



Remote sensing of
different absorbing
aerosol species

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Remote sensing of soot carbon – Part 1: Distinguishing different absorbing aerosol species

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Abstract

We describe a method of using the aerosol robotic network (AERONET) size distributions and complex refractive indices to retrieve the relative proportion of carbonaceous aerosols and iron oxide minerals. We assume that soot carbon has a spectrally flat refractive index, and that enhanced imaginary indices at the 440 nm wavelength are caused by brown carbon or hematite. Carbonaceous aerosols can be separated from dust in imaginary refractive index space because 95 % of biomass burning aerosols have imaginary indices greater than 0.0042 at the 675–1020 nm wavelengths, and 95 % of dust has imaginary refractive indices of less than 0.0042 at those wavelengths. However, mixtures of these two types of particles can not be unambiguously partitioned on the basis of optical properties alone, so we also separate these particles by size. Regional and seasonal results are consistent with expectations. Monthly climatologies of fine mode soot carbon are less than 1.0 % by volume for West Africa and the Middle East, but the southern Africa and South America biomass burning sites have peak values of 3.0 and 1.7 %. Monthly-averaged fine mode brown carbon volume fractions have a peak value of 5.8 % for West Africa, 2.1 % for the Middle East, 3.7 % for southern Africa, and 5.7 % for South America. Monthly climatologies of iron oxide volume fractions show little seasonal variability, and range from about 1.1 to 1.7 % for coarse mode aerosols in all four study regions. Finally, our sensitivity study indicates that the soot carbon retrieval is not sensitive to the component refractive indices or densities assumed for carbonaceous and iron oxide aerosols, and differs by only 15.4 % when these parameters are altered from our chosen baseline values. The associated soot carbon absorption aerosol optical depth (AAOD) does not vary at all when these parameters are altered, however, because the retrieval is constrained by the AERONET optical properties.

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1 Introduction

Soot carbon (sC) is a byproduct of combustion that is composed of aggregated graphite spheres (Andreae and Gelencsér, 2006). It is often called light absorbing carbon (LAC), black carbon (BC), refractory black carbon (rBC), or elemental carbon (EC) in the scientific literature (depending upon the measurement technique), but we prefer the carbonaceous aerosol definitions nicely presented by Andreae and Gelencsér (2006). Thus, the term “soot carbon” presented here is equivalent to “light absorbing carbon” in Bond and Bergstrom (2006) and “black carbon” or “refractory black carbon” in Bond et al. (2013). We use the term brown carbon (BrC) for absorbing organic matter to distinguish these species from organic compounds that do not absorb significantly at visible wavelengths (Jacobson, 1999; Kirchstetter et al., 2004; Kanakidou et al., 2005; Hoffer et al., 2006; Schnaiter et al., 2006; Sun et al., 2007; Dinar et al., 2008; Chen and Bond, 2010). Our BrC is equivalent to OM in Chung et al. (2012).

Atmospheric warming caused by sC is highly uncertain. The most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC; Boucher et al., 2013) estimate of the sC direct radiative forcing for fossil fuel and biofuel sC is $+0.4 \text{ W m}^{-2}$ (with an uncertainty range of $+0.05$ to $+0.8 \text{ W m}^{-2}$); this estimate is based upon the AeroCom Phase II model simulations of Myhre et al. (2013a) and the scaled absorption aerosol optical depth (AAOD) findings of Bond et al. (2013). The direct effect does not capture all forcing mechanisms, however, and Bond et al. (2013) estimate that the industrial-era climate forcing associated with sC is $\text{RF}_{\text{sC}} = +1.1 \text{ W m}^{-2}$, with an uncertainty range of $+0.17$ to $+2.1 \text{ W m}^{-2}$ when all forcing mechanisms are included. Soot carbon radiative forcing is 2nd only to CO_2 radiative forcing as a contributor to global warming (Ramanathan and Carmichael, 2008; Bond et al., 2013). Finally, although CO_2 radiative forcing is larger than sC radiative forcing ($\text{RF}_{\text{CO}_2} = 1.8 \pm 0.19 \text{ W m}^{-2}$, per Myhre et al., 2013b), the range of uncertainty for sC forcing is much larger than the range of uncertainty for CO_2 forcing.

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The cooling associated with all aerosols in the IPCC 5th assessment report is $-0.35 \pm 0.5 \text{ W m}^{-2}$; thus, soot carbon warming from the direct effect alone reduces aerosol cooling by about 53 %, which has prompted suggestions that reducing sC could be a viable method of mitigating global warming in the short term (Jacobson, 2010).

Others have noted that non-absorbing aerosols that are co-emitted with sC make this difficult in practice (Bond et al., 2013).

sC warming is uncertain because modeled sC concentrations and the associated absorption are unconstrained by in situ measurements. The difficulty is the lack of available sC data. The Interagency Monitoring of Protected Visual Environments (IMPROVE) network provides routine elemental carbon (EC) measurements at the surface in the United States, but mainly in remote areas (Malm et al., 1994). Some surface measurements are also available in other parts of the world (Koch et al., 2009), but global coverage of sC concentration and absorption is not available from satellite data.

Modeled sC concentrations are too high by a factor of 1.6 on average over North America when compared to long term in situ measurements at the surface (Park et al., 2003; Koch et al., 2009), and too high by a factor of 5 to 7.9 when compared to aircraft measurements during field campaigns over the United States, Canada, and the Pacific Ocean (Koch et al., 2009; Schwarz et al., 2010). Modeled AAOD, on the other hand, is lower than the aerosol robotic network (AERONET) and ozone monitoring instrument (OMI) products by a factor of 0.69 and 0.85 over North America (Koch et al., 2009), and a factor of 2–4 lower than AERONET worldwide (Sato et al., 2003). Thus, the link between sC emissions, sC concentrations, and AAOD is not straightforward, and the low bias in modeled AAOD over North American source regions can not be simply associated with errors in the sC emission inventories alone.

One problem is that sC is not the only absorbing aerosol in the atmosphere, as BrC and iron oxides in dust are significant absorbers at ultraviolet through mid-visible wavelengths (Kerker et al., 1979; Chen and Cahan, 1981; Hsu and Matijević, 1985; Gillespie and Lindberg, 1992; Bedidi and Cervelle, 1993; Kirchstetter et al., 2004; Sun et al., 2007; Derimian et al., 2008; Chen and Bond, 2010). Separating the absorption

associated with sC from the absorption associated with these other aerosols is not trivial; this is especially true for absorption at the 550 nm wavelength favored by many studies, since all of these aerosol species absorb at that wavelength.

Thus, there is a need for determining the relative proportions of sC, BrC, and iron oxide in atmospheric aerosols. AERONET provides aerosol size distributions and complex refractive index at four wavelengths (440, 675, 870, and 1020 nm) at hundreds of surface sites throughout the world (Holben et al., 1998, 2001; Dubovik and King, 2000; Dubovik et al., 2000). This information can be used to retrieve the relative proportions of carbonaceous aerosols and iron oxide minerals. Schuster et al. (2005) retrieved sC from the aerosol complex refractive index provided in the AERONET database by assuming that all aerosol absorption is associated with sC. Arola et al. (2011) used the spectral variability of the imaginary refractive index in the AERONET database to retrieve BrC. Similarly, Li et al. (2013) used AERONET complex refractive indices to retrieve sC, BrC, and dust over Beijing. Wang et al. (2013) added single-scatter albedo (SSA) as an additional constraint to these refractive index approaches. Koven and Fung (2006) used the spectral variability of the imaginary index to retrieve hematite concentrations at dust sites. Other methods of retrieving sC from AERONET data include the absorption Angstrom exponent (AAE) approach (Chung et al., 2012; Bahadur et al., 2012) and the Bond et al. (2013) approach. However, these last two approaches assume that all absorbing aerosols are externally mixed (which is inconsistent with the AERONET retrieval algorithm), and do not necessarily maintain a link to the measured radiances (as discussed in Sect. 5 and Schuster et al., 2015).

