Central Limit Theorem and Confidence Intervals

B39AX — Fall 2023

Heriot-Watt University

Properties of normal RVs

Normality is preserved under linear transformations:

$$X \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu, \sigma^2)$$
 \Longrightarrow $aX + b \sim \mathcal{N}(a\mu + b, a^2\sigma^2)$

• Sum of independent normal RVs is normal:

$$\begin{cases} X \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu_X, \, \sigma_X^2) \\ Y \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu_Y, \, \sigma_Y^2) & \Longrightarrow & X + Y \, \sim \, \mathcal{N}\Big(\mu_X + \mu_Y, \, \sigma_X^2 + \sigma_Y^2\Big) \\ X \text{ and } Y \colon \text{independent} \end{cases}$$

Sums of normal RVs

Let X_1, X_2, \ldots, X_n be independent and identically distributed (i.i.d.) normal RVs:

$$X_i \stackrel{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \mathcal{N}(\mu, \sigma^2), \qquad i = 1, \dots, n$$

Then,

$$S_n = X_1 + X_2 + \dots + X_n \sim \mathcal{N}(n\mu, n\sigma^2)$$

and

$$\frac{S_n - n\mu}{\sigma\sqrt{n}} \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1)$$

This holds (asymptotically) even when the X_i 's are not normal!

Central Limit Theorem

Theorem (Central Limit Theorem)

Let X_1,X_2,\dots,X_n be a sequence of i.i.d. RVs with common mean $\mu=\mathbb{E}[X_i]$ and common variance $\sigma^2={\sf Var}(X_i)$, for $i=1,\dots,n$. Then,

$$Z_n := \frac{X_1 + X_2 + \dots + X_n - n\mu}{\sigma \sqrt{n}} = \frac{\frac{X_1 + X_2 + \dots + X_n}{n} - \mu}{\frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}}}$$

converges in distribution to a standard normal RV $\mathcal{N}(0,\,1)$, i.e.,

$$\lim_{n \to \infty} \mathbb{P}(Z_n \le z) = \Phi(z), \quad \forall z.$$

Central Limit Theorem

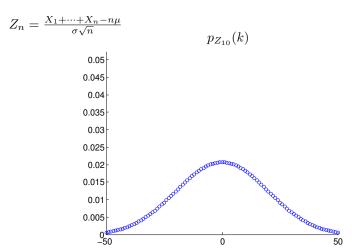
- CLT is surprisingly general!
- Requires only independence, same distribution, and finite μ and σ^2
- Convergence can be slow (Berry-Esseen theorem): for some c > 0,

$$\sup_{z} \left| \mathbb{P}(Z_n \le z) - \Phi(z) \right| \le \frac{c}{\sqrt{n}}$$

- Approximation accuracy varies with the distribution:
 - $n \ge 8$ gives a good approximation for continuous uniform RVs
 - $n \ge 30$ for other RVs in this course (except Cauchy RVs)
- Proof of CLT is beyond the scope of this course

Example

 X_i : uniformly distributed on $[-10, 10] \cap \mathbb{N}$, $i = 1, \ldots, n$ (discrete)



Normal approximation based on the CLT

Let X_1, X_2, \ldots, X_n be i.i.d. RVs with common mean μ and variance σ^2

$$S_n := X_1 + \dots + X_n \qquad (n \ge 30)$$

Then, $\mathbb{P} ig(S_n \leq s ig)$ can be approximated by treating S_n as a normal RV

Procedure:

- Calculate the mean $n\mu$ and the variance $n\sigma^2$ of S_n
- Calculate the normalized value $z = \frac{s n\mu}{\sigma\sqrt{n}}$
- Use the approximation

$$\mathbb{P}(S_n \le s) \simeq \Phi(z) \,,$$

where $\Phi(z)$ is available from standard normal CDF tables

Exercise

We load on a plane 100 packages whose weights are independent uniform RVs distributed between 5 and $50\,\mathrm{kg}.$ What is the probability that the total weight will exceed $3000\,\mathrm{kg}?$

Ans: $\simeq 2.74\%$

Parameter estimation

Most distributions have parameters, e.g.,

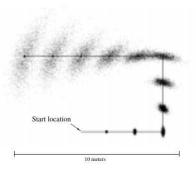
$$\mathsf{Ber}(p) \qquad \mathcal{N}(\mu,\,\sigma^2) \qquad \mathsf{Bin}(n,\,p) \qquad \mathsf{Poisson}(\lambda) \qquad \mathsf{Exp}(\lambda)$$

How do we estimate a parameter θ from data realizations, i.e., samples from the distribution?

