The Cool Skin Effect

Figure 3 shows the cool skin effect estimated by Donlon02 and Fairall96. The Fairall96 estimate of the cool skin effect is stronger than the Donlon02 estimate for low wind speeds (U_{10} < 9 m s^{-1}) but weaker for high wind speeds (9 m s^{-1} < U_{10} < 16 m s^{-1}) (Figure 3a). The monthly wind speed distribution (green bars in Figure 3a) shows that wind speeds less than 9 m s^{-1} account for 80% of the wind conditions. Therefore, the cool skin effect estimated by Fairall96 is typically stronger than that estimated by Donlon02. The standard deviation of the Fairall96 cool skin effect is much higher at low wind speeds than at high wind speeds, which reflects that the drivers (longwave radiation, heat flux, and solar radiation) can produce substantial variations in the cool skin effect under relatively calm conditions.

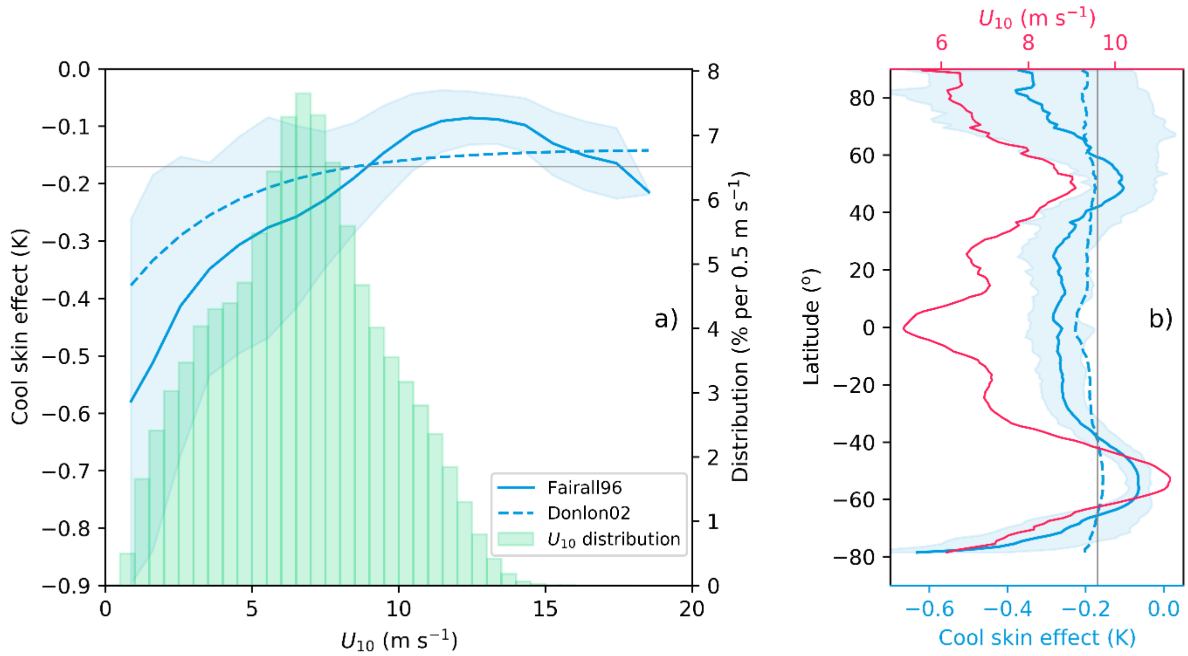

Figure 3. (a) Relationship between the cool skin effect and the 10 m wind speed (U_{10}). Green bars represent the frequency distribution of the ERA5 monthly averaged reanalysis wind speeds (1° × 1°) over the global ocean for 1982–2020. (b) Latitudinal variation in U_{10} (red line) and the cool skin effect (1° latitude bins). Both subplots show the average cool skin effect estimated by the Fairall96 physical model (Fairall et al., 1996, solid blue line), the Donlon02 wind speed-dependent empirical model (Donlon et al., 2002, dashed blue line) and a constant value (-0.17 K, , grey line; Donlon et al., 2002). The light blue shaded area in both subplots indicates one standard deviation of the bin averages in Fairall96 cool skin estimates. Global ocean 1° × 1°, monthly datasets are used to estimate the cool skin effect (see Section 2.3).