Knowledge of both sC mixing ratios and AAOD are important for constraining how sC is transported, removed, and mixed with other aerosols in the global models. Here, we present a method of deriving column concentrations of sC mass and mixing ratios that are consistent with the AERONET AAODs, size distributions, and refractive indices. The method is an improvement over previous methods because it uses different mixtures of aerosol species for the fine mode than for the coarse mode. That is, we as-

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sume that the fine mode is dominated by carbonaceous absorbing aerosols, and that the coarse mode is dominated by the iron oxides commonly found in mineral aerosols.

2 Method

There are four absorbing aerosols species that are commonly found in the atmosphere: soot carbon (sC), brown carbon (BrC), hematite, and goethite. Soot carbon and brown carbon are produced by the same combustion sources, and generally coexist in aerosol layers. Hematite and goethite are iron oxides that are different forms of “free” iron, and typically appear together as well (Arimoto et al., 2002; Lafon et al., 2006; Shi et al., 2012; Formenti et al., 2014). Our task is to separate the various contributions of these absorbing aerosol species.

Our approach utilizes imaginary refractive index, which we present for the common absorbing aerosols in Fig. 1. Note that the BrC imaginary refractive index is substantial at UV wavelengths, decreases dramatically as wavelength increases throughout the visible, and absorbs negligibly at wavelengths longer than about 0.700 μm (Kirchstetter et al., 2004; Hoffer et al., 2006; Sun et al., 2007; Dinar et al., 2008; Chakrabarty et al., 2010; Chen and Bond, 2010; Lack et al., 2012).

Dust particles containing hematite also have a strong spectral signature, with the greatest absorption occurring at the UV and blue wavelengths. It is generally assumed that hematite is spectrally flat in the near infrared region ($\sim 0.700\text{--}1.0\ \mu\text{m}$), but measurements are sparse at those wavelengths. Nonetheless, the AERONET climatologies shown in Fig. 1 corroborate a flat spectral signature at the 0.67–1.02 μm wavelengths for absorbing dust, as does Dubovik et al. (2002); Kim et al. (2011); and Wagner et al. (2012).

Since both BrC and hematite have strong spectral dependence for the imaginary index, mixtures of carbonaceous aerosols and dust can not be unambiguously partitioned on the basis of the imaginary index alone. Fortunately, we can separate these particles by size, since carbonaceous particles are dominated by fine mode particles

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and two absorbing inclusions can be expressed as a function (F) of the volume fraction of the inclusions (f_i), the complex refractive index of the inclusions ($m_i = n_i + ik_i$), and the complex refractive index of the host aerosol (m_{host}):

$$m_{\text{mix}}(\lambda_j) = F(f_1, f_2, m_1(\lambda_j), m_2(\lambda_j), m_{\text{host}}(\lambda_j)), \quad (1)$$

where λ_j represents wavelength of interest. In practice, Eq. (1) is implemented using the Maxwell Garnett effective medium approximation (EMA), the Bruggeman EMA, or volume averaging (Bohren and Huffman, 1983; Schuster et al., 2005). Volume averaging provides the simplest method for determining m_{mix} (i.e., $m_{\text{mix}} = \sum_i f_i m_i$), but the Maxwell Garnett and Bruggeman EMAs are determined from the complex dielectric constants of the host and inclusions, and therefore require additional equations for conversion to the refractive index (see Bohren and Huffman, 1983). The Maxwell Garnett and Bruggeman EMAs differ by less than 5% (Lesins et al., 2002), so we use the Maxwell Garnett EMA because of its superior computational speed.

If the inclusion refractive indices (m_i) are known, we can compute the inclusion fractions and the host refractive index that “best” matches the AERONET refractive indices (m_{rtr}) by iterating f_i and n_{host} until a minimum χ^2 value is achieved (Schuster et al., 2005):

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{j=1}^4 \frac{(n_{\text{rtr}}(\lambda_j) - n_{\text{mix}}(\lambda_j))^2}{n_{\text{rtr}}(\lambda_j)} + \frac{(k_{\text{rtr}}(\lambda_j) - k_{\text{mix}}(\lambda_j))^2}{k_{\text{rtr}}(\lambda_j)} \rightarrow 0, \quad (2)$$

The solution is unique because the co-emitted absorbing aerosols that we consider (sC and BrC or hematite and goethite) have different spectral signatures, as shown in Fig. 1. Thus, the sC mixing ratio in the fine mode is determined by the 670–1020 nm wavelengths (since BrC exhibits little or no absorption in this spectral region). Likewise, a unique combination of hematite and goethite exists that provides the “best” match to the AERONET retrieved refractive indices for the coarse mode.

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Note that the host species is generally a mixture of components itself, with an unknown refractive index. Thus, we allow the real refractive index n_{host} to be a free parameter that is retrieved (unlike in Schuster et al., 2005, where we assumed that the host was water). We assume that all absorption is caused by sC, BrC, hematite, and goethite, and that therefore the host species is non-absorbing (i.e. $k_{\text{host}}(\lambda) = 0$). We also assume that the real refractive index of the host is spectrally flat ($dn_{\text{host}}/d\lambda = 0$). Finally, the real refractive index of BrC is not well characterized, so we assume that it has the same refractive index as the host aerosol (i.e., $n_{\text{BrC}} = n_{\text{host}}$).

2.1.1 Imaginary refractive index space for dust

We can use the Maxwell Garnett effective medium approximation (Bohren and Huffman, 1983) to determine the range of imaginary refractive indices expected for atmospheric dust that contains only hematite and goethite as absorbing species (i.e., no carbonaceous aerosols), which we present as the shaded area in Fig. 3. In this case, $f_1 = f_h$ is the volume fraction of hematite and $f_2 = f_g$ is the volume fraction of goethite. We use a real refractive index of 1.5 for the host aerosol, Chen and Cahan (1981) for the hematite refractive indices, Bedidi and Cervelle (1993) for the goethite refractive indices (see Table 1), and assume that all other minerals present have negligible absorption throughout the UV-NIR range of wavelengths. (We discuss the repercussions of using different refractive indices in the Sect. 4.) Field measurements indicate that free iron mass concentrations are less than about 5 % (Lafon et al., 2004; Wagner et al., 2012), so we present the range of computed refractive indices associated with up to 5 % free iron (by volume) as the shaded area in Fig. 3. The bottom border of the shaded area represents an $f_h = 0$ isoline and the top border represents an $f_g = 0$ isoline. Finally, the numbers along the top of the shaded area indicate the total percentage of free iron (i.e., hematite + goethite) on the vertical isolines (we also include an additional isoline outside of the shaded area for 10 % free iron).

2.1.2 Imaginary refractive index space for carbonaceous aerosols

In order to complete our description of two co-emitted aerosol absorbers in $k(440)$ vs. $k(670-1020)$ space, we similarly compute refractive indices for mixtures of carbonaceous aerosols. In this case, sC and BrC are the only absorbing species and $f_1 = f_{\text{sC}}$, $f_2 = f_{\text{BrC}}$. We use a spectrally invariant imaginary index of $m_{\text{sC}} = 1.95 + 0.79i$ for soot carbon (Bond and Bergstrom, 2006) and the Kirchstetter et al. (2004) measurements for BrC (see Fig. 1). The solid black line in Fig. 3 is a 1 : 1 line, and represents the spectrally invariant refractive index of soot carbon. The grey lines above the black line in Fig. 3 denote the contribution of brown carbon, with BrC/sC mass mixing ratios ranging from 1 to 20 (assuming that sC has a density of 1.8 g cm^{-3} and BrC has a density of 1.2 g cm^{-3} , as in Bond and Bergstrom, 2006; Turpin and Lim, 2001).