Example

Estimate the position of a robot along time*†





^{*}Fox et al., "Monte Carlo Localization: Efficient Position Estimation for Mobile Robots," AAAI, 1999.

 $^{^{\}dagger} Wang \ et \ al., \ "Real-time \ 3D \ Human \ Tracking \ For \ Mobile \ Robots \ with \ Multisensors," \ arXiv:1703.04877v1, \ 2017.$

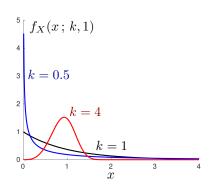
Example: Weibull Distribution and Survival Analysis

X has Weibull distribution w/ parameters k>0 (shape), $\lambda>0$ (scale) if

$$f_X(x; k, \lambda) = \frac{k}{\lambda} \left(\frac{x}{\lambda}\right)^{k-1} e^{-(x/\lambda)^k}, \quad \text{for } x \ge 0$$

Survival function: $S(t) = \mathbb{P}(X > t)$

- Electrical components lifetimes
- Cancer survival rates
- Life expectancies
- Manufacturing delivery times



How to compute parameters k and λ from observations?

Parameter estimation

X: RV whose distribution depends on θ , the parameter to estimate.

Estimator/Statistic: An *estimator* or *statistic* $\widehat{\Theta}_n$ of θ is a function of n *observations* X_1, \ldots, X_n of X, i.e., for some function g,

$$\widehat{\Theta}_n = g(X_1, \dots, X_n) .$$

When we observe *realizations* of the observations,

$$\widehat{\theta}_n = g(x_1, \dots, x_n)$$
.

Remarks

The observations are usually independent copies of \boldsymbol{X}

 $\widehat{\Theta}_n$ is a RV, because it is a function of RVs

Example

Let X represent the outcome of a biased coin (or elections): $X \sim \text{Ber}(p)$

$$\mathbb{P}(X=1) = p \qquad \mathbb{P}(X=0) = 1 - p$$

How do we estimate $\theta = p$ from realizations of n independent tosses?

- Let X_1, \ldots, X_n represent n observations (tosses) of X
- An estimator of θ is the *sample mean* $\widehat{\Theta}_n = \overline{X}_n := \frac{X_1 + \dots + X_n}{n}$
- It is "reasonable" estimator, because

$$\mathbb{E}\big[\widehat{\Theta}_n\big] = \frac{\mathbb{E}\big[X_1 + \dots + X_n\big]}{n} = \frac{\mathbb{E}\big[X_1\big] + \dots + \mathbb{E}\big[X_n\big]}{n} = p = \theta$$

Properties of estimators

Let $\widehat{\Theta}_n$ be an estimator of θ [i.e., $\widehat{\Theta}_n$ is a function of observations X_1 , ..., X_n , whose distribution depends on θ]

Unbiased estimator: An estimator is unbiased if $\mathbb{E}[\widehat{\Theta}_n] = \theta$, for all θ

Asymptotically unbiased estimator: An estimator is asymptotically unbiased if

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} \mathbb{E}\big[\widehat{\Theta}_n\big] = \theta$$

Mean squared error and the bias-variance tradeoff

A more robust quality measure of an estimator is

Mean squared error:

$$\mathsf{MSE} = \mathbb{E} \Big[ig(\widehat{\Theta}_n - heta ig)^2 \Big]$$

MSE captures both the bias and the variance of the estimator:

$$\mathsf{MSE} = \left(\underbrace{\mathbb{E}\big[\widehat{\Theta}_n\big] - \theta}_{\mathsf{blas}}\right)^2 + \mathsf{Var}\big(\widehat{\Theta}_n\big)$$

This is called bias-variance decomposition (proof at end of slides)

Example: Estimation of the mean of a RV

 X_1, \ldots, X_n : independent observations of RV X (unknown distribution)

Consider the following estimators of the mean of X, $\theta = \mathbb{E}[X]$:

$$\bullet \ \ \widehat{\Theta}_n^{(1)} = \overline{X}_n := \frac{X_1 + \dots + X_n}{n} \qquad \text{(sample mean)}$$

$$\bullet \ \widehat{\Theta}_n^{(2)} = 0$$

Are these estimators biased? What is their MSE?