The Donlon02 cool skin effect only has a slight latitudinal variation that is not substantially different from a constant (-0.17 K) value (Figure 3b), which was used by a previous study for air-sea CO_2 flux correction (Watson et al., 2020). In contrast, the Fairall96 cool skin estimate shows a clear latitudinal variation with two relatively small cool skin effect regions at around 50°S and 50°N where wind speeds are high. The Fairall96 cool skin effect is stable in the tropical zone and decreases toward both poles to ~50° and then increases at even higher latitudes.

In most ocean regions, the Fairall96 cool skin effect follows variations in wind speed. Intriguingly, the Fairall96 cool skin effect is nearly constant within the tropical and subtropical zones, even though the wind speed is much lower near the equator than in the subtropics. Drivers other than wind speed (i.e., latent and sensible heat fluxes, and longwave radiation) might counteract the low wind speed effect in this area.

4 Discussion

4.1 Variation in the CO_2 Flux Correction

In this section, we discuss the impact of the warm bias and cool skin effects on global air-sea CO_2 flux estimates. The corrections are applied over time (between 1982 and 2020, Figure 4a, b) and by latitude (Figure 4c, d).

The bias correction using the buoy SST assessment (bias_buoy) leads to an average increase in ocean CO_2 uptake of 0.19 Pg C yr^{-1}, while the bias correction utilizing the co-located DOISST (bias_OI) suggests an average increase of 0.43 Pg C yr^{-1} (Figure 4a). Adopting the cool skin correction from Fairall96 and Donlon02 increases the 1982–2020 average ocean CO_2 uptake by 0.39 Pg C yr^{-1} and 0.43 Pg C yr^{-1}, respectively (Figure 4b). A constant cool skin correction of -0.17 K increases the flux by an amount similar to using the Donlon02 correction. In total, the flux correction using the bias_buoy and Fairall96 is on average ~0.3 Pg C yr^{-1} lower than if the bias_OI and Donlon02 are used for 1982 to 2020. The inter-annual variation in the net air-sea CO_2 flux with different temperature corrections are shown in Figure S4 in Supporting Information S1.

Figure 4a and 4c show the change in the air-sea CO_2 flux (ΔFlux) generated by correcting for the warm bias in SOCAT SST. The temporal and the latitudinal variation of the two flux corrections (bias_buoy and bias_OI) follow similar patterns, but the magnitude is different.

Using bias_OI creates a ΔFlux that is twofold larger (in absolute terms) than that using bias_buoy. The data in Figure 2a suggest that using bias_OI may overestimate the bias in SOCAT SST, which would result in a ~0.25 Pg C yr^{-1} overestimation of the air-sea CO_2 flux correction. Therefore, we favour the bias_buoy correction over the bias_OI correction.

While we use the same latitude-varying temperature difference (i.e., bias_buoy) to correct the bias in SOCAT SST for every year, the flux correction shows clear inter-annual variation (green line in Figure 4a). On reason is that the number of measurements in each year of SOCAT is different (Figure S2 in Supporting Information S1), and their spatial distribution differs between years. The latitude-dependent bias correction, when applied to the different year-to-year spatial distribution in the SOCAT data, results in a time-varying annual mean bias correction (Figure S2 in Supporting Information S1).