2.2 Separation of dust and carbonaceous aerosols

We are now in a position to evaluate the composition of the AERONET retrievals. We begin by assessing “pure” dust over the Middle East sites listed in Table 2, and plot AERONET Level 2 retrievals in Fig. 4a. We define “pure” dust as retrievals with fine mode volume fractions $\text{fvf} \leq 0.05$ and lidar depolarization ratios $\delta\rho \geq 0.2$ at the $0.532 \mu\text{m}$ wavelength (Schuster et al., 2012). Note that all of the retrievals in Fig. 4a lie in the shaded region, indicating that these AERONET retrievals are consistent with the free iron fractions found in the literature and the refractive indices that we used to compute the shaded region.

Similarly, we plot the AERONET retrievals from the South American sites during the peak of the biomass burning season in Fig. 4b. Note that these aerosols tend to have much higher imaginary indices at the red and near-infrared wavelengths (k_{rnr}) than the dust aerosols of Fig. 4a, and that most of the retrievals do not occupy the shaded area. This is because biomass burning aerosols are generally more absorbing than dust at $0.670-1.020 \mu\text{m}$. Also note that our retrieved BrC/sC mass ratio for biomass

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refractive index for BrC; for instance, the median retrieved BrC/sC volume ratio increases from 1.5 to 2.7 for the South American biomass burning season when Chen and Bond (2010) is used for the BrC refractive index instead of Kirchstetter et al. (2004). However, the maximum BrC/sC value also increases from 15.2 to 27.5, and the latter value is well outside of the range outlined by Chen and Bond (2010).

Recently, some authors have attempted to use AAE to speciate carbonaceous aerosols and dust (Chung et al., 2012; Bahadur et al., 2012), so we present AAE vs. fine volume fraction (fvf) for the West Africa and South America sites in Fig. 10. The color code in each of the panels represents the volume fraction of one of the absorbing aerosol species with respect to the total volume of all absorbing aerosol species. The fraction of sC is presented in the top panel, BrC in the middle panel, and free iron in the lower panel. Data on the left side of the panels correspond to low fvf, and therefore are dominated by dust at the West African sites. Data on the right is dominated by biomass burning at the South American sites.

It is immediately obvious that the AAE parameter is sensitive to the relative proportions of sC and BrC when carbonaceous aerosols dominate the retrievals, as shown by the strong color gradients on the right side of the upper two panels. This is because of the strong spectral dependence of k_{BrC} and the wavelength-independent refractive index of sC shown in Fig. 1. The strong spectral dependence of k_{BrC} enhances the absorption at the shortest wavelengths, which increases AAE. Soot carbon has a wavelength-independent refractive index (Bond and Bergstrom, 2006; Bond et al., 2013), so the AAE of pure sC is smaller than the AAE of pure BrC for particles of the same size. Thus, both the AAE and our retrieved BrC are sensitive to the spectral dependence of the retrieved imaginary index, and the color gradient for carbonaceous aerosols in Fig. 10 reflects this.

However, Fig. 10 also indicates that AAE is not useful for discriminating between dust and carbonaceous aerosols. For instance, a retrieved AAE ~ 1.2 can not discriminate between the dust aerosols with fvf < 0.1 on the left side of Fig. 10 and the carbonaceous aerosols with fvf > 0.7 on the right side of Fig. 10. This is because the AAE of

pure dust has a large range of possible values (from less than 0 to greater than 3), depending upon the relative fractions of hematite and goethite. Thus, the AAE of dust is not well separated from the AAE of carbonaceous aerosols along the vertical axis in Fig. 10. This is discussed further in Schuster et al. (2015).

4 Sensitivity to component refractive indices

The refractive indices that we use for this retrieval are outlined in the upper portion of Table 1; refractive index uncertainty in any one of these components has an effect on all of the absorbing components to some extent, which we assess in this section. We assess this uncertainty by repeatedly retrieving sC, BrC, and hematite climatologies using all of the refractive index sources listed in Table 1, and then compare the results to our baseline retrieval. In order to stress the algorithm, we seek locations with significant concentrations of both dust and carbonaceous aerosols; thus, we use the month of January at the West African sites of Table 2. Dust is always present at those sites, and January is near the peak of the biomass burning season at those locations. We explain our baseline refractive index choices in Sect. 4.1; the sensitivity studies for sC, BrC, and free iron are presented in Sects. 4.2 and 4.3.

4.1 Rationale for our choice of baseline refractive indices

Bond and Bergstrom (2006) did an extensive review of sC refractive indices, and concluded that the available data was consistent with a constant refractive index at visible wavelengths. They also hypothesized that “strongly absorbing carbon with a single refractive index exists, and that some of the variation in reported refractive indices results from void fractions in the material.” They recommended using $k = 0.63\text{--}0.79$ for sC at visible wavelengths, favoring the larger extreme for highly graphitized carbon. The spectrally invariant value of $k_{\text{sC}} = 0.79$ was later adopted in Bond et al. (2013).

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Thus, we use $m_{sC} = 1.95 + 0.79i$ at all wavelengths as our baseline complex refractive index for sC.

Reported values for the imaginary index of BrC varies by more than an order of magnitude at $\lambda = 0.440 \mu\text{m}$, as shown in Fig. 1 and Table 1. This is because BrC is a generic term for many absorbing organic carbon particles, and does not represent a single aerosol species, per se. The refractive index of BrC depends upon combustion conditions and the fuel source, and therefore can vary substantially between the various AERONET sites. We require that our BrC retrieval produces reasonable BrC fractions and BrC/sC ratios for all cases. So for instance, Table 4 indicates that using the lower limit of Sun et al. (2007) can result in f_{BrC} as high as 1.0 (i.e., 100 % brown carbon), which is clearly not acceptable. Fortunately, the refractive index of all BrC is negligible at the 670–1020 nm wavelengths (see Fig. 1), so BrC refractive index does not have a substantial impact on the retrieved sC mixing ratio (as shown in Sect. 4.2). We use Kirchstetter et al. (2004) for our baseline refractive index of BrC because it provides reasonable maximum and median f_{BrC} and BrC/sC ratios at the biomass burning sites.

Hematite also exhibits a large range of reported refractive indices, some of which are noted in Table 1. Hematite and goethite are the two dominant absorbers in mineral dust, and most of the spectral variability of dust absorption at visible wavelengths is associated with hematite. Consequently, we must choose a hematite source for our retrieval that has enough spectral variability to describe all of the AERONET retrievals. That is, k_{440}/k_{rnir} is often greater than 5 in the AERONET database, so we need to choose hematite and goethite optical properties that can accomplish this spectral variability. Since the only available goethite measurement has a positive spectral dependence (i.e., $dk/d\lambda > 0$, per Bedidi and Cerville, 1993), the hematite source that we choose must also indicate $k_{440}/k_{\text{rnir}} > 5$.

Additionally, our choice of mineral refractive indices must produce retrieved hematite and goethite fractions that are consistent with other work. In situ measurements indicate that hematite and goethite constitute 2.8–6.5 % of mineral dust by mass (Alfaro

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variability of the bars within each group indicates that the choice of hematite refractive index (as indicated by color) has very little effect on the sC retrieval ($\lesssim 1\%$). There are two reasons for this. (1) The retrieval initially assumes that sC and hematite are located in different modes (i.e., fine vs. coarse), so the absorption interference associated with these species is minimized; (2) the sC retrieval is mainly determined by the red and near-infrared wavelengths, and hematite has a much lower imaginary refractive index than sC at those wavelengths.

