Machine Learning for Central Banking

Daily Takeaways from BSP Lectures

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Outline

Introduction

- No free lunch in regression analysis:
- We have to filter our data.
- We have to know the questions we are asking.
- We have to check the assumptions of the regression model.

Regression

- Single equation is not the way to go.
- We have to take seriously the assumptions of Gauss-Markov.
- Are the regressors exogenous? Is the disturbance term IID?
- Moving to first-differenced weekly data does not get rid of serial dependence.
- Ergodicity: we can move to monthly first differences or quarterly.
- No free lunch: we lose observations.

Macroeconomics and Reality

- Chris Sims developed the Vector Autoregressive (VAR) model in the 1980s.
- It is one of the principal workhorses of policy analysis.
- As Sargent notes, it is a state-space model that brings together good dynamic econometrics with good dynamic economics.
- All variables depend on other *lagged* endogenous variables.
- Adding more lags removes higher-order serial correlation, as shown by the Ljung-Box Q statistic.

Interpreting the VAR

- We can use Granger causality to see if one variable is a cause or significant predictor of another variable.
- We can use impulse response functions to see how one-time changes in one variable affect the dynamic response of other variables.
- We can use Forecast Error Variance Decomposition (FEVD) to see the relative importance of one variable for the overall variance of other variables.
- We can use the FEVD matrix to see if one variable has more outward or inward connectedness to other variables in the system.
- The relative strength of bivariate connectedness can be visualized with Directional Graphics.

Questions about VAR Models

- Are the results of VAR regressions robust to the choice of the number of lags?
- As we increase the dimensions of the VAR, or lags, or both, we rapidly increase the number of parameters.
- For a VAR system of 10 variables with a lag structure of 5, we have 510 parameters, if we also include constant terms.
- So a VAR rapidly consumes degrees of freedom.
- There is also the ever-present danger of *overfitting*.
- Another way of putting things: we encounter the bias-variance trade-off.

Selection Criteria

- Need for *regularization* criteria
- After getting rid of serial correlation, one can add more lags and get a better fit
- So we need to handicap our models: adjust the Likelihood L by the number of parameters k for a given number of observations n:
- Akaike: $AIC = -2\ln(L) + 2k$
- Schwartz: $BIC = -2\ln(L) + k\ln(n)$
- Hannan-Quinn: $HQIC = -2\ln(L) + 2k\ln(\ln(n))$

VAR a la Sims

- We learned that one can derive information from Granger causality, IRF, and FEVD
- When doing IRF and FEVD, for small VAR's, we use the Cholesky decomposition to orthogonalyze the residuals
- In this way, each shock is independent of the other shocks so we can interpret the effects of a shock to one variable
- No free lunch: the results depend crucially on the ordering of the variables
- We can use the Pesaran Generalized Forecast Error Variance Decomposition
- Results do not depend on the ordering of the variables but interpretation of the shock is less clear-cut
- We can also *bootstrap* the regression results and obtain confidence intervals for the IRF and FEVD estimates

Regularization Criteria

- We can use the Akaike, Schwartz and Hannan-Quinn criteria for model comparison for different numbers of parameters
- Basically idea is to handicap the inverse of the Likelihood by 2K, ln(K) and ln(ln(K)), where K is the number of parameters
- Select the model which delivers the lowest values of the information criteria
- Often we get different ranking of models by different criteria.
- Broader issue is over-fitting and the *bias vs. variance trade-off*

Elastic Net and Cross Validation

- With EN we handicap the Sum of Squared Residuals by a factor λ, α for the sum of the absolute values of the coefficients or the sum of squared values of the coefficients
- We find the optimal values of the parameter λ by *Cross Validation*
- We start with grids on λ, α and choose a percentage of observations to pull out of the sample and use as test or validation sets
- We select the values of λ, α, which deliver the lowest out-of-sample mean prediction errors.
- We showed that the Elastic Net with Cross Validation is a ruthless killer of coefficients
- The ones that survive are important
- The FEVD results can be used to asses the relative inward and outward connectedness of the state variables

Volatility

- The GARCH frame is the most widely used way of estimating time-varying volatility.
- Such volatility is a proxy for the latent uncertainty or risk process.
- GARCH model led to the development of VaR analysis (Value at Risk).
- Problem: risk in this setup has no independent drivers, it is only a function of the lagged prediction errors.
- Stochastic volatility models have emerged to compensate for this drawback of GARCH.
- We can estimate such models with Maximum Likelihood or Generalized Method of Moments.
- GMM allows us to simulate the artificial data for longer periods than actual data.

Limits of Linear VAR models

- We revised how returns can be calendar adjusted for days of the week and months of the year. Very important to do so.
- The VAR model is linear.
- We have to figure out how to destroy nuisance parameters.
- There is no free lunch: to interpret the results, one has to use the Cholesky decomposition.
- This means we have to order the variables in a special way.
- In order of importance?

GARCH Models

- The GARCH model due to Engle is another workhorse of financial empirical work.
- It allows for a time-varying risk or volatility but the risk only depends on the shocks to the return.
- There are no shocks to volatility (aka uncertainty shocks) which are different from shocks to mean return forecasting errors.
- Is this realistic?

SVJD Model

- Start with a model which allows shocks to the standard deviation apart from the shocks to the mean return.
- Assumption is that they are correlated by a factor $\rho < 0$. The idea is that negative shocks to mean return will increase volatility or uncertainty.
- We make use of the continuous-time Bates SVJD (Stochastic Volatility Jump Diffusion) model.
- It incorporates both types of shocks, to mean and conditional variance, but also permits a Poisson shock to mean returns.
- We thus have four stochastic processes, for Normal shocks to mean and variance, a Poisson shock for jump occurrence, and a shock for the size of the Poisson shock.
- We can estimate such a model with seven parameters.

Estimation

- Estimating the highly nonlinear stochastic model is challenging.
- Newton's Method: $\Delta\Omega_t = -\frac{J_{t_1}}{H_{t-1}}$
- Starting with guess at time t= 0, we iterate till convergence
- Problem: the Hessian H is often impossible to invert and the Gradient J often vanishes
- It is easier to obtain parameters that deliver local rather than global optima.
- Choice between Maximum Likelihood and Generalized Method of Moments (GMM).
- We see the asset returns have a high degree of kurtosis relative to the Normal Distribution.
- Makes sense to do GMM over Maximum Likelihood estimation for getting the coefficients.

Methods of Estimation

- We can start with *global* methods such as Genetic Algorithm.
- Then go to less global, more local, but stochastic methods like Simulated Annealing (SA) and Particle Swarm (PS).
- Then go to local gradient descent methods like ADAM.