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When working with multilook fully polarimetric synthetic aperture radar (SAR) data, an appropriate way of representing the backscattered signal consists of the so-called covariance matrix. For each pixel, this is a 3 3 Hermitian positive definite matrix that follows a complex Wishart distribution. Based on this distribution, a test statistic for equality of two such matrices and an associated asymptotic probability for obtaining a smaller value of the test statistic are derived and applied successfully to change detection in polarimetric SAR data. In a case study, EMISAR L-band data from April 17, 1998 and May 20, 1998 covering agricultural fields near Foulum, Denmark are used. Multilook full covariance matrix data, azimuthal symmetric data, covariance matrix diagonal-only data, and horizontal–horizontal (HH), vertical–vertical (VV), or horizontal–vertical (HV) data alone can be used. If applied to HH, VV, or HV data alone, the derived test statistic reduces to the well-known gamma likelihood-ratio test statistic. The derived test statistic and the associated significance value can be applied as a line or edge detector in fully polarimetric SAR data also.
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