The two leftmost groups of bars in Fig. 11 utilize the same BrC refractive indices (i.e., Kirchstetter et al., 2004), so the dominant difference between these two groups is caused by the different sC refractive indices used for the retrievals. Groups of bars labeled “L” utilize $m_{\text{sC}} = 1.75 + 0.63i$, which is the low extreme from Bond and Bergstrom (2006); groups labeled “H” utilize $m_{\text{sC}} = 1.95 + 0.79i$, the highest recommended value of Bond and Bergstrom (2006). Thus, the full range of sC refractive indices recommended by Bond and Bergstrom (2006) produces a sC retrieval uncertainty of $\leq 14.2\%$.

We can assess the effect of k_{BrC} variability on the sC retrieval by observing all of the groups labeled “H” in Fig. 11. The retrievals in these four groups consistently use $k_{\text{sC}} = 0.79$, and the color code corresponds to the hematite refractive index. Consequently, the only differences between like-colored bars in the “H” groups is the BrC refractive index. Thus, the dark blue bars indicate that using Sun et al. (2007) water soluble organic carbon (WSOC) for the BrC refractive index produces the maximal relative bias of 5.8% below our baseline Kirchstetter et al. (2004) retrievals.

Some authors expected this value to be substantially higher (Ganguly et al., 2009), but BrC does not appreciably absorb radiation at red or near-infrared wavelengths (Jacobson, 1999; Sato et al., 2003; Kanakidou et al., 2005). Hence, it is actually quite easy to separate the effect of sC from BrC using refractive indices at the 670–1020 nm wavelengths, since sC absorption is more than 2 orders of magnitude greater than BrC absorption in this spectral region (as shown in Fig. 1).

Overall, Fig. 11 indicates that relative bias in the sC retrieval ranges from -5.8 to $+14.2\%$ at the African dust sites during the biomass burning season. The largest

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uncertainty is driven by the uncertainty in the sC refractive index. Uncertainty in the hematite refractive index has very little effect on the sC retrieval (< 1%), and uncertainty in the BrC refractive index alters the retrieval by less than 5.8%. We also did a similar sensitivity study for the month of August at the biomass burning sites of South America (per Table 2) to determine performance when carbonaceous aerosols are the dominant particles, and found that both BrC and hematite refractive index uncertainties alter the sC retrieval by less than 1% (not shown). Additionally, measured sC densities are well known ($1.8 \text{ g cm}^{-3} \pm 6\%$, per Bond and Bergstrom, 2006). Thus, the RMS error in retrieving sC mass that is associated with sC density and the refractive indices of sC, hematite, and BrC is $\sqrt{6^2 + 14.2^2} = 15.4\%$.

4.3 Sensitivity of retrieved BrC and free iron to other absorbers

We can apply a similar analysis to BrC and hematite using Fig. 12. The top panel indicates that sC and hematite refractive indices have a small effect on the BrC bias (because all of the bars for a given BrC have similar magnitudes). However, the bias can be as low as 50% (using Sun et al., 2007, water insoluble OC for BrC) or as high as 440% (using Sun et al., 2007, water soluble OC for BrC). This is because the range of imaginary refractive indices for BrC varies by more than an order of magnitude at the $0.440 \mu\text{m}$ wavelength (e.g., see Fig. 1), and this ambiguity propagates through the retrieval.

The lower panel of Fig. 12 tells a similar story for iron. That is, all of the like-colored bars are similar in magnitude, indicating that the sC and BrC refractive indices have a relatively small effect on the amount of iron retrieved. However, the retrieval changes by 83% if we use the Kerker et al. (1979) refractive indices (as tabulated by Hsu and Matijević, 1985). It is doubtful that the various forms of hematite truly exhibit the large range of refractive indices found in the literature, though, and the remote sensing community could benefit from future work that narrows the range of plausible refractive indices for hematite.

and severs the link to the radiation field. Consequently, no known aerosol microphysical properties (i.e., component size distributions and complex refractive indices) can simultaneously describe the component AODs that they report and the measured radiance fields in the AERONET database.

This last point is very important. AERONET provides a set of microphysical aerosol properties that can be used to accurately compute the radiance field at the surface. This link to the radiance field is the strength of the AERONET product, and therefore must be respected when we interpret the AERONET results. Reformulating the model assumptions in a manner that is not consistent with the original retrieval can produce results that are inconsistent with the radiance measurements. Thus, this lack of consistency with the AERONET retrieval model is an unaccounted source of error that still needs to be evaluated for the AAE and Bond techniques.

Our constrained refractive index approach is substantially different than the AAE and Bond approaches. Since we are constraining our retrievals to the AERONET refractive indices and using the same size distributions and forward modeling code to compute AOD as the operational AERONET algorithm, our column AODs are constrained to the values reported by AERONET (and therefore have the same uncertainty). Because of this constraint, any uncertainty associated with sC refractive index or density does not propagate into sC AOD; rather, the retrieval adjusts the sC volume mixing ratio to maintain a mixture that matches the AERONET column refractive indices (and therefore AOD). Thus, the constrained refractive index approach results in identical sC AODs for any assumed sC refractive index and density.

Consequently, the 15.4% uncertainty in sC volume fraction associated with uncertainty in the sC density and component refractive indices that we reported in Sect. 4.2 does NOT carry forward into the AOD computations. We can not emphasize this enough. That is, since our sC retrieval is constrained by the AERONET imaginary indices at the red and near-infrared wavelengths where it is the only absorbing aerosol species (e.g. Fig. 1, and Lindberg et al., 1993), the sC AOD associated with our retrievals is unaltered by the choice of sC density or refractive index. Additionally, our

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approach provides a mass absorption cross section (MAC_{sC}) for each retrieval that can be checked against measurements and models. Finally, since our mixtures maintain the AERONET internal mixture assumption and are constrained by the AERONET refractive indices, our approach maintains a link to the measured radiance fields.

6 Conclusions

We present a method of distinguishing the relative concentrations soot carbon (sC), brown carbon, and iron oxide aerosol species in the atmosphere. The approach determines a mixture of absorbing and scattering aerosols that is consistent with the complex refractive indices provided by each AERONET retrieval. The method initially assumes that all carbonaceous aerosols are located in the fine aerosol mode, and that all iron oxides are located in the coarse aerosol mode. However, the retrieval allows some carbonaceous aerosols to populate the coarse mode, and some hematite to populate the fine mode (if this is necessary to reproduce the AERONET refractive indices). The solution for sC is unique because it is the only aerosol species with significant absorption at the red and near-infrared wavelengths. The solution for brown carbon and iron oxide is more ambiguous than the soot carbon retrieval, but the result for these other absorbers could be improved with better characterization of the refractive indices for those components.

The results show sensible regional and seasonal variability of the component aerosols, with the highest proportion of carbonaceous aerosols occurring at the seasonal biomass burning sites. The iron oxide mixing ratios and hematite/goethite ratios are also consistent with the values published in the scientific literature.

Our approach maintains the same internal mixture assumption that is employed by the operational AERONET product, and is constrained by the AERONET refractive indices; thus, there is a robust connection between our aerosol mixtures and the radiances measured with the AERONET sun photometers. This is not the case for the

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Bond et al. (2013) and AAE approaches, which utilize external mixture assumptions for the absorbing aerosols.

