

Interactive comment on “Interpretation of FRESCO cloud retrievals in case of absorbing aerosol events” by P. Wang et al.

Anonymous Referee #1

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Summary

The manuscript attempts to interpret the meaning of retrieved cloud fraction and cloud top pressure by the FRESCO algorithm in the presence of thick layers of smoke, desert dust and volcanic ash layers. Two scenarios are addressed: aerosol layers are present in an otherwise water-cloud free atmospheric column, and aerosol layers are located above a cloud deck. The authors carried out a sensitivity analysis for these two scenarios using radiative transfer calculations, and then attempt the interpretation of FRESCO observations for specific situations when aerosol layer were detected by GOME-2 observations.

Results of the sensitivity analysis indicate that the interpretation of the FRESCO retrievals in the presence of aerosols is only possible for aerosol layers of unusually high

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values of optical depth (3.65) and single scattering albedo 0.8 or lower which seem very unrealistic. If these conclusions are correct then the applicability of the FRESKO algorithm to report aerosol layer height is limited to very extreme and rare events of very high AOD and very low SSA, which would render the FRESKO method of aerosol layer height determination totally useless.

Main comment

A major flaw in the presented analysis is the use of the Henyey-Greenstein (HG) approximation to represent the scattering properties of aerosols and clouds. As discussed by Hansen et al (1969), the HG phase function is inadequate for the interpretation of satellite observations that require an accurate description of the angular dependence of the scattering effects of aerosols and clouds. The HG function does not reproduce the well known angular features associated with particle scattering such as the bow effect of cloud droplets or the particle size and refractive index dependent glory feature of aerosol particles. The use of the HG analytical expression in sensitivity studies makes it very difficult to study the sensitivity to change in aerosol microphysical and optical properties. I therefore, recommend that the current sensitivity analysis be repeated using actual Mie calculations to represent clouds and aerosols. Another serious weakness of the sensitivity analysis is the neglect of the spectral dependence of aerosol absorption.

Other comments

Pg 32688 lines 15-16. Only over the oceans. Pg 32688 line 26. The AAI is also sensitive to aerosol particle size [Torres et al, 1998; Herman et al, 1997]

Pg 32688 line 27. Knowledge of aerosol layer height is not enough to derive aerosol optical depth (AOD) from the AAI. Information on single scattering albedo is also required. Both AOD and SSA can be simultaneously derived (if aerosol height is known) using observations of AAI and reflectance at a near UV channel.

Pg 32689 line 22. Please provide a reference on the cloud model used for the calculations representative of the cloudy scene, i.e, cloud droplet size distribution parameters and wavelength dependent refractive index.

Pg 32690 line 13. It seems to me that the effective cloud fraction should also be wavelength dependent. Please explain/elaborate.

Pg 32692 line 1. Be quantitative, how small is the MODIS-GOME2 overpass time difference at high latitudes.

Pg 32692 line 2. This assumption is hard to justify for time differences larger than about 15 minutes. Although for simple qualitative verification is probably OK.

Pg 32692 line 22. Aerosol products characterized by means of cloud parameters? Explain.

Pg. 32693 line 5. What is the assumed aerosol type associated with SSA values of 0.6 and 0.8? Are these SSA values regarded as typical? At what wavelengths? Provide references. The spectral dependence of absorption significantly affects the magnitude of the Aerosol Index [Jethva and Torres, 2012]. A table describing the aerosol (type, particle size distribution and wavelength dependent optical properties) and cloud models used in the sensitivity analysis should be included.

Pg. 32693. The Henyey-Greenstein scattering phase function is a very crude representation of clouds and aerosols (see main comment above). With the currently available high speed computing capabilities the H-G function is no substitute for accurate particle scattering calculations (Mie, T-matrix or Geometric Optics). See Hansen et al (1969) for an analysis of the H-G function approximation in relation to accurate calculations.

Pg. 32694 line 11. What it is the 'reasonable' value?

Pg. 32695 line 26. As presented, the summary of the sensitivity analysis indicate that the interpretation of the FRESCO retrievals in the presence of aerosols is only possible

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for aerosol layers of unusually high values of optical depth (3.65) and single scattering albedo 0.8 or lower which seem very unrealistic as typically observed values. If these conclusions are correct then the applicability of the FRESCO algorithm to report aerosol layer height is limited to very extreme events of very high AOD and very low SSA, which would render the FRESCO method of aerosol layer height determination totally useless. I strongly suspect this finding is the result of improper modeling of the aerosol effect in which the spectral dependence of aerosol absorption seem to have been ignored.

Pg. 32696 line 5. An effort should be made to compare FRESCO inferred aerosol heights to CALIPSO observations.

Pg. 32698, line 19. The assumption that the two plumes located a similar altitude would have similar AAI values if their optical thicknesses are similar is wrong. Differences in viewing geometry, single scattering albedo and cloud presence (either below the aerosol layer or at the same level) will also affect the magnitude of the aerosol index.

Pg. 32702 line 21. Document the source of the SSA measurements (ground-based? satellite?) in Witte et al (2011).

Pg 32704, line 18. Aerosol events yielding AAI values of 8 are probably among the most absorbing cases detectable. The statement that no strong absorbing aerosol cases were detected again points to the flaw of the sensitivity analysis. According to the sensitivity analysis unrealistically high (low) values of AOD (SSA) are required for a successful determination of the aerosol height by the FRESCO algorithm.

Interactive comment on Atmos. Chem. Phys. Discuss., 11, 32685, 2011.

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