How stationary are planetary waves in the Southern Hemisphere?

Abstract goes here

# Introduction

Even though many atmospheric variables depend strongly on latitude, they can deviate considerably from their latitudinally averaged value. These deviations modulate weather systems and regional climate through latitudan transport of heat, humidity, and momentum (REFS), and also can contribute to blocking patterns (REF).

Because of their wave-like structure, Loon and Jenne (1972) called the zonal asymmetries in the time-mean southern hemisphere geopotential “standing waves” and distinguished them from the asymmetries of the daily fields, which he called “daily waves”. Other studies use different terminology: Quintanar and Mechoso (1995) and Rao, Fernandez, and Franchito (2004) called them “quasi-stationary waves”, Turner et al. (2017) used “planetary waves” as a synonym, and Raphael (2004) and Irving and Simmonds (2015) called them “zonal waves”. Kravchenko et al. (2012) and Lastovicka, Krizan, and Kozubek (2018) used the terms “quasi-stationary waves” and “stationary planetary waves”, respectively, but in reference to waves in the individual fields (the “daily waves”, following Loon and Jenne (1972) terminology).

These studies also use different methods. Loon and Jenne (1972) and Quintanar and Mechoso (1995) averaged the fields and then computed the wave amplitude, while Rao, Fernandez, and Franchito (2004) and Turner et al. (2017) computed the wave amplitudes of the individual fields and then averaged the amplitudes. Raphael (2004) and Irving and Simmonds (2015) constructed indexes of the amplitude of planetary waves, but the former one is sensitive to waves in phase with the mean wave, while the latter captures all waviness irrespective of phase.

Quasi-stationary waves arise from the superposition of individual “daily waves” with similar phase. However, no recent studies assessed *how* similar, and thus, how “stationary” are “quasi-stationary” waves.

In this study we aim to distinguish between quasi-stationary waves and zonal waves and to show that the mean amplitude of zonal waves differ from the amplitude of quasi-stationary waves. We exploit this difference to construct a measure of quasi-stationary wave stationarity and show that planetary waves with wavenumbers 2 and 3 are significantly less stationary in the southern hemisphere than in the northern hemisphere.

# Methods

We define *planetary waves* as waves that extend along a full latitude circle. *Zonal waves* (ZW) are planetary waves of the “instantaneous” fields and *quasi-stationary waves* (QS), planetary waves of the time-mean field such that:

where is wavenumber, longitude, and and , amplitude and phase, respectively. depends on time, but not . From the properties of wave superposition we can deduce that, in general, the stationary phase does not equal and the stationary amplitude is less or equal (Pain 2005).

These definitions depend on which are the “instantaneous fields” and the averaging time-scales. A dataset of 365 daily mean fields defines 365 daily zonal waves and one annual quasi-stationary wave but 12 monthly quasi-stationary waves (per level and latitude). A 30 year dataset of monthly mean fields define 360 monthly zonal waves and one 30-year quasi-stationary wave. Monthly planetary waves are quasi-stationary waves in one case and zonal waves in the other.

Here we use monthly geopotential fields from the NCEP/NCAR Reanalysis (Kalnay et al. 1996) for the period 1948 to 2017 and compute one quasi-stationary wave for the whole period for each month, level and wavenumber. Amplitude and phase for each wavenumber was estimated by fitting a fourier transform for each latitude circle, level and monthly record.

# Results

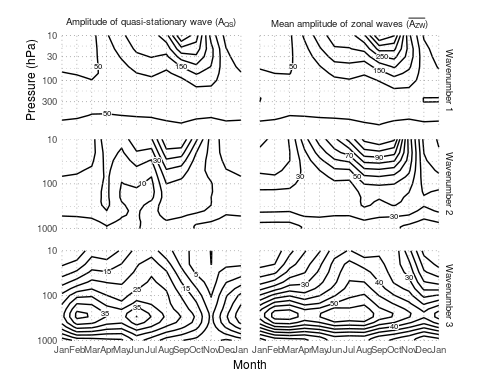
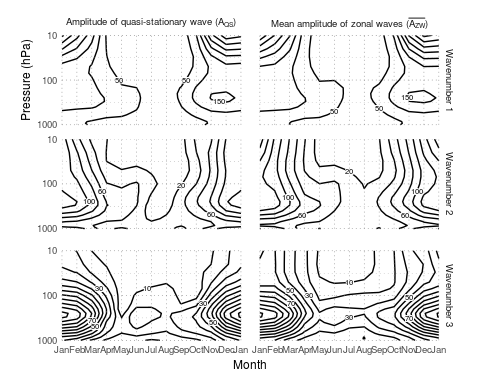


