Does visual uncertainty influence saccadic adaptation?

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Rationale

To maintain the high accuracy of saccadic eye movements, the brain is continually calibrating the link between motor commands and visual location.

This is evidenced by studies of saccadic adaptation [1], in which saccades gradually learn to anticipate an artificially induced motor error by adjusting amplitude by a fraction of the observed landing error.

How does the oculomotor system decide how much of the error should be corrected?

According to probabilistic models of motor learning, adaptation speed take into account *measurement* noise (e.g. uncertainty in perceiving and localizing visual target) as well as on *process* noise (random fluctuations in the state of the oculomotor plan).

The probabilistic model corresponds to a Kalman filter (if noise is Gaussian) and predicts that adaptation should be slower with higher measurement uncertainty:

Predict:

$$\hat{g}_t = g_{t-1}$$
$$\hat{\sigma}_t^2 = \sigma_{t-1}^2 + \sigma_p^2$$

Time Update

Update:

$$K_t = \frac{\hat{\sigma}_t^2}{\hat{\sigma}_t^2 + \sigma_m^2}$$
$$g_t = \hat{g}_t + K_t(y_t - \hat{g}_t)$$
$$\sigma_t^2 = (1 - K_t)\hat{\sigma}_t^2$$

Measurement Update

$\hat{g}_t$ state variable (e.g. parameter of oculomotor plant that scale saccadic amplitude)

y_t noisy observation of the state variable (e.g. observed saccadic gain)