We also present a sensitivity study, which indicates a 15.4 % uncertainty in retrieved sC concentration that is mainly associated with ambiguity of the sC refractive index documented in Bond and Bergstrom (2006). We note that this uncertainty in soot carbon mass does not carry forward to the sC AAOD or radiative forcing uncertainty, though. This is because the sC retrieval is constrained by the AERONET refractive indices at the red and near infrared wavelengths, where it is essentially the only absorbing aerosol. Consequently, the AAOD (and radiative forcing) computed using our sC retrieval and the AERONET size distribution matches the AERONET AAOD at those wavelengths, regardless of reasonable assumptions for the component aerosol refractive indices and densities.

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Table 1. Refractive indices used to test sensitivity of this retrieval to component aerosol optical properties. The subscript “rnr” refers to the red and near infrared wavelengths, and k_{rnr} is the average k for the 670–1020 nm wavelengths.

Species	$k(440)$	$k(\lambda_{\text{rnr}})$	$\frac{k(440)}{k(\lambda_{\text{rnr}})}$	λ_{rnr} (μm)	Reference
This retrieval					
Soot Carbon	0.790	0.790	1.0	0.670–1.020	Bond and Bergstrom (2006)
Brown Carbon	0.063	0.001	63.0	0.700	Kirchstetter et al. (2004)
Hematite	1.229	0.127	9.7	0.670–0.700	Chen and Cahan (1981)
Goethite	0.068	0.120	0.6	0.660–0.700	Bedidi and Cervelle (1993)
Other measurements					
Soot Carbon	0.630	0.630	1.0	0.670–1.020	Bond and Bergstrom (2006), low extreme
Brown Carbon	0.127	0.006	21.2	0.670–0.700	Sun et al. (2007), WSOC
Brown Carbon	0.016	0.002	8.0	0.670–0.700	Sun et al. (2007), WIOC
Brown Carbon	0.035	0.001	35.0	0.600	Chen and Bond (2010)
Hematite	0.27	0.006	45.0	0.650	Kerker et al. (1979) *
Hematite	0.59	0.040	14.8	0.675	Gillespie and Lindberg (1992)

* As tabulated by Hsu and Matijević (1985).

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Table 4. Maximum and median BrC volume fractions, and BrC/sC mass ratios retrieved for fine mode aerosols at the biomass burning sites during the peak of the burning seasons (August–September for South America, July–September for southern Africa), using different BrC refractive indices. The refractive index used for sC is $m_{sC} = 1.95 + 0.79i$.

	Maximums		Medians	
	f_{BrC}	$\frac{BrC}{sC}$	f_{BrC}	$\frac{BrC}{sC}$
South America				
Sun et al. (2007) ¹	0.183	8.0	0.014	0.8
Kirchstetter et al. (2004)	0.343	15.2	0.028	1.5
Chen and Bond (2010) ¹	0.658	27.5	0.051	2.7
Sun et al. (2007) ²	1.000	47.7	0.116	6.5
Southern Africa				
Sun et al. (2007) ¹	0.111	5.8	0.012	0.4
Kirchstetter et al. (2004)	0.230	11.8	0.023	0.7
Chen and Bond (2010) ¹	0.414	21.2	0.043	1.3
Sun et al. (2007) ²	0.842	45.2	0.105	3.2

¹ Upper Limit; ² Lower Limit.

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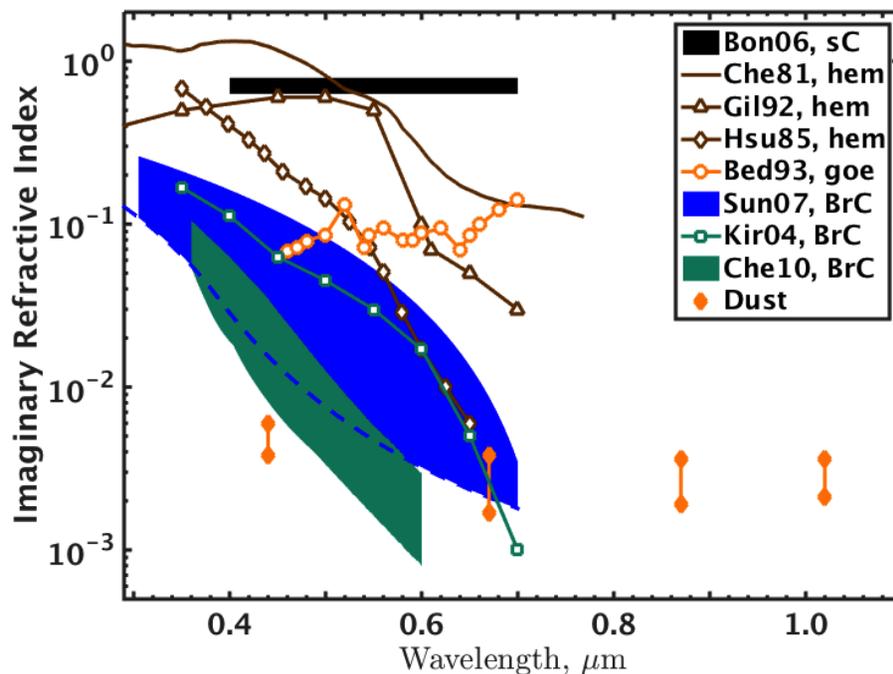


Figure 1. Imaginary refractive index of several absorbing aerosols. Bon06 – soot carbon (Bond and Bergstrom, 2006); Che81 – hematite (Chen and Cahan, 1981); Gil92 – hematite (Gillespie and Lindberg, 1992); Hsu85 – hematite (Hsu and Matijević, 1985); Bed93 – goethite (Bedidi and Cervelle, 1993); Sun07 – brown carbon (Sun et al., 2007); Kir04 – brown carbon (Kirchstetter et al., 2004); Che10 – brown carbon (Chen and Bond, 2010); Dust – range of AERONET dust climatologies over Africa and the Middle East.

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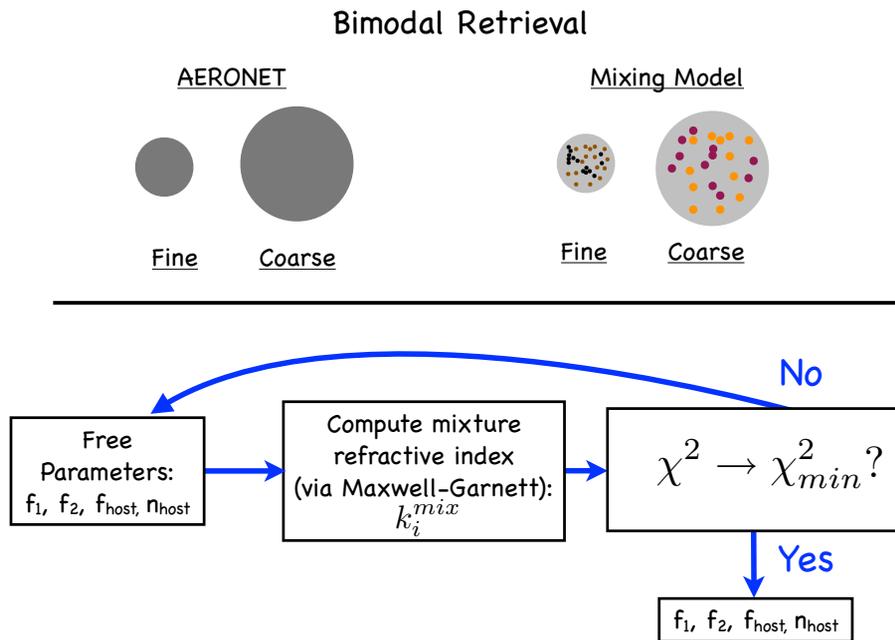


Figure 2. Schematic illustrating carbonaceous aerosol retrieval (sC and BrC) for the fine mode and free iron retrieval (goethite and hematite) for the coarse mode. AERONET provides refractive indices for uniform particles, and the retrieval uses different components for each mode to find a mixture that matches the AERONET refractive indices.