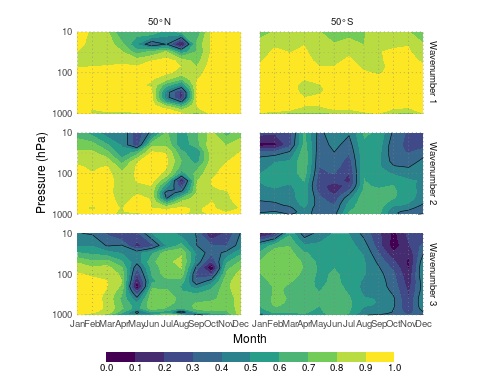
Figure shows the seasonal cycle of the amplitude of planetary waves at 50S and 50N using monthly fields from the NCEP/NCAR reanalysis (Kalnay et al. 1996) between 1948 and 2017. We computed the left column () as the amplitude of the average geopotential field for each month, level and wavenumber, and the right column () as the average amplitude of the 70 individual fields.

Figure shows that at 50N for the three wavenumbers and have a similar seasonal cycle with similar vertical extent. In the southern hemisphere, however, this is true only for wavenumber 1 (Figure ). is much smaller than and its seasonal cycle is less defined. has a smaller magnitude than end even though their overall structure is similar (one relative maximum in February-March in the middle troposphere and another in July-August that extends to the lower stratosphere), they differ in the details. has a local minimum in November that is absent in . The relative contribution of each wavenumber is also different. While dominates over in the stratosphere and is of similar magnitude in the troposphere, dominates over throughout the year and in every level except in the aforementioned November minimum.

Loon and Jenne (1972) also recognized these differences. He observed that daily zonal waves 2, 4, 5 and 6 had big amplitudes but, unlike zonal waves 1 and 3, their quasi-stationary wave counterparts were negligible. He deduced that zonal waves 1 and 3 were exceptionally consistent in phase and thus had what he called a “standing wave component”. We quantify this observation as the quotient between and . As an analogy with the constancy of the wind (Singer 1967), we define quasi-stationary wave stationarity as

For a sample of completely random waves, the expected value of is because the average amplitude of the sum of waves with random phases and mean amplitude is (Pain 2005). For completely stationary waves irrespective of sample size.

While is used –sometimes as (Singer 1967)– in the meteorological literature in the context of wind steadiness (e.g Hiscox, Miller, and Nappo 2010), to our knowledge this is the first time it has been applied to the study of atmospheric waves.



Seasonal cycle of stationarity at 50S and 50N computed using Equation

Figure shows for wavenumbers 1 to 3 computed using Equation at 50N and 50S. We separate between high and low stationarity with the ad-hoc threshold of 0.4 (black line in Figure ).

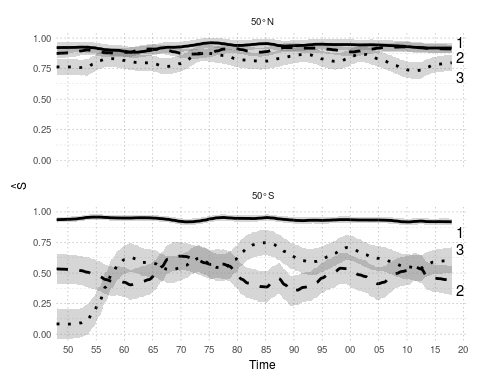
At 50N planetary waves 1, 2 and 3 are highly stationary in almost every month and level, and even more so planetary wave 1 at 50S.

