Student Project 2: Reference Scaling and NTID Analysis

Student: Carlos Victor Montefusco Pereira

1. Project Overview

This project investigates advanced bioequivalence (BE) methodologies beyond standard fixed-limit average bioequivalence (ABE), focusing on Reference Scaled Average Bioequivalence (RSABE) and Narrow Therapeutic Index Drug (NTID) analyses. Three replicated crossover datasets were analyzed using Pumas/Bioequivalence tools to understand how variability, regulatory frameworks, and clinical risk influence bioequivalence conclusions.

The datasets analyzed were:

- PJ2017_4_3 (RTTR | TRRT)
- PJ2017_4_4 (RTRT | TRTR, fully replicated)
- CL2009_9_4_1 (RTTR | TRRT, AUC only)

Primary endpoints included AUC and Cmax where available.

2. Task 1: Dataset Exploration and Variability Assessment

The first task assessed study design, completeness, and within-subject variability (CV_r) to determine eligibility for reference scaling.

PJ2017_4_3

- Replicated crossover design (RTTR | TRRT)
- Complete data with balanced sequences
- AUC: CV_r = 8.02%
- Cmax: CV_r = 21.17%
- Neither endpoint meets the ≥30% threshold for highly variable drugs (HVD)

Conclusion:
Not highly variable for either endpoint → RSABE not appropriate

PJ2017_4_4

- Fully replicated crossover (RTRT | TRTR)

- Large sample size and balanced design
- AUC: CV_r = 35.4%
- Cmax: CV_r = 60.26%

Conclusion:
Both endpoints qualify as highly variable, especially Cmax → RSABE applicable

CL2009_9_4_1

- Replicated crossover (RTTR | TRRT)
- Endpoint available: AUC only
- AUC: CV_r = 39.62%

Conclusion:
AUC qualifies as highly variable → RSABE applicable

3. Task 2: Standard Bioequivalence Analysis (80–125%)

Standard ABE was performed as a baseline for all datasets.

PJ2017_4_3

- AUC: GMR = 103.6%, CI = [99.31, 108.2] → PASS
- Cmax: GMR = 91.23%, CI = [83.18, 100.1] → PASS

PJ2017_4_4

- AUC: GMR = 110.6%, CI = [102.9, 118.9] → PASS
- Cmax: GMR = 151%, CI = [132.2, 172.4] → FAIL

CL2009_9_4_1

- AUC: GMR = 116.7%, CI = [98.19, 138.8] → FAIL

Summary:
Standard ABE is sufficient for PJ2017_4_3, partially successful for PJ2017_4_4 (AUC only), and fails for CL2009_9_4_1.

4. Task 3: Reference Scaled Average Bioequivalence (RSABE)

RSABE was applied only to endpoints identified as highly variable.

PJ2017_4_3

- Not eligible for RSABE (CV_r < 30%)

PJ2017_4_4

- Cmax (FDA HVD RSABE):
  - CV_r = 60.26% → eligible
  - Fails RSABE
    - GMR = 151% (fails FDA point-estimate safeguard)
    - Howe's RSABE statistic = 0.0821 (> 0)
- AUC: RSABE not required (standard ABE already passes)

CL2009_9_4_1

- AUC (FDA HVD RSABE):
  - Eligible due to CV_r > 30%
  - Fails RSABE
    - CI exceeds 80–125%
    - RSABE statistic does not satisfy criteria

Conclusion:
RSABE does not rescue any failed endpoint in these datasets; variability is not the sole cause of failure.

5. Task 4: NTID Analysis

EMA Narrow Therapeutic Index (90–111%)

Dataset	Endpoint	Result
PJ2017_4_3	AUC, Cmax	Not applicable
PJ2017_4_4	AUC	**FAIL** (upper CI > 111%)
PJ2017_4_4	Cmax	**FAIL**
CL2009_9_4_1	AUC	**FAIL**

FDA NTI RSABE

Dataset	Endpoint	Result
PJ2017_4_4	AUC	**PASS** (all 3 FDA NTI criteria met)
PJ2017_4_4	Cmax	**FAIL**
CL2009_9_4_1	AUC	**FAIL**

Key Insight:
FDA NTI allows RSABE but still enforces strict safeguards; only PJ2017_4_4 AUC satisfies all NTI conditions.

6. Task 5: Comparative Analysis and Regulatory Strategy

Method Comparison Summary

Dataset	Endpoint	Standard ABE	FDA HVD RSABE	EMA NTI	FDA NTI
PJ2017_4_3	AUC	PASS	N/A	N/A	N/A
PJ2017_4_3	Cmax	PASS	N/A	N/A	N/A
PJ2017_4_4	AUC	PASS	N/A	FAIL	PASS
PJ2017_4_4	Cmax	FAIL	FAIL	FAIL	FAIL
CL2009_9_4_1	AUC	FAIL	FAIL	FAIL	FAIL

Regulatory Strategy

- Use standard ABE for low-variability drugs (PJ2017_4_3)
- Plan replicate designs early for potentially HVDs
- RSABE cannot compensate for large formulation differences
- NTID development requires endpoint-specific, regulator-specific strategies

7. Advanced Questions for Consideration

Regulatory Perspective

- FDA prefers RSABE when $CV_r \geq 30\%$ and replicate designs allow accurate σWR estimation.
- FDA uses statistical RSABE; EMA often uses widened limits or narrow ABE depending on context.

- NTID approval may require additional PK, PD, or clinical bridging studies.

Scientific Considerations

- Reference scaling adjusts BE limits based on reference variability.
- RSABE assumes log-normal PK data and valid mixed-effects modeling.
- Endpoints must be evaluated independently based on variability.

Clinical Implications

- RSABE results should be communicated as variability-aware, not lenient.
- Expanded limits may raise safety concerns, especially for NTIDs.
- Clinical equivalence is inferred, not proven, by PK-based BE.

8. Practical Scenarios

Generic Highly Variable Drug

Use replicate design + RSABE for HVD endpoints (usually Cmax).

RSABE Pass, Standard BE Fail

Present standard ABE transparently, justify RSABE with variability evidence, and demonstrate all safeguards.

NTID Development

Expect tight limits, replicate designs, and possible additional clinical evidence.

9. Conclusion

This project demonstrates how bioequivalence conclusions depend strongly on variability, endpoint behavior, and regulatory framework. RSABE is a powerful but constrained tool, and NTID evaluation demands heightened rigor. A one-size-fits-all BE strategy is inappropriate; endpoint- and region-specific planning is essential.