Differential Chromatic Refraction: literature overview

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1 Overview

Like any medium, the Earth's atmosphere refracts incident light, which for an observer on the Earth's surface results in a deflection of the apparent position of sources towards zenith by about 1 arcsecond per degree of the source from zenith. This bulk effect of refraction is well understood in astronomical applications and is easily accounted for most of the optical through radio wavelengths where the index of refraction is constant, but towards the blue end of the optical spectrum atmospheric dispersion results in increasing refraction. As a result, photons from the same source but different wavelengths that pass through the same filter of a telescope will have slightly different degrees of refraction and will land on different locations of the detector, an effect called Differential Chromatic Refraction (DCR). Differential Chromatic Refraction was first raised as an issue for spectrometry in Filippenko (1982), where the problem was framed as a loss of flux in slit spectrometers. The issue has now become important for imaging cameras as well, though, because high-resolution cameras such as the LSST will experience significant PSF smearing in the u and g bands (Figure 1).

2 DCR literature

A quick summary of and notes on the existing literature covering DCR. Each reference we found is covered in it's own subsection below.

2.1 Report on Summer 2014 Production: Analysis of DCR (Andrew Becker)

`https://github.com/lsst-dm/S14DCR/blob/master/report/S14report_V0-00.pdf`

- Estimated DCR effects directly for LSST using catSim's stellar SEDs.

- Investigated only airmass effects (no temperature, etc. dependence).

- Utilized 5 mas threshold for "good" DCR corrections based on estimated accuracy required for difference imaging (no dipoles).

- Summmary of DCR estimates:

    - For g and r, nearly all stars will exhibit differential DCR of > 5 mas at parallactic angle differences > 20 deg. or airmass differences of > 0.15.
    - For i, similar effects for parallactic angle differences > 25 deg. or airmass differences > 0.2, mostly for M-dwarf stars.
    - For z, only very large differences in parallactic angle or airmass lead to DCR > 5 mas.

- DCR corrections tested based on modeling using colors and airmass terms.

    - Random forest regression models provided most accurate modeling of DCR and refraction.
    - u and g models worked but would be degraded by 10% color errors (u) or 2.5% color errors (g).
    - riz models could correct all but 10^{-5} stars to < 5 mas residuals.

Recommendations:

- Code from the S14DCR analysis `https://github.com/lsst-dm/S14DCR` should be updated to use latest version of sims_photUtils and include estimates for galaxies and SNe.

- Potentially merge capabilities of SED and Bandpass in sims_photUtils with those from chroma `https://github.com/DarkEnergyScienceCollaboration/chroma/`; see below.