σ_t^2 uncertainty around state variable at trial t

σ_m^2 measurement variance

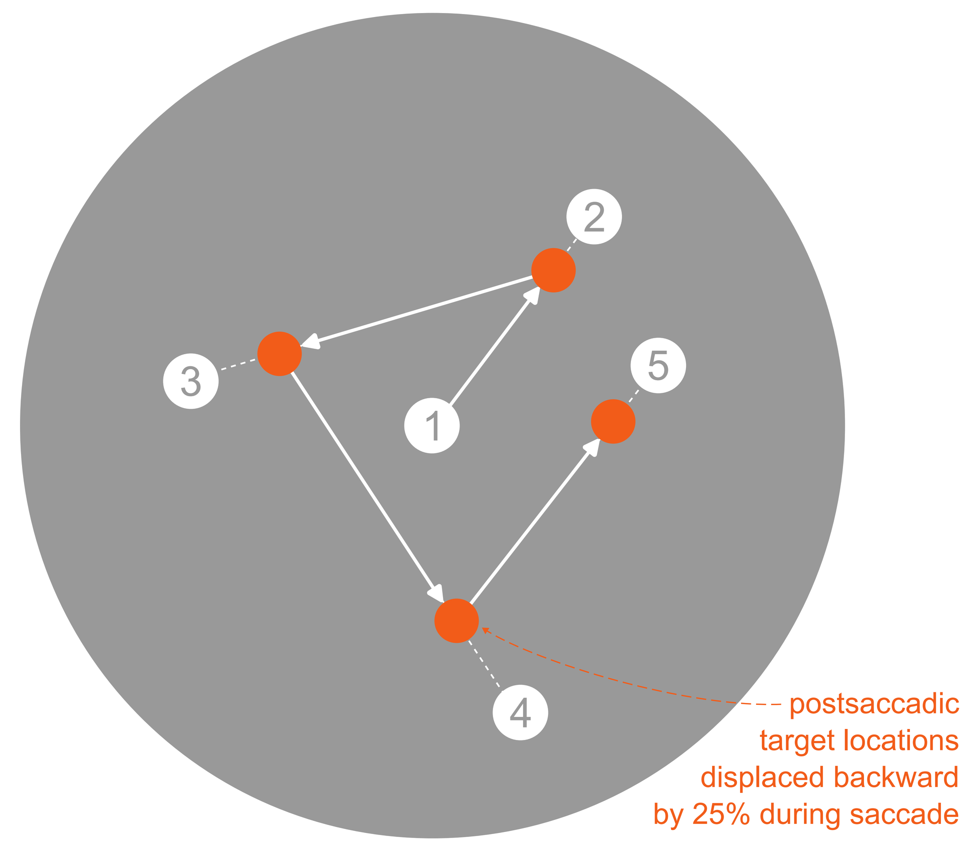
σ_p^2 process noise variance

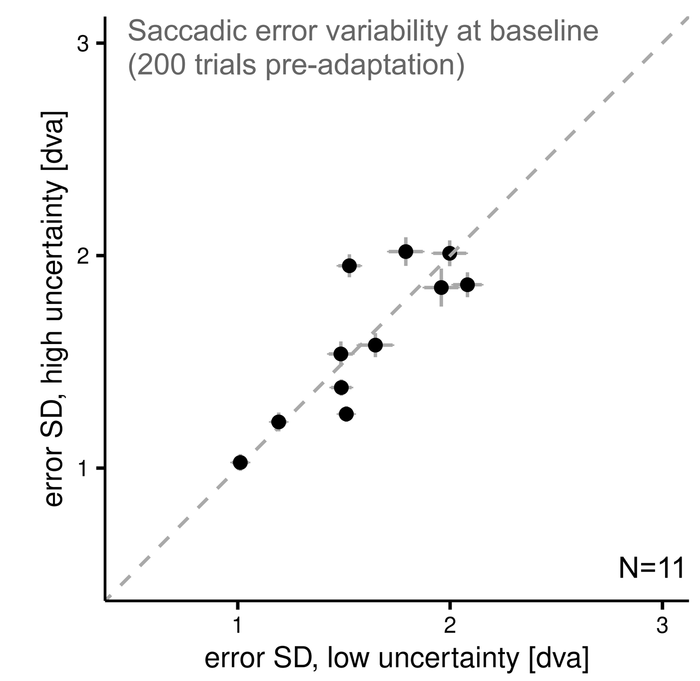
K_t learning rate (Kalman gain)

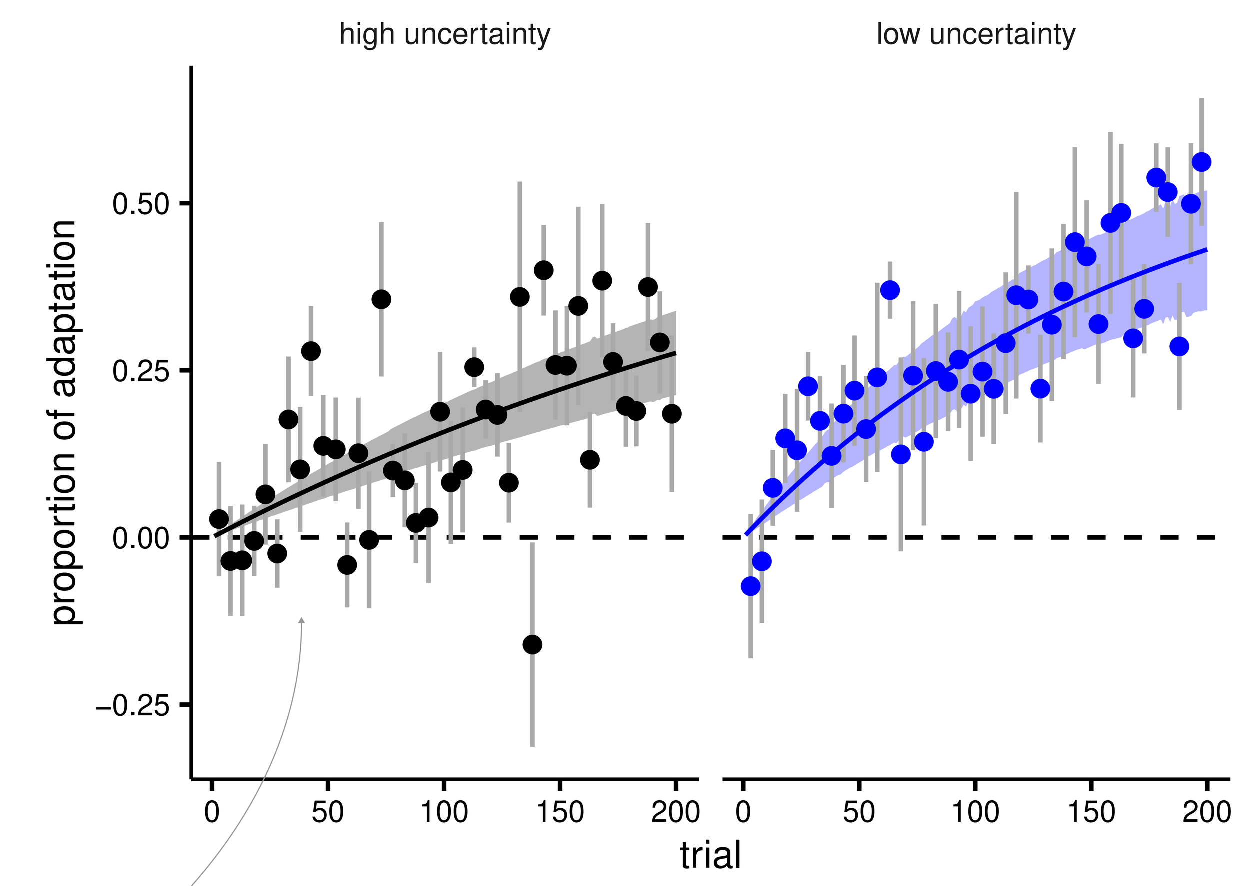
While there is evidence that motor adaptation for other types of movement comforms to this prediction (e.g. hand reaching [3]), studies of adaptation in the saccadic system have concluded that it is not influenced by visual uncertainty [4]. Here we re-examined this conundrum using stimuli that have been recently shown to influence location uncertainty [6] and two types of adaptation protocol: classical and global [5].