Example: Estimation of the mean of a RV

We had seen that $\widehat{\Theta}_n^{(1)}$ is unbiased: $\mathbb{E}\Big[\widehat{\Theta}_n^{(1)}\Big] = \theta$

For MSE, use bias-variance decomposition and independence of X_i 's:

$$\begin{split} \mathsf{MSE}^{(1)} &= \left(\underbrace{\mathbb{E}\big[\widehat{\Theta}_n^{(1)}\big] - \theta}\right)^2 + \mathsf{Var}\Big(\widehat{\Theta}_n^{(1)}\Big) \\ &= \mathbb{E}\bigg[\Big(\frac{X_1 + \dots + X_n}{n} - \theta\Big)^2\Big] \\ &= \frac{1}{n^2}\underbrace{\mathbb{E}\Big[\big(X_1 + \dots + X_n - n\theta\big)^2\Big]}_{\mathsf{Var}(X_1 + \dots + X_n)} \\ &= \frac{1}{n^2}\Big(\mathsf{Var}(X_1) + \dots + \mathsf{Var}(X_n)\Big) \\ &= \underbrace{\frac{\mathsf{Var}(X_1)}{n}}_{n} \xrightarrow{n \to \infty} 0 \end{split}$$

Example: Estimation of the mean of a RV

For $\widehat{\Theta}_n^{(2)} = 0$, we use again the bias-variance decomposition:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathsf{MSE}^{(2)} &= \left(\mathbb{E}\big[\widehat{\Theta}_n^{(2)}\big] - \theta\right)^2 + \mathsf{Var}\big(\widehat{\Theta}_n^{(2)}\big) \\ &= \left(\mathbb{E}\big[0\big] - \theta\right)^2 + \mathsf{Var}\big(0\big) \\ &= \theta^2 \end{aligned}$$

Conclusion: $\widehat{\Theta}_n^{(1)}$ is a better estimator than $\widehat{\Theta}_n^{(2)}$, because it is unbiased and its MSE decreases with n.

Estimators of the variance

Let X_1, \ldots, X_n be independent copies (observations) of X.

We want to estimate the variance of X, $Var(X) = \mathbb{E}[(X - \mathbb{E}[X])^2]$.

Case 1: mean $\mu = \mathbb{E}[X]$ is *known*. Then,

$$\hat{S}_n^2 = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \left(X_i - \mu \right)^2 \quad \text{is unbiased.}$$

Case 2: mean $\mu = \mathbb{E}[X]$ is *unknown*.* Then,

$$\hat{S}_n^2 = \frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^n \left(X_i - \overline{X}_n \right)^2 \quad \text{is unbiased}. \qquad \left(\overline{X}_n \text{: sample mean} \right)$$

^{*}The alternative estimator $\overline{S}_n^2 = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \left(X_i - \overline{X}_n \right)^2$ is also a valid estimator, but it is biased (however asymptotically unbiased). All proofs in a separate document.

Exercise

Let X be a RV distributed as $\mathcal{N}(\mu, \sigma^2)$ with unknown μ and σ^2 .

We observed the following independent realizations of X:

$$-2.2\,,\ 1.3\,,\ 0.9\,,\ 1.4\,,\ -0.3\,,\ 4.9$$

Compute an unbiased estimate for μ and for σ^2 .