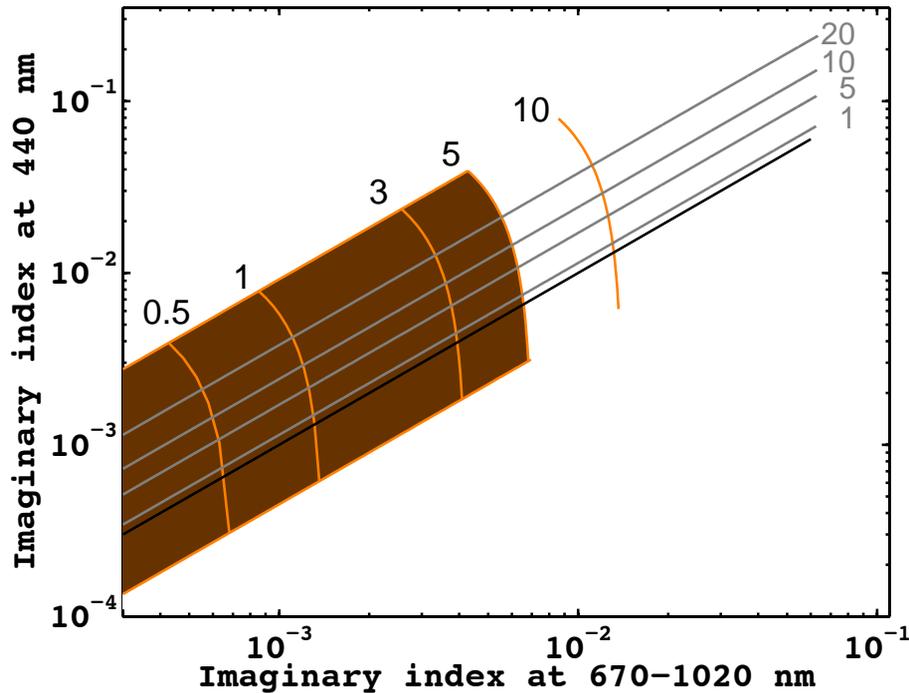


Figure 3. Shaded area indicates imaginary refractive indices at the AERONET wavelengths that are possible with mixtures of 0–5 % by volume of iron oxide in the form of hematite and/or goethite (as denoted by the orange isolines). The bottom border of the shaded area represents a 0% hematite isoline, and the top border represents a 0% goethite isoline. The x axis is an average for the 670, 870, and 1020 nm wavelengths. Solid black line presents spectrally invariant refractive index, as expected for black carbon. Solid grey lines indicate OC/BC mass mixing ratios of 1, 5, 10, and 20 when no absorbing dust is present.

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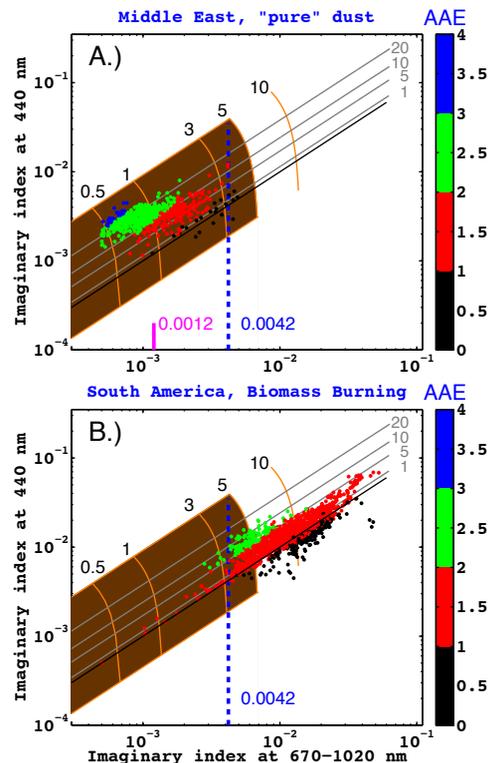


Figure 4. AERONET Level 2.0 imaginary refractive index at 440 nm vs. the 670–1020 nm average; color code corresponds to the absorption Angstrom exponent. Top panel: data over the Middle East, filtered to retain only dust (i.e., require fine volume fractions less than 0.05 and depolarizations greater than 0.2 at the 532 nm wavelength). Vertical magenta line denotes the median. Bottom panel: South America biomass burning sites for August and September. The vertical dashed line at $k(670\text{--}1020) = 0.0042$ separates 95 % of the two datasets. See Table 2 for a listing of AERONET sites used in these regions.

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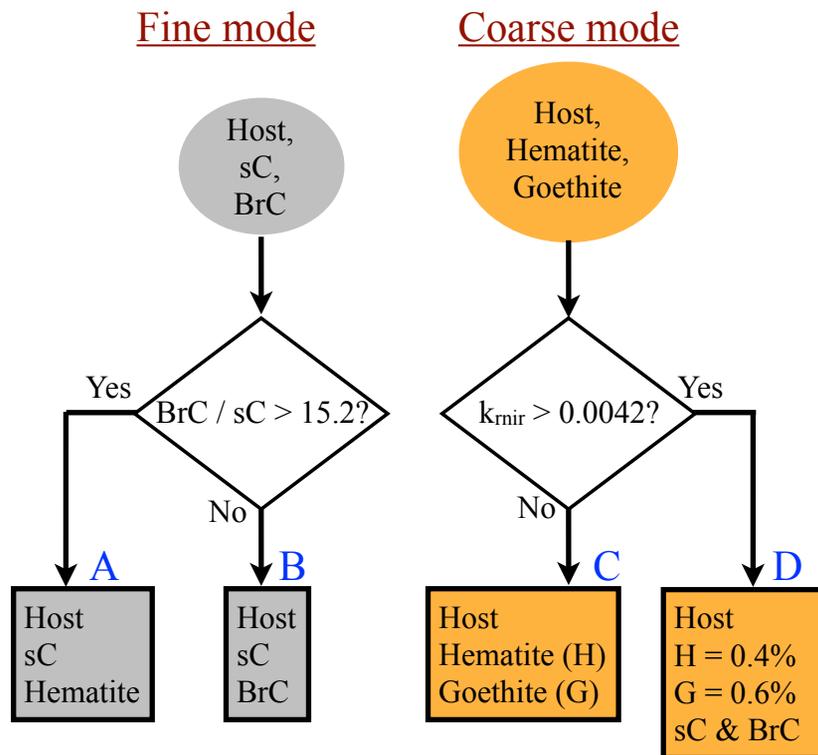


Figure 6. Flowchart showing absorbing aerosol retrieval process. Initially, all carbonaceous species are assumed to occupy the fine mode and all iron oxide (hematite, goethite) is assumed to occupy the coarse mode. If $\text{BrC}/\text{sC} > 15.2$ would be required for a 2-component mixture, then hematite is used instead of BrC to characterize the spectral dependence of the refractive index in the fine mode (branch A). Likewise, if the retrieved absorption at the red and near-infrared wavelengths is above a threshold of $k_{\text{rmir}} = 0.0042$, then the hematite and goethite fractions are fixed at the values we retrieved for “pure” African dust, and some carbonaceous aerosol is assumed to occupy the coarse mode (branch D).