- Incorporate DCR calcs into sims pipeline to enable effects of DCR corrections on image coadds and differences (see also `https://github.com/lsst-dm/W14ImageDifferencing`).
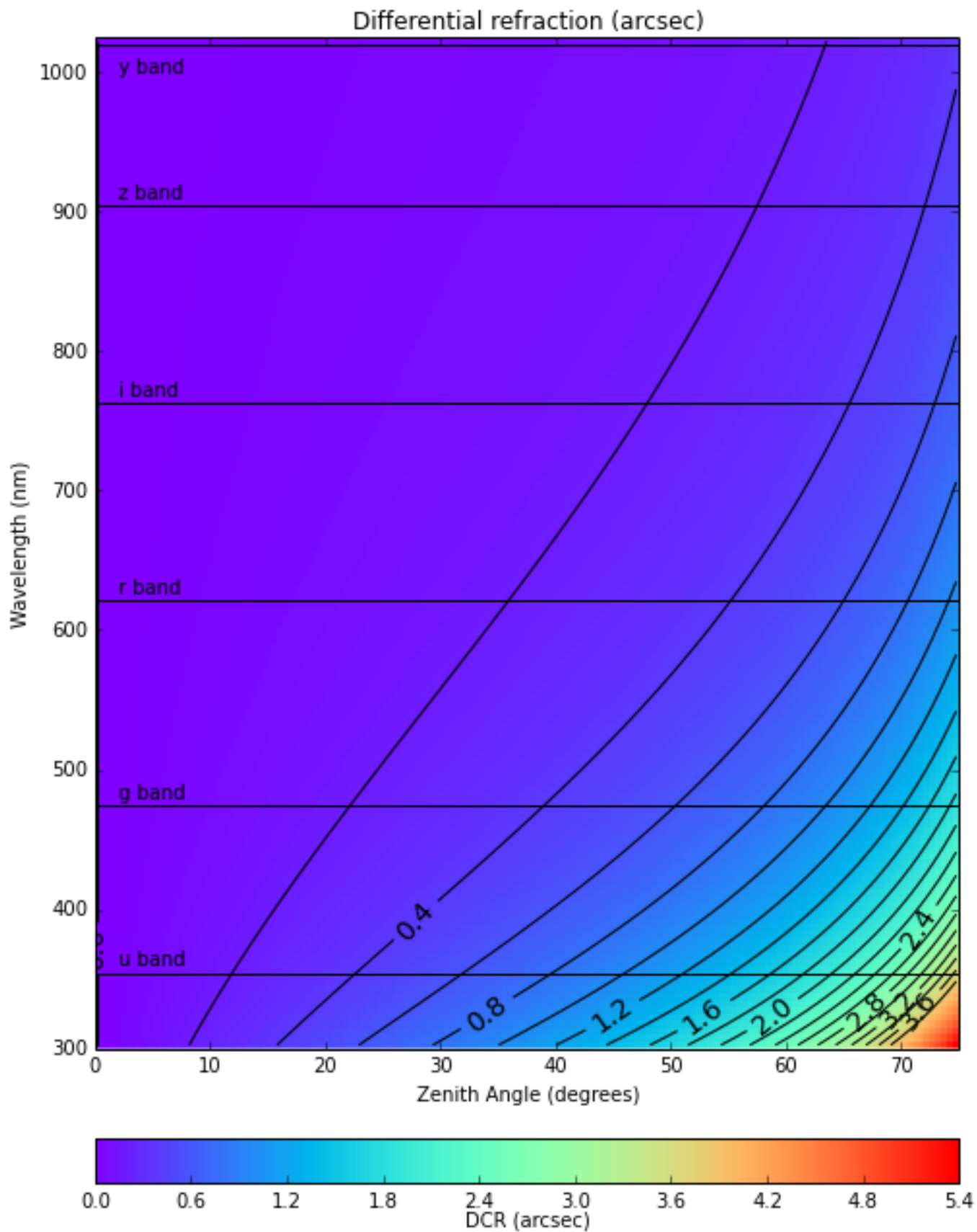
Figure 1: Maximum DCR over a range of zenith angles and wavelengths. Each wavelength is treated as the center wavelength of a band with 20% bandwidth, and maximum DCR is calculated for the difference in position of two photons from the same source at opposite ends of the band.