Ans: $\widehat{\mu}=1.0$ and $\widehat{\sigma}^2=5.48$ (the biased formula for σ^2 would give 4.57)

t-Student distribution

Let X_1, \ldots, X_n be i.i.d. normal RVs w/ mean μ and variance σ^2

We saw that

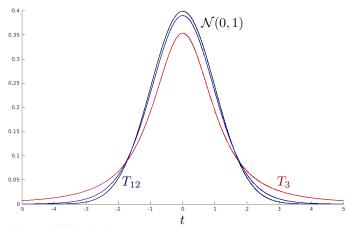
$$Z = \frac{\frac{X_1 + \dots + X_n}{n} - \mu}{\sigma / \sqrt{n}} = \frac{\overline{X} - \mu}{\sigma / \sqrt{n}} \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1)$$

What if σ^2 is unknown? If we replace it by $\widehat{S}_n^2=\frac{1}{n-1}\sum_{i=1}^n \left(X_i-\overline{X}_n\right)^2$,

$$\text{is} \quad T_n := \frac{\overline{X}_n - \mu}{\widehat{S}_n / \sqrt{n}} \quad \text{normal?}$$

t-Student distribution

 $T_n = \frac{\overline{X}_n - \mu}{\widehat{S}_n / \sqrt{n}}$ has t-Student distribution with n-1 degrees of freedom



t-Student distribution

 T_n has a complicated PDF, but its values are tabulated

Usage: Use the *t*-Student distribution when

- ullet X_i 's are normal (or approximately normal)
- σ^2 is unknown
- n is small (e.g., n < 50) [otherwise, $\widehat{S}_n^2 \simeq \sigma^2$]

Confidence intervals

X: RV whose distribution depends on parameter θ

Example: $\theta = \text{daily electricity consumption in a given household}$

 X_1,\ldots,X_n : independent observations of X

We can obtain unbiased estimators $\Theta = g(X_1, \dots, X_n)$ of θ , for some function g

But how good is an estimator? Why not an interval?

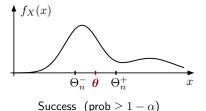
Confidence intervals

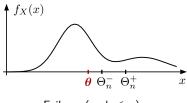
Confidence interval

Fix $0 < \alpha < 1$ (typically small, e.g., 0.1, 0.05, 0.01).

A confidence interval with confidence level $1-\alpha$ for a parameter θ is an interval $\left[\Theta_n^-,\,\Theta_n^+\right]$, where $\Theta_n^- \leq \Theta_n^+$ are RVs such that, for all θ ,

$$\mathbb{P}\Big(\Theta_n^- \le \theta \le \Theta_n^+\Big) \ge 1 - \alpha$$





Failure (prob $\leq \alpha$)

Example

- $X \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu, \sigma^2)$ with unknown μ , but known σ^2
- Estimator of μ : $\widehat{\Theta}_n = \overline{X}_n := \frac{X_1 + \dots + X_n}{n} \ \left(X_i \text{: i.i.d. copy of } X \right)$

How to derive a confidence interval for $\theta = \mu$ with $\alpha = 0.05$?

- Use the fact that $\widehat{\Theta}_n \sim \mathcal{N}\Big(\mu\,,\,\frac{\sigma^2}{n}\Big)$ and thus $Z = \frac{\widehat{\Theta}_n \mu}{\sigma/\sqrt{n}} \sim \mathcal{N}(0,\,1)$
- Therefore,

$$\mathbb{P}(-c \le Z \le c) = \mathbb{P}\left(-c \le \frac{\widehat{\Theta}_n - \mu}{\sigma/\sqrt{n}} \le c\right)$$
$$= \mathbb{P}\left(\widehat{\Theta}_n - c\frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}} \le \mu \le \widehat{\Theta}_n + c\frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}}\right)$$
$$\ge 1 - \alpha$$

Example

Parameter c is determined from the normal table:

$$\mathbb{P}(-c \leq Z \leq c) \geq 1 - \alpha \quad \Longleftrightarrow \quad \Phi(c) \geq 1 - \tfrac{\alpha}{2} = 0.975,$$

which gives c = 1.96. The confidence interval for μ is then

$$\left[\widehat{\Theta}_n - 1.96 \frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}} , \widehat{\Theta}_n + 1.96 \frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}}\right].$$