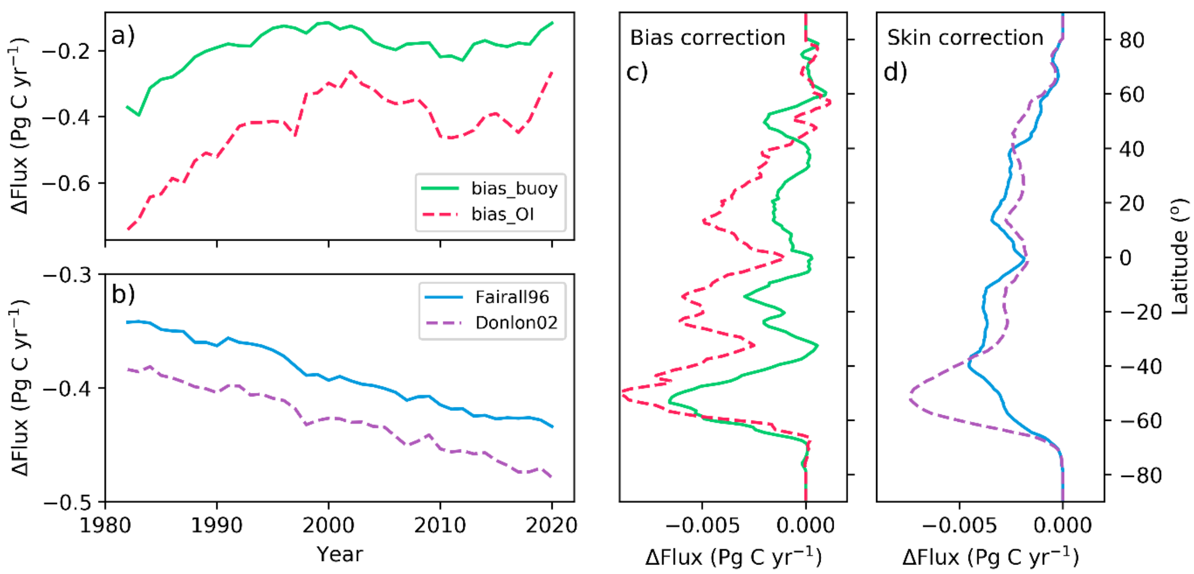

Figure 4. SST corrections to the air-sea CO_2 flux (ΔFlux) versus time (a, b) and versus latitude (c, d). SST corrections account for the bias in the SOCAT SST (a, c) and the cool skin effect (b, d). Negative ΔFlux values represent increased ocean CO_2 uptake. Green and red lines represent ΔFlux due to the bias correction assessed by drifting buoy SST (bias_buoy) and by co-located DOISST (bias_OI), respectively. Blue and purple lines represent ΔFlux due to the Fairall96 and the Donlon02 cool skin corrections, respectively. ΔFlux in a) and b) is the global annual mean, while ΔFlux in (c) and (d) is the long-term average (1982–2020) in 1° latitude bins. Results are based on the MPI-SOMFFN fCO_{2w} mapping method (Landschützer et al., 2013) (See Methods). The inter-annual variation of the global air-sea CO_2 flux with different temperature corrections can be seen in Figure S4 (Supporting Information S1). Our preferred corrections are bias_buoy for warm bias in SOCAT SST and Fairall96 for the cool skin effect (see Section 4.1).

Figure 4b and 4d show the change in air-sea CO_2 flux when accounting for the cool skin effect using the Fairall96 and Donlon02 models. Figure 4b indicates an increase over time in both flux corrections (absolute value), which is driven by the increase in fCO_{2a} (see equation 1 and table 1). The impact of the cool skin effect on the air-sea CO_2 flux is through $\alpha_i * fCO_{2a}$. The ever-rising atmospheric CO_2 concentration and thus fCO_{2a}, result in the growing cool skin flux correction.

The flux correction using Donlon02 exceeds that by Fairall96 by ~0.05 Pg C yr^{-1} (in absolute terms). The largest difference in flux between the two cool skin corrections occurs in the Southern Ocean (Figure 4d). The Donlon02 cool skin effect has minimal latitudinal variation, so the flux correction is largest at ~50°S where the gas transfer velocity is maximum and the ocean area is relatively large (Figure 2c). The Fairall96 cool skin effect has an apparent latitudinal variation and a minimum (absolute) value at ~50°S. This minimum cool skin effect offsets the maximum wind speed and large ocean area, resulting in a smaller flux correction (in absolute terms) at ~50°S for Fairall96 than for Donlon02. Recent work (Alappattu et al., 2017; Embury et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2020) has suggested that the Fairall96 cool skin model is better than Donlon02 at capturing the cool skin effect at a global scale and this, coupled with our estimates indicates that using the Donlon02 model may lead to an over-correction of the air-sea CO_2 flux, especially in the Southern Ocean.

4.2 Implications for Air-Sea CO_2 Flux Estimates

This study deals with the potential bias in the fCO_{2w}-based air-sea CO_2 flux estimates due to upper ocean temperature effects. A large amount of uncertainty in this fCO_{2w}-based flux also comes from the gas transfer velocity (Woolf et al., 2019). The air-sea CO_2 flux estimated from the ocean carbon inventory (Gruber et al., 2019) does not require the gas transfer velocity, is unaffected by upper ocean temperature effects and provides an independent estimate of ocean CO_2 uptake. To compare the fCO_{2w}-based net air-sea CO_2 flux with the anthropogenic air-sea CO_2 flux of the ocean carbon inventory, we need to adjust for river-induced CO_2 outgassing. The riverine carbon flux has been estimated as 0.23 Pg C yr^{-1} (Lacroix et al., 2020), 0.45 Pg C yr^{-1} (Jacobson et al., 2007), and 0.78 Pg C yr^{-1} (Resplandy et al., 2018). Here we adopt the mean of these values (0.49 ± 0.28 Pg C yr^{-1}).