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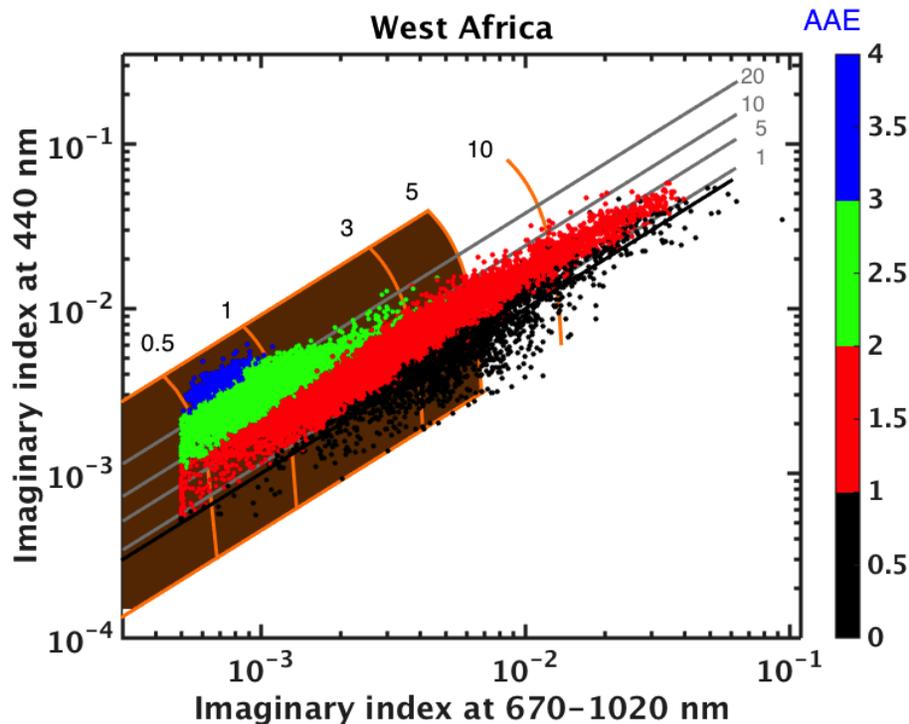


Figure 7. All level 2.0 retrievals for the West African AERONET sites of Table 2, including mixtures of biomass burning and dust. Many of the points are located above the uppermost grey line, which would require BrC/sC ratios greater than 15.2 for a mixture containing only carbonaceous aerosols. Likewise, retrievals to the right of the shaded area require iron oxide volume mixing ratios greater than 5% if no carbonaceous aerosol is included.

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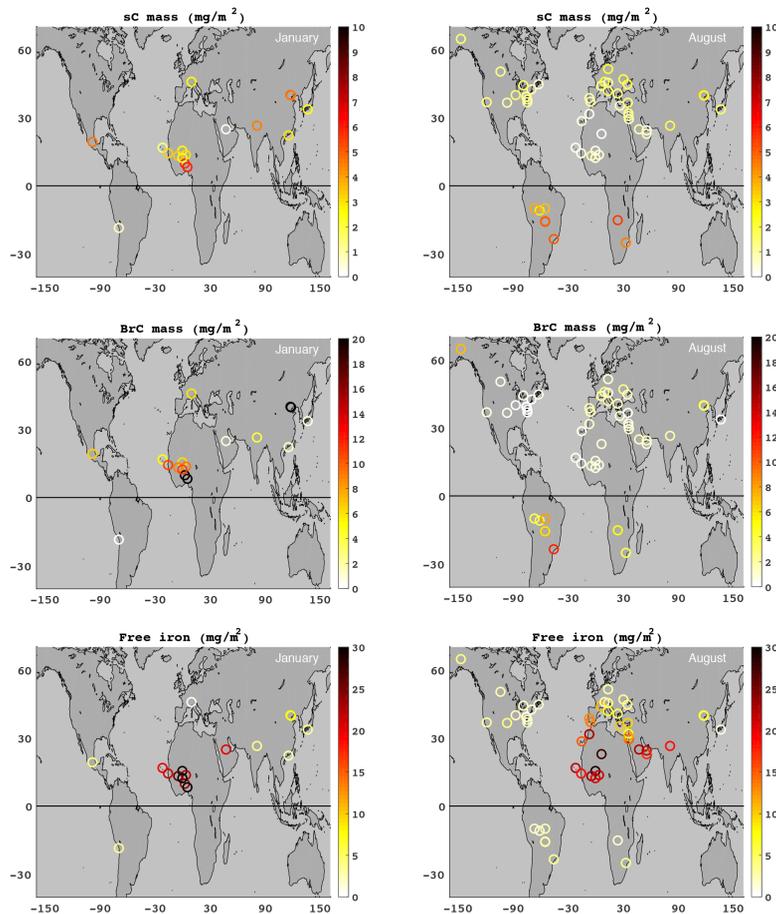


Figure 8. Column mass concentrations of sC (top row), BrC (middle row), and iron oxide (bottom row) retrieved from Level 2.0 AERONET data for January (left column) and August (right column). Minimum number of retrievals is 25 for each site.

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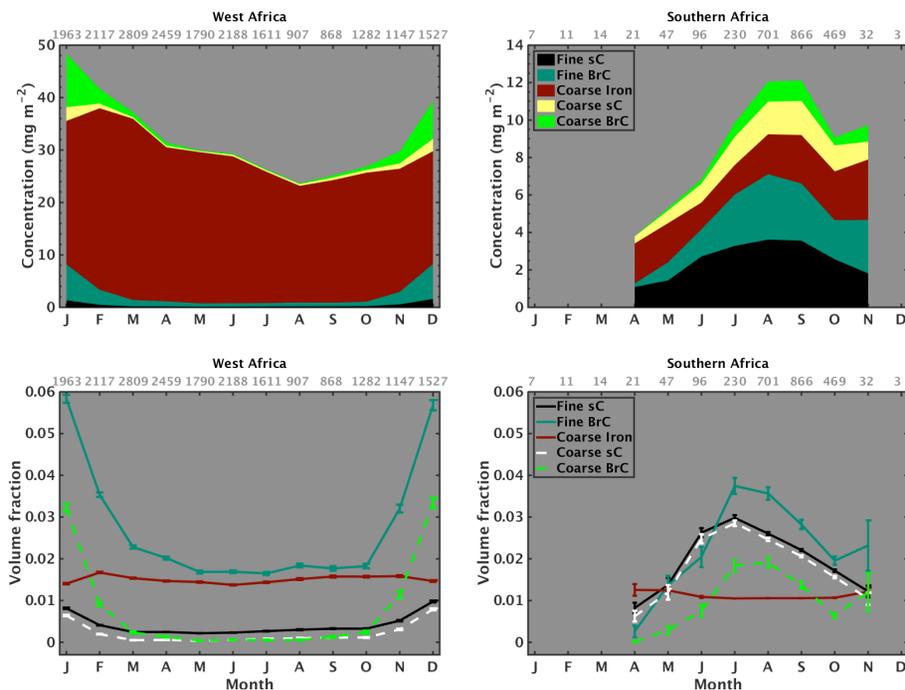


Figure 9. Upper panels: monthly-averaged column concentrations of retrieved sC, BrC, and free iron in the fine and coarse modes at the West Africa and southern African sites (fine mode iron is negligible at these scales). Note the difference in y axis scales. Lower panels: monthly averaged volume fractions at the same sites. Error bars represent the SD of the means. Number of retrievals per month shown along upper axes; only months with more than 20 retrievals are shown in plots.