Remarks:

- Once realizations x_1,\dots,x_n are available, we replace $\widehat{\theta}_n=\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^n x_i$
- Wrong interpretation: "The probability of $\mu \in \mathsf{CI}$ is 95%"
- Correct interpretation: "If we repeatedly build CIs from i.i.d. samples, 95% of them will contain $\theta=\mu$ "
- ullet Building CIs requires knowing the distribution of $\widehat{\Theta}_n$

Exercise

We conduct a poll to estimate the fraction of the population that supports a given candidate for office. Out of the 1200 people that were interviewed, 684 support the candidate (57%). Build a 95% confidence interval for the fraction of the population that supports the candidate.

Use

- CLT to approximate a sum of Bernoulli RVs as a normal RV;
- The unbiased estimate for the variance, and assume it is accurate.

Exercise: solution

Define the RVs

X = "a person chosen from the population supports the candidate."

 X_i = "the *i*th person interviewed supports the candidate," $i = 1, \ldots, n$.

The X_i 's are n = 1200 independent copies of X.

We have $X \sim \mathrm{Ber}(p)$, and we wish to estimate $\mu := \mathbb{E}[X] = p = \theta$.

We are given a realization of the unbiased estimator of μ :

$$\hat{\theta}_n = \overline{x}_n = \frac{x_1 + \dots + x_n}{n} = \frac{684}{1200} = 0.57$$

Exercise: solution

As n>30, CLT approximates $\frac{X_1+\cdots+X_n-n\mu}{\sigma\sqrt{n}}$ by $Z\sim\mathcal{N}(0,\,1)$, and

$$0.95 = \mathbb{P}\left(-c \le Z \le c\right)$$

$$\simeq \mathbb{P}\left(-c \le \frac{X_1 + \dots + X_n - n\mu}{\sigma\sqrt{n}} \le c\right)$$

$$= \mathbb{P}\left(\overline{X}_n - c\frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}} \le \mu \le \overline{X}_n + c\frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}}\right)$$

We know $\overline{x}_n=0.57$, n=1200, and c=1.96 (normal table). As n>50,

$$\sigma^2 \simeq \widehat{S}_n^2 = \frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^n (X_i - \overline{X}_n)^2 = \frac{1}{1199} \left[684(1 - 0.57)^2 + 516 \cdot 0.57^2 \right]$$
$$= 0.245$$

The 95% CI is
$$\left[0.57 - 1.96\sqrt{\frac{0.245}{1200}}, 0.57 + 1.96\sqrt{\frac{0.245}{1200}}\right] = [0.542, 0.598].$$

Procedure for computing a CI for the mean of a RV

X: RV whose distribution has mean μ (a.k.a. **population mean**) X_1, \ldots, X_n : i.i.d. copies of X

Case 1: variance σ^2 of X is known

- Use sample mean $\overline{X}_n = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n X_i$ as the estimator of μ
- If X has normal distribution or if CLT is applicable $(n \ge 30)$,

$$\frac{\overline{X}_n - \mu}{\sigma/\sqrt{n}} \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1)$$

• CI is

$$\left[\overline{X}_n - c\frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}}, \overline{X}_n + c\frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}}\right],$$

where c is such that $\mathbb{P}(-c \le Z \le c) \ge 1 - \alpha$.

Procedure for computing a CI for the mean of a RV

X: RV whose distribution has mean μ

 X_1, \ldots, X_n : i.i.d. copies of X

Case 2: variance σ^2 of X is unknown and $n \geq 50$

- Use sample mean $\overline{X}_n = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n X_i$ as the estimator of μ
- As n is large, $\widehat{S}_n^2 = \frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^n (X_i \overline{X}_n)^2$ accurately estimates σ^2
- \bullet As n is large, CLT is applicable and

$$\frac{\overline{X}_n - \mu}{\widehat{S}_n / \sqrt{n}} \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1)$$

Cl is

$$\left[\overline{X}_n - c\frac{\widehat{S}_n}{\sqrt{n}}, \overline{X}_n + c\frac{\widehat{S}_n}{\sqrt{n}}\right],$$

where c is such that $\mathbb{P}(-c \leq Z \leq c) \geq 1 - \alpha$.

