Understanding Arctic Surface Temperature Differences in Reanalyses

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Introduction

Reanalyses in the Arctic are widely used for model evaluation and for understanding contemporary climate change. Nevertheless, differences among reanalyses in fundamental meteorological variables including surface air temperature are large. A review of surface temperature differences is presented with a particular focus on differences in contemporary reanalyses. An important consideration is the significant differences in Arctic surfaces, including the central Arctic Ocean, the Greenland Ice Sheet, and non-glaciated land (Fig. 1).

While there is significant correlation among reanalyses in annual time series, there is substantial disagreement in mean values. For the period 1980-2013, the trend in annual temperature ranges from 0.3 to 0.7K per decade. Over the central Arctic Ocean, differences in mean values and trends are larger.

Most of the uncertainty is associated with winter months. This is likely associated with the constraint imposed by melting processes (i.e. 0°C), rather than seasonal changes to the observing system.

Greenland Ice Sheet (GrIS)

Observed surface melting over the last decade lend importance to the use of reanalyses for the GrIS for understanding processes in the context of regional and hemispheric circulation changes. Averaged temperatures indicate considerable differences in both winter and summer. Deficient topography is significant in some reanalyses. In comparisons with Summit station, discrepancies in transitional seasons are suggestive of solar zenith angle dependency issues with surface albedo.

Discussion

Differing treatments of Arctic cloud radiative processes likely influence temperature differences among reanalyses. Nevertheless, the treatment of ice sheet surfaces and sea ice in particular remain overly simplistic in reanalyses. The use and blending of sea ice data sets as boundary conditions leads to trouble. Current reanalyses do not account for spatial or interannual variability in sea ice albedo or sea ice thickness. These may both be significant factors in recent temperature trends.

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