The net air-sea CO_2 flux derived from the ocean carbon inventory for 1994 to 2007 is -2.1 ± 0.4 Pg C yr^{-1} (i.e., -2.6 Pg C yr^{-1} anthropogenic flux plus 0.49 Pg C yr^{-1} river carbon flux; see the footnote of Table 2 for the propagated uncertainty) (Gruber et al., 2019), which is shown in Table 2 along with the ensemble mean of eighteen fCO_{2w}-based fluxes (Fay et al., 2021). Fluxes from six fCO_{2w} products and three wind speed products (three wind products are used for each fCO_{2w} product) are utilized to generate the ensemble mean flux, where missing fCO_{2w} has been filled with a scaled climatology and gas transfer velocity (K_{660}) has been calibrated to a global average of 18.2 cm hr^{-1} over the ice-free ocean based on ^{14}C-bomb flux estimates (Fay et al., 2021). All six fCO_{2w} products (which include the MPI SOMFFN method) have been developed from the SOCAT v2021 dataset. So the corrections of the ensemble mean flux for the temperature effects should be similar to the corrections in this study based on the MPI-SOMFFN fCO_{2w} mapping method (Landschützer et al., 2013). Futhermore, an ensemble of different data interpolation methods and different wind products provides a more robust flux estimate than a single interpolation method based on a single wind product. The flux corrections estimated in this study are applied to the ensemble mean flux.

Table 2. Global mean net air-sea CO_2 fluxes for 1994 to 2007. Here bias_buoy and bias_OI represent the bias correction (to SOCAT SST) using the assessment from buoy SST and co-located DOISST, respectively. Fairall96 (Fairall et al., 1996) and Donlon02 (Donlon et al., 2002) correspond to the cool skin effect estimated by the physical and the empirical model, respectively. We favour the bias_buoy and Fairall96 corrections (see Section 4.1)

Net air-sea CO_2 flux estimates (Pg C yr^{-1})	**Flux without a temperature correction**	**Flux with warm bias correction**		**Flux with warm bias and cool skin correction**	
		bias_buoy	bias_OI	bias_buoy + Fairall96	bias_OI + Donlon02
Ensemble mean of fCO_{2w}-based fluxes*	-1.7 ± 0.4	-1.8 ± 0.4	-2.0 ± 0.4	-2.2 ± 0.4	-2.4 ± 0.4
Ocean carbon inventory**	-2.1 ± 0.4				

*The ensemble mean of the fluxes from six fCO_2 products and three wind speed products (Fay et al., 2021).

**From Gruber et al. (2019) (-2.6 ± 0.3 Pg C yr^{-1}) with a riverine-derived carbon flux adjustment (0.49 ± 0.28 Pg C yr^{-1}). The uncertainty (i.e., ± 0.4 Pg C yr^{-1}) is calculated as $\sqrt{0.3^2 + 0.28^2}$ Pg C yr^{-1}.

The ensemble mean air-sea CO_2 flux without any bias and cool skin corrections (-1.7 ± 0.4 Pg C yr^{-1}) is barely within the combined uncertainty of the net flux estimate from the ocean carbon inventory. The ensemble mean CO_2 flux with bias_buoy and Fairall96 cool skin corrections is -2.2 ± 0.4 Pg C yr^{-1}, similar to the ocean carbon inventory derived net ocean CO_2 uptake. The corrections using the bias_OI and the Donlon02 suggested by a previous study (Watson et al., 2020) pushes the ensemble mean air-sea CO_2 flux (-2.4 ± 0.4 Pg C yr^{-1}) towards the lower limit of the ocean carbon inventory flux estimate (Table 2).