Procedure for computing a CI for the mean of a RV

X: RV whose distribution has mean μ

 X_1, \ldots, X_n : i.i.d. copies of X

Case 3: variance σ^2 of X is unknown and n < 50

- Use sample mean $\overline{X}_n = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n X_i$ as the estimator of μ
- Estimate σ^2 with $\widehat{S}_n^2 = \frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^n (X_i \overline{X}_n)^2$
- As n is small and we have only an estimation of σ^2 , we use

$$T_n := rac{\overline{X}_n - \mu}{\widehat{S}_n / \sqrt{n}} \sim t ext{-Student}(n-1)$$

Cl is

$$\left[\overline{X}_n - t\frac{\widehat{S}_n}{\sqrt{n}}, \overline{X}_n + t\frac{\widehat{S}_n}{\sqrt{n}}\right],$$

where t is such that $\mathbb{P}(-t \leq T_n \leq t) \geq 1 - \alpha$.

Exercise

The weight of an object is measured 8 times using a scale that reports the true weight, plus a random error with zero mean and unknown variance. Assume that the errors in the observations are independent. The following results were obtained:

$$0.5547, \ 0.5404, \ 0.6364, \ 0.6438, \ 0.4917, \ 0.5674, \ 0.5564, \ 0.6066$$

Note that

$$\overline{x}_n = 0.5747$$
, $\widehat{s}_n^2 = \frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \overline{x}_n)^2 = 2.636 \times 10^{-3}$

Compute a 95% confidence interval for the mean.

Exercise: solution

As the variance is unknown and n is small $(n \le 50)$,

$$\frac{\overline{X}_n - \mu}{\widehat{S}_n / \sqrt{n}} \ \sim \ t\text{-Student}(7)$$

The CI is then

$$\left[\overline{X}_n - t\frac{\widehat{S}_n}{\sqrt{n}}, \overline{X}_n + t\frac{\widehat{S}_n}{\sqrt{n}}\right].$$

From the t-Student table, $\mathbb{P}(T_8 \geq t) \geq \frac{\alpha}{2} = 0.025$ implies t = 2.365.

Replacing the values, we obtain the CI

$$\begin{split} & \left[0.5747 - 2.365 \frac{\sqrt{2.636 \times 10^{-3}}}{\sqrt{8}} \,,\, 0.5747 + 2.365 \frac{\sqrt{2.636 \times 10^{-3}}}{\sqrt{8}} \right] \\ & = \left[0.532 \,,\, 0.618 \right]. \end{split}$$

Proofs

Bias-Variance Decomposition

$$\mathsf{MSE} := \mathbb{E} \Big[\big(\widehat{\Theta}_n - \theta \big)^2 \Big] = \Big(\mathbb{E} \big[\widehat{\Theta}_n \big] - \theta \Big)^2 + \mathsf{Var} \big(\widehat{\Theta}_n \big)$$

Proof

$$\mathbb{E}\Big[\big(\widehat{\Theta}_n - \theta\big)^2\Big] = \mathbb{E}\Big[\Big(\widehat{\Theta}_n - \mathbb{E}\big[\widehat{\Theta}_n\big] + \mathbb{E}\big[\widehat{\Theta}_n\big] - \theta\Big)^2\Big]$$

$$= \mathbb{E}\Big[\Big(\widehat{\Theta}_n - \mathbb{E}\big[\widehat{\Theta}_n\big]\Big)^2\Big] + \underbrace{\mathbb{E}\Big[\Big(\mathbb{E}\big[\widehat{\Theta}_n\big] - \theta\Big)^2\Big]}_{\mathsf{Var}(\widehat{\Theta}_n)}$$

$$+ 2 \underbrace{\mathbb{E}\Big[\Big(\widehat{\Theta}_n - \mathbb{E}\big[\widehat{\Theta}_n\big]\Big) \cdot \Big(\mathbb{E}\big[\widehat{\Theta}_n\big] - \theta\Big)\Big]}_{=0}.$$

The last term is zero because of the linearity of the expected value.