In the southern hemisphere, planetary wave 2 stationarity has a semianual cycle. It reaches its maximum in April and in August-September, plummeting to a deep minimum in June. Planetary wave 3 stationarity peaks in February and slowly decreases towards a November deep minimum after witch increases sharply.

Equation is equivalent to

The numerator represents the sum of the zonal waves amplitudes projected onto the direction of the quasi-stationary wave. Waves that deviate from that direction decrease stationarity in proportion to their amplitude.

We used Equation to compute a timeseries of quasi-stationary wave stationarity. We first calculated for each month and then, applied Equation with a 15-year rolling window approximated using loess regression with degree 0. The results for wavenumbers 1 to 3 at 50N and 50S are shown in Figure .



Quasi-stationary wave stationarity for wavenumbers 1 to 3

Quasi-stationary wave stationarity remained high and constant for wavenumbers 1 to 3 at 50N and 1 at 50S but not for wavenumbers 2 and 3 at 50S. Quasi-sationary wave 3 stationarity jumped from zero to more than 0.5 in less than five years in the 50’s and increased again in the late 70’s. These could indicate inhomogeneities caused by changes in the observational network –routine satellite observations began in 1979– but the absense of similar breaks for wavenumbers 1 or 2 suggest they represent real changes in the atmospheric circulation with unknown cause.

## Considerations about phase

For defining local impacts, the phase of planetary waves is as important as their amplitude. One way of dealing with the phase of ZW is to fix it. Yuan and Li (2008) use Principal Component Analysis on the meridional wind field to obtain a spatial pattern of the leading mode that is very similar to the QS3. The timeseries associated to this mode is, then, an indication of the intensity of the ZW3 that is similar to the QS3. A more direct approach is the index created by Raphael (2004). Since it is based on the geopotential height anomalies at the maximums of the QS3, it is sensitive to ZW3 patterns with phase close to the stationary phase. An almost mathematically equivalent approach (with correlation = 0.98) is to compute the projection of each onto the direction of the (i.e. the expression inside the sum of the numerator in Equation ). This methodology has fewer constrains in that the phase of interest can be changed depending on the application.

# Conclusions

The fact that zonal waves (ZW) and quasi-stationary waves (QS) are two distinct but related phenomena has both practical and theoretical implications.

First, researchers should be aware of which phenomena they want to study and use the appropriate methods. The mean amplitude of zonal waves could be appropriate to study the vertical propagation of Rossby waves, for example. But zonal wave amplitude could lead to misleading results if used as the basis of local impacts studies because they are probably more influenced by phase effects.

Secondly, comparison between results should also be made having this issues in mind. For instance, Irving and Simmonds (2015) compare their planetary wave activity index with Raphael (2004)’s wave 3 index and conclude that the later cannot account for events with waves far removed from their climatological position. However, being an index of the zonal wave component in phase with the quasi-stationary wave, this is by design.

Although having a consistent nomenclature across papers is important, we believe this problem can be ameliorated by researchers detailing their definitions and methodology. This is also good for clarity and reproducibility. Since planetary waves are generally more stationary in the northern hemisphere, these issues are more critical for studies of the southern hemisphere.

Thirdly, the explorations of both ZW and QS can lead to novel levels of analysis. Here, we showed it can be used to define a metric of stationarity of quasi-stationary waves, but other applications are also possible. Smith and Kushner (2012) used the phase relationship between ZW1 and QS1 to show that linear interference between the QS1 and ZW1 was related to vertical wave activity transport at the tropopause.

We speculate that the level of stationarity responds to the nature of the forcings. Higly stationary planetary waves are explained mainly by stationary forcings while low stationary planetary waves respond mainly to the internal variation of the atmosphere. This suggests that in the southern midlatitudes, wave 2 and 3 consist of forced responses mixed with internat variability. Their annual cycle further suggests that the mean state of the atmosphere can modulate these responses.

*xx me falta un final acá xx*

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