Mathematical Biostatistics Boot Camp: Lecture 14, Logs

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November 5, 2012

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Logs

- Recall that $\log_B(x)$ is the number y so that $B^y = x$
- Note that you can not take the log of a negative number; $\log_B(1)$ is always 0 and $\log_B(0)$ is $-\infty$
- When the base is $B = e$ we write $\log_e$ as just log or ln
- Other useful bases are 10 (orders of magnitude) or 2
- Recall that $\log(ab) = \log(a) + \log(b)$, $\log(a^b) = b\log(a)$, $\log(a/b) = \log(a) - \log(b)$ (log turns multiplication into addition, division into subtraction, powers into multiplication)

Some reasons for "logging" data

- To correct for right skewness
- When considering ratios
- In settings where errors are feasibly multiplicative, such as when dealing with concentrations or rates
- To consider orders of magnitude (using log base 10); for example when considering astronomical distances
- Counts are often logged (though note the problem with zero counts)

The geometric mean

- The (sample) **geometric mean** of a data set $X_1, \ldots, X_n$ is

$$\left(\prod_{i=1}^{n} X_i\right)^{1/n}$$

- Note that (provided that the X_i are positive) the log of the geometric mean is

$$\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} \log(X_i)$$

- As the log of the geometric mean is an average, the LLN and clt apply (under what assumptions?)
- The geometric mean is always less than or equal to the sample (arithmetic) mean

The geometric mean

- The geometric mean is often used when the X_i are all multiplicative
- Suppose that in a population of interest, the prevalence of a disease rose 2% one year, then fell 1% the next, then rose 2%, then rose 1%; since these factors act multiplicatively it makes sense to consider the geometric mean

$$(1.02 \times .99 \times 1.02 \times 1.01)^{1/4} = 1.01$$

for a 1% geometric mean increase in disease prevalence

- Notice that multiplying the initial prevalence by 1.01^4 is the same as multiplying by the original four numbers in sequence
- Hence 1.01 is constant factor by which you would need to multiply the initial prevalence each year to achieve the same overall increase in prevalence over a four year period
- The arithmetic mean, in contrast, is the constant factor by which your would need to *add* each year to achieve the same *total* increase $(1.02 + .99 + 1.02 + 1.01)$
- In this case the product and hence the geometric mean make more sense than the arithmetic mean

Nifty fact

- The *question corner* (google) at the University of Toronto's web site (where I got much of this) has a fun interpretation of the geometric mean
- If a and b are the lengths of the sides of a rectangle then
  - The arithmetic mean $(a+b)/2$ is the length of the sides of the square that has the same perimeter
  - The geometric mean $(ab)^{1/2}$ is the length of the sides of the square that has the same area
- So if you're interested in perimeters (adding) use the arithmetic mean; if you're interested in areas (multiplying) use the geometric mean

Asymptotics

- Note, by the LLN the log of the geometric mean converges to $\mu = E[\log(X)]$
- Therefore the geometric mean converges to $\exp\{E[\log(X)]\} = e^{\mu}$, which is *not* the population mean on the natural scale; we call this the population geometric mean (but no one else seems to)
- To reiterate
$$\exp\{E[\log(x)]\} \neq E[\exp\{\log(X)\}] = E[X]$$
- Note if the distribution of $\log(X)$ is symmetric then
$$.5 = P(\log X \leq \mu) = P(X \leq e^{\mu})$$
- Therefore, for log-symmetric distributions the geometric mean is estimating the median

Using the CLT

- If you use the CLT to create a confidence interval for the log measurements, your interval is estimating μ, the expected value of the log measurements
- If you exponentiate the endpoints of the interval, you are estimating e^{μ}, the population geometric mean
- Recall, e^{μ} is the population median when the distribution of the logged data is symmetric
- This is especially useful for paired data when their ratio, rather than their difference, is of interest

Example

Rosner, Fundamentals of Biostatistics page 298 gives a paired design comparing SBP for matched oral contraceptive users and controls.

- The geometric mean ratio is 1.04 (4% increase in SBP for the OC users)
- The T interval on the difference of the log scale measurements is [0.010, 0.067] log(mm Hg)
- Exponentiating yields [1.010, 1.069] (mm Hg).

Comparisons

- Consider when you have two independent groups, logging the individual data points and creating a confidence interval for the difference in the log means
- Prove to yourself that exponentiating the endpoints of this interval is then an interval for the *ratio* of the population geometric means, $\frac{e^{\mu_1}}{e^{\mu_2}}$

The log-normal distribution

- A random variable is **log-normally** distributed *if its log is a normally distributed random variable*
- "I am log-normal" means "take logs of me and then I'll then be normal"
- Note log-normal random variables are not logs of normal random variables!!!!!! (You can't even take the log of a normal random variable)
- Formally, X is lognormal(μ, σ^2) if $\log(X) \sim \mathrm{N}(\mu, \sigma^2)$
- If $Y \sim \mathrm{N}(\mu, \sigma^2)$ then $X = e^Y$ is log-normal

The log-normal distribution

- The log-normal density is

$$\frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}} \times \frac{\exp[-\{\log(x) - \mu\}^2/(2\sigma^2)]}{x} \quad \text{for} \quad 0 \leq x \leq \infty$$

- Its mean is $e^{\mu+(\sigma^2/2)}$ and variance is $e^{2\mu+\sigma^2}(e^{\sigma^2} - 1)$
- Its median is e^{μ}

The log-normal distribution

- Notice that if we assume that $X_1, \ldots, X_n$ are log-normal(μ, σ^2) then $Y_1 = \log X_1, \ldots, Y_n = \log X_n$ are normally distributed with mean μ and variance σ^2
- Creating a Gosset's t confidence interval on using the Y_i is a confidence interval for μ the log of the median of the X_i
- Exponentiate the endpoints of the interval to obtain a confidence interval for e^μ, the median on the original scale
- Assuming log-normality, exponentiating t confidence intervals for the difference in two log means again estimates ratios of geometric means

Example

Gray matter volumes investigated

- Took GM volumes for the young and old groups, logged them
- Did two independent group intervals, got old [13.24, 13.27] log(cubic cm) and young [13.29, 13.31] log(cubic cm).
- Exponentiating yields [564.4, 577.5] cc, [592.0, 606.9] cc.
- Doing a two group T interval on the logged measurements yields [0.032, 0.066] log(cubic cm)
- exponentiating this interval yields [1.032, 1.068]