(a) Pressure and Temperature

(b) Zenith Angle and Pressure
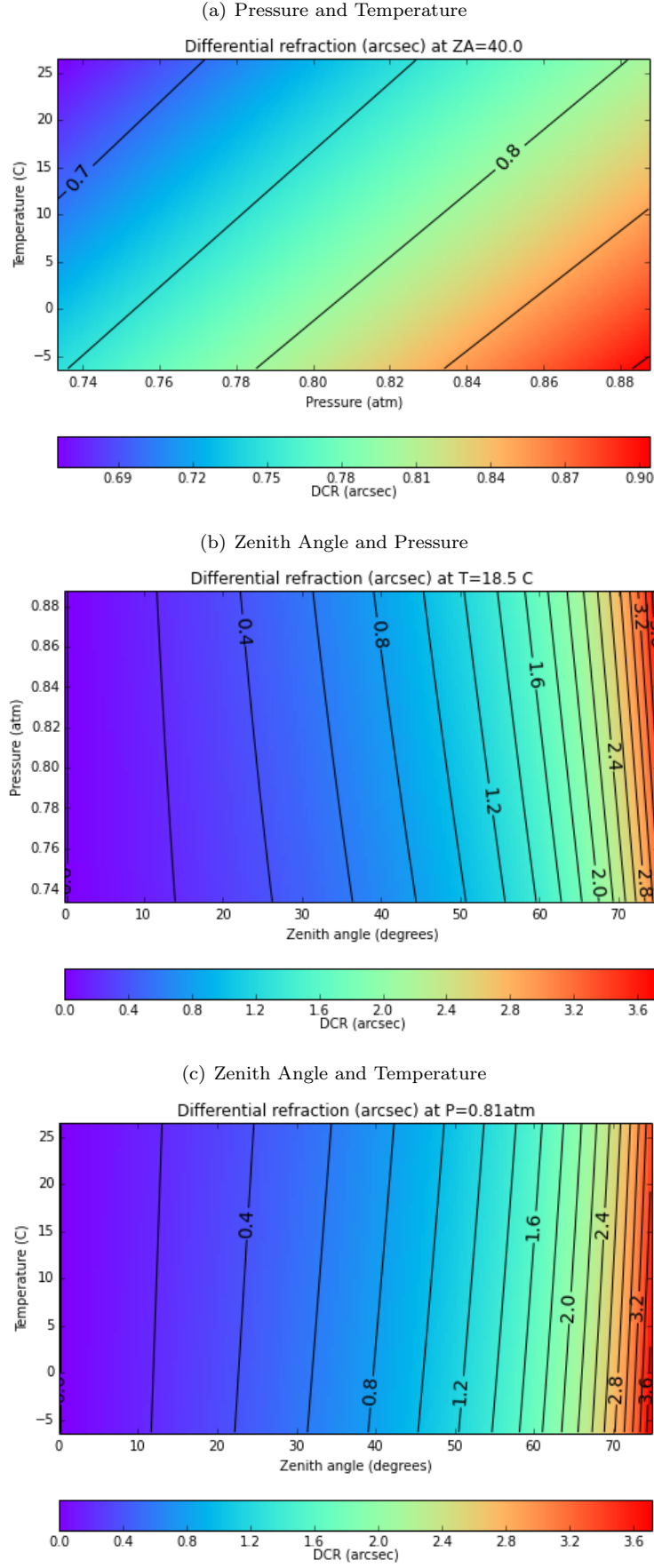
(c) Zenith Angle and Temperature

Figure 2: Investigation of maximum DCR under varying conditions for LSST u' band. For a given filter, maximum DCR depends on the zenith angle of observation (airmass), atmospheric pressure, temperature, and, to a lessor degree, humidity. In panels (a) - (c) we keep one of the three main parameters fixed at a nominal value, and map the full range of realistic observing conditions for the remaining two to get a feel for the relative importance of each.

2.2 Meyers & Burchat (2015)

- Estimates of DCR on weak lensing measurements.

- Source code for analysis is available here: `https://github.com/DarkEnergyScienceCollaboration/chroma/`.

- Primarily measured effects of DCR on shape measurements (2nd moments); code can be used to estimate 1st moments for a given SED. Preliminary code: `https://github.com/isullivan/LSST-DCR/tree/master/code/notebooks`.

Recommendations:

- Check and incorporate DCR code from their chroma package into sims pipelines

2.3 Chambers (2005)

- Updated summary of (more accurate?) astrometric transformations including DCR.

- Estimated astrometric accuracy in Pann-STARRS of 1 mas. This assumes accurate atmospheric characterization for each field from sky probes (atmospheric absorption).

Recommendations:

- Understand these transformations. Suggestion is that C code exits somewhere in the Pan-STARRS codebase, but I could not find it.

2.4 Cuby et al. (1998)

2.5 Filippenko (1982)

- Original paper posing DCR as a problem to be addressed.

- Focused on the effect on spectrometers, with the recommendation that slit spectrometers be aligned with fixed parallactic angle.

2.6 Alejandro Plazas & Bernstein (2012)

2.7 Stone (1996)

- A good reference giving equations for refraction including the effect of temperature, pressure, and water vapor pressure. Used for calculating Figure 2

References

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