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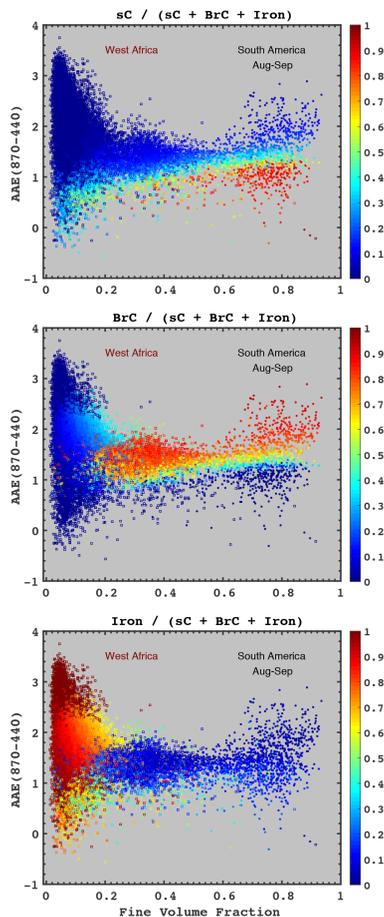


Figure 10. Colormaps showing the volume fraction of absorbing species associated with each absorber. Data located mainly on the left is from the West African sites, data on the right corresponds to the biomass burning season at the South American sites.

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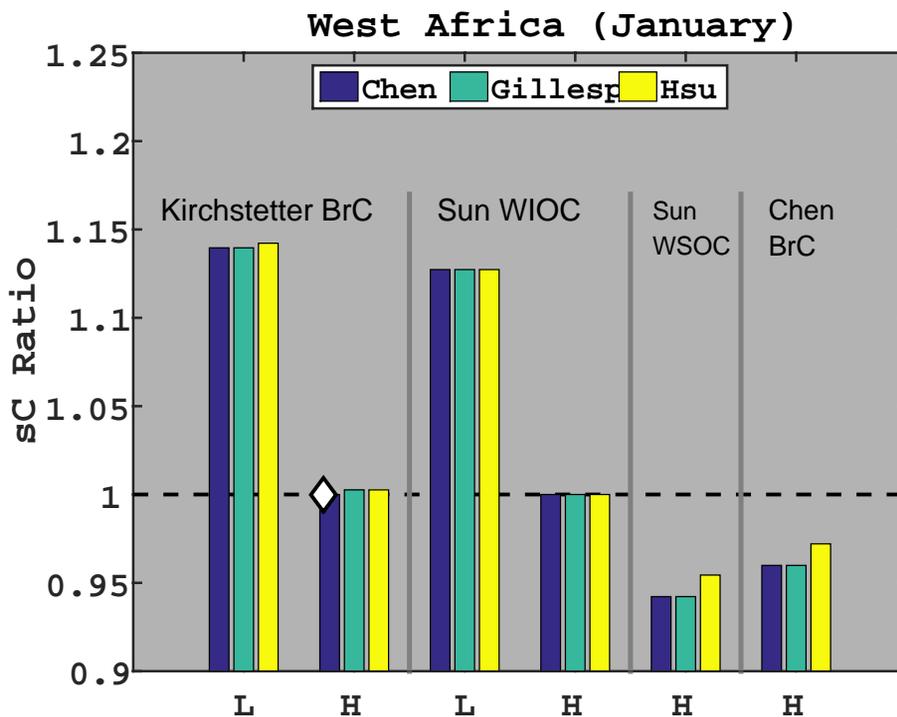


Figure 11. Relative bias associated with component refractive index uncertainty, utilizing 18 combinations of the refractive indices listed in Table 1. Each group of bars utilizes either the lowest (L) or highest (H) sC refractive index recommended by Bond and Bergstrom (2006). Groups of bars are also labeled according to the four BrC refractive index sources in Table 1; color code denotes hematite refractive index source. Baseline components are denoted by the diamond. Note that the sC bias associated with refractive index uncertainty is always less than 15%. See Table 1 for refractive index citations.

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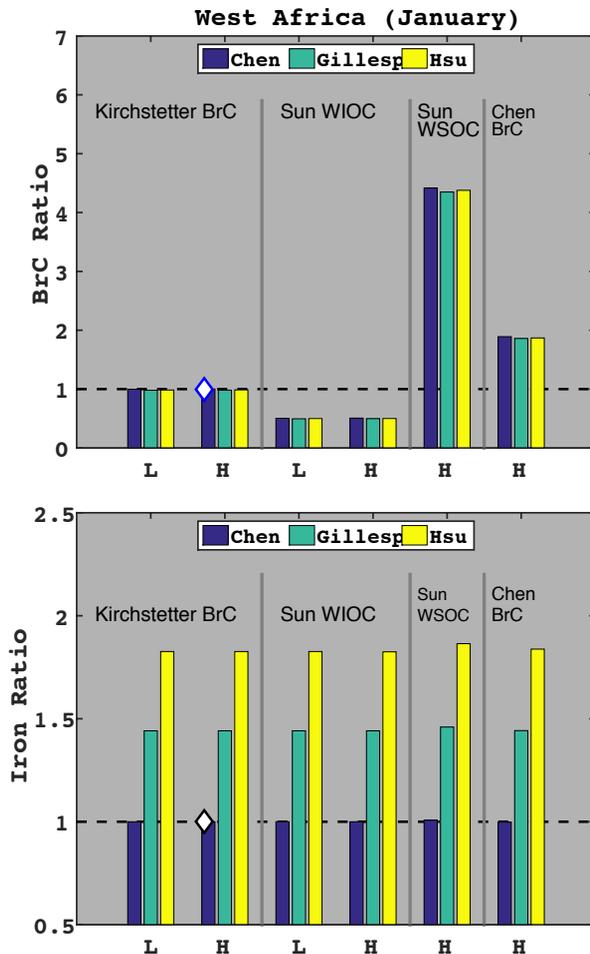


Figure 12. Same as Fig. 11, except y axis is BrC (top panel) and free iron (bottom panel) relative biases.

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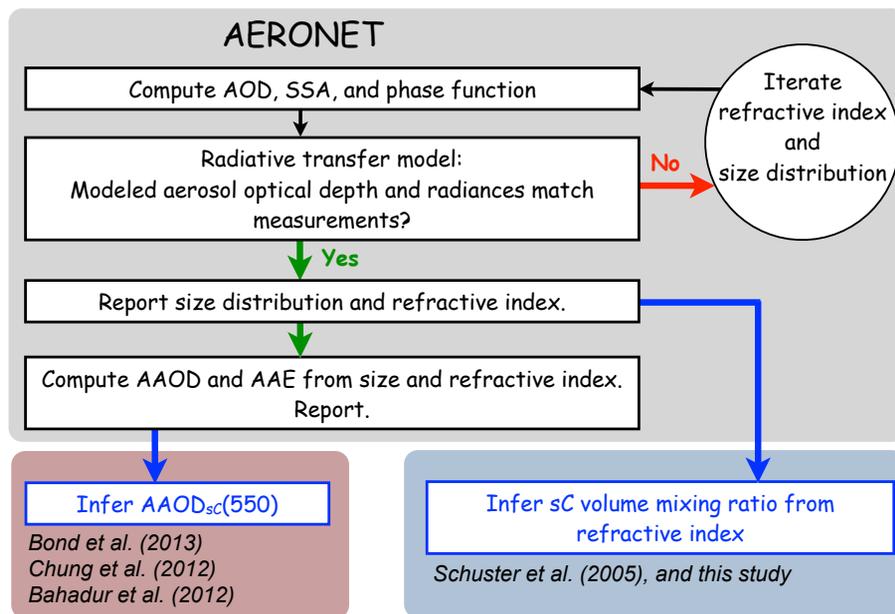


Figure 13. Retrieval schematic for AERONET (gray shading) and subsequent sC retrievals reported in the literature. The size distribution and the complex refractive index are the independent variables that are iterated in the AERONET product; AAOD and AAE are computed from these parameters. Maroon shading denotes various techniques that are based upon AAOD; blue shading denotes this study, which is based upon the refractive index.

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