Another question is whether the warm bias and cool skin flux corrections conflict with our understanding of air-sea CO_2 fluxes. One might argue that the preindustrial ocean and atmosphere would have been in a natural equilibrium (i.e., the global total of steady state of natural air-sea CO_2 fluxes would have been zero; see Hauck et al., 2020 for details), but the temperature corrections would create a preindustrial ocean carbon sink. However, the warm bias in SOCAT SST is not a natural phenomenon and should not affect the preindustrial flux estimate. Furthermore, while the cool skin is a natural phenomenon, the flux correction due to the cool skin effect includes both natural and anthropogenic contributions. Figure 4b shows that the cool skin flux correction decreased almost linearly by ~0.1 Pg C yr^{-1} (from -0.34 to -0.43 Pg C yr^{-1}) due to the increase in atmospheric CO_2 (~70 ppm or µmol mol^{-1}, from 341 to 414 ppm) from 1982 to 2020 (Dlugokencky & Tans, 2018). Preindustrial atmospheric CO_2 was ~260–280 ppm (Wigley, 1983), which is ~70 ppm lower than atmospheric CO_2 in 1982. Thus, the preindustrial natural air-sea CO_2 flux correction due to the cool skin effect could be ~-0.25 Pg C yr^{-1}, with the remaining correction (~-0.2 Pg C yr^{-1} in 2020) due to the increase in atmospheric CO_2 by anthropogenic emissions.

A flux correction for the cool skin effect is only related to the fCO_{2w} observation-based flux estimate, which is available from the 1980s onwards (Friedlingstein et al., 2020). There were no fCO_{2w} measurements in preindustrial times, so the total preindustrial air-sea CO_2 flux (the sum of steady state natural flux and river flux) is based on model studies, theory, and lateral transport constraints (Hauck et al., 2020). Although the cool skin effect might result in an ~-0.25 Pg C yr^{-1} flux, we can still assume that ocean and atmosphere were in a natural equilibrium in preindustrial times. Specifically, the cool skin effect has been implicitly included in the preindustrial natural equilibrium assumption. Therefore, this study improves our understanding by suggesting a stronger anthropogenic contribution to the air-sea CO_2 flux, while there is no contradiction between the temperature correction and the preindustrial natural equilibrium assumption.

The cool skin effect and its impact on the air-sea CO_2 flux have been discussed for decades. While the cool skin effect itself has been well observed and modelled, its impact on the air-sea CO_2 flux is mainly based on theoretical arguments. We still lack strong observational evidence to confirm the need to include the cool skin effect on estimates of air-sea CO_2 flux – an important topic we urge the community to demonstrate experimentally. The eddy covariance method (e.g., Dong et al., 2021) provides direct flux measurements, that could be used as a reference CO_2 flux to assess the accuracy of the bulk CO_2 flux. Long-term eddy covariance measurements at a place with very low ΔfCO_2 would be insightful because the relative effect of cool skin on the bulk CO_2 flux is in theory more prominent for regions of low ΔfCO_2. Appropriate laboratory experiments may yield further insight.

In summary, this work updates the temperature corrections to fCO_{2w}-based air-sea CO_2 flux estimates. It shows that there is a slight warm bias in SOCAT SST and a latitude-varying cool skin effect, resulting in ~0.6 Pg C yr^{-1} additional ocean CO_2 uptake for 1982 to 2020. The corrected air-sea CO_2 flux for an ensemble of six gap filled air-sea CO_2 flux products agrees well with the ocean carbon inventory derived net flux. The extreme sensitivity of fCO_{2w} and thus of the air-sea CO_2 flux to the accuracy of SST means that we should be carefully choose the reference temperature to assess any bias in the SOCAT SST. The importance of the Southern Ocean for atmospheric CO_2 uptake, and the strong winds encountered there mean that large scale assessments need a suitable model for the cool skin correction to the air-sea CO_2 flux.

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Open Research

Data can be accessed as follows. Gridded SOCAT v2021 data: https://www.socat.info/index.php/data-access/. Reanalyzed sea surface CO_2 fugacity dataset using co-located DOISST: https://doi.org/10.18160/vmt4-4563. *In-situ* SST measurements (including the drifting buoy SST and the ship SST): https://www.star.nesdis.noaa.gov/socd/sst/iquam/data.html. CCI SST v2.1: https://surftemp.net/regridding/index.html. DOISST v2.1: https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/data/sea-surface-temperature-optimum-interpolation/v2.1/access/avhrr/. ECMWF monthly averaged reanalysis data: https://cds.climate.copernicus.eu/cdsapp#!/dataset/reanalysis-era5-single-levels-monthly-means?tab=form.

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