Global saccadic adaptation

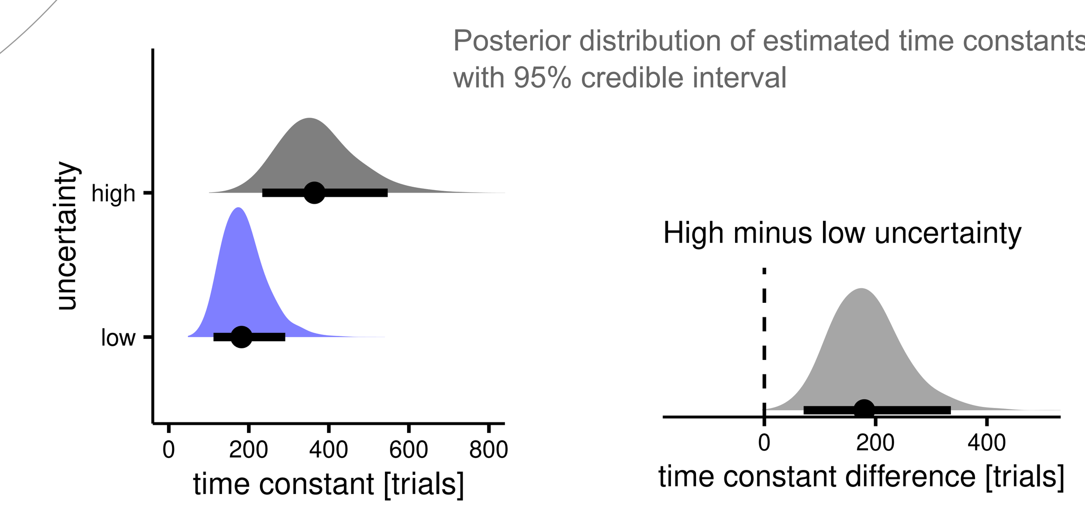
In the global adaptation protocol [4], the target moves in a random walk







Data analyzed with a multilevel Bayesian model. lLines are group-level predictions with 95% credibile intervals



High and low uncertainty sessions run on separate days (1 week apart), order counterbalanced

Target distance: 4 - 12 dva

Intra-saccadic step: -25% of initial distance

Stimuli

Saccade targets were Gaussian luminance blobs superimposed on a noise background

- pixel size ≈0.1 degrees of visual angle [dva]
- noise SD was 14.73 cd/m^2 for classic adaptation and 10.21 cd/m^2 for global adaptation

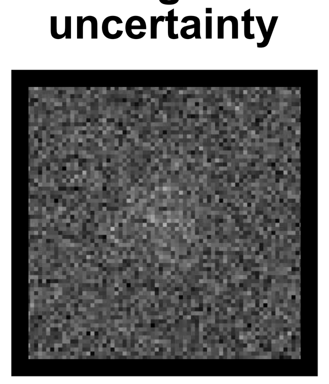
Identical for all participants

low uncertainty

Classic adaptation
147 cd/m2 peak luminance
6.84 contrast-to-noise ratio

Global adaptation
102 cd/m2 peak luminance
6.71 contrast-to-noise ratio

high uncertainty



Peak luminance adjusted individually in a pre-test session

Classic adaptation
64.05 (SD=2.76) cd/m^2 peak luminance
1.19 (0.19) contrast-to-noise ratio

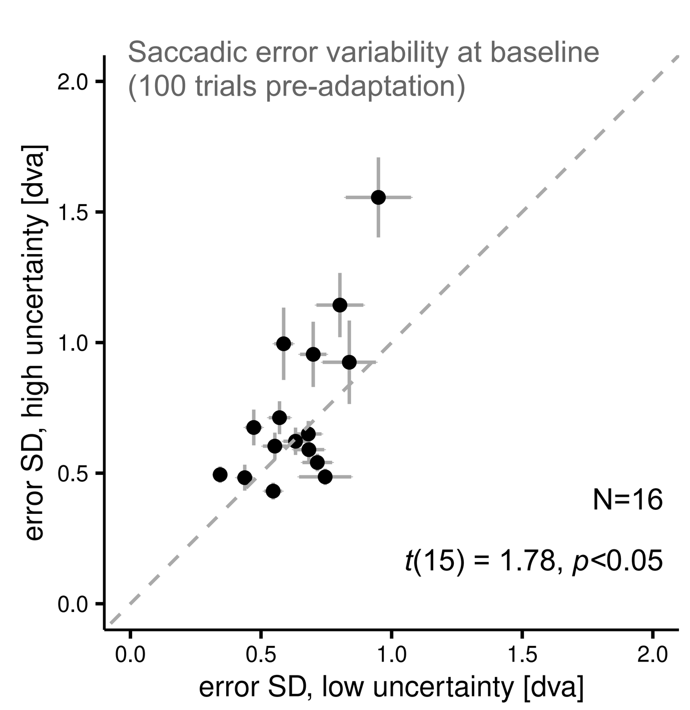
Global adaptation
43.33 (4.15) cd/m^2 peak luminance
0.97 (0.41) contrast-to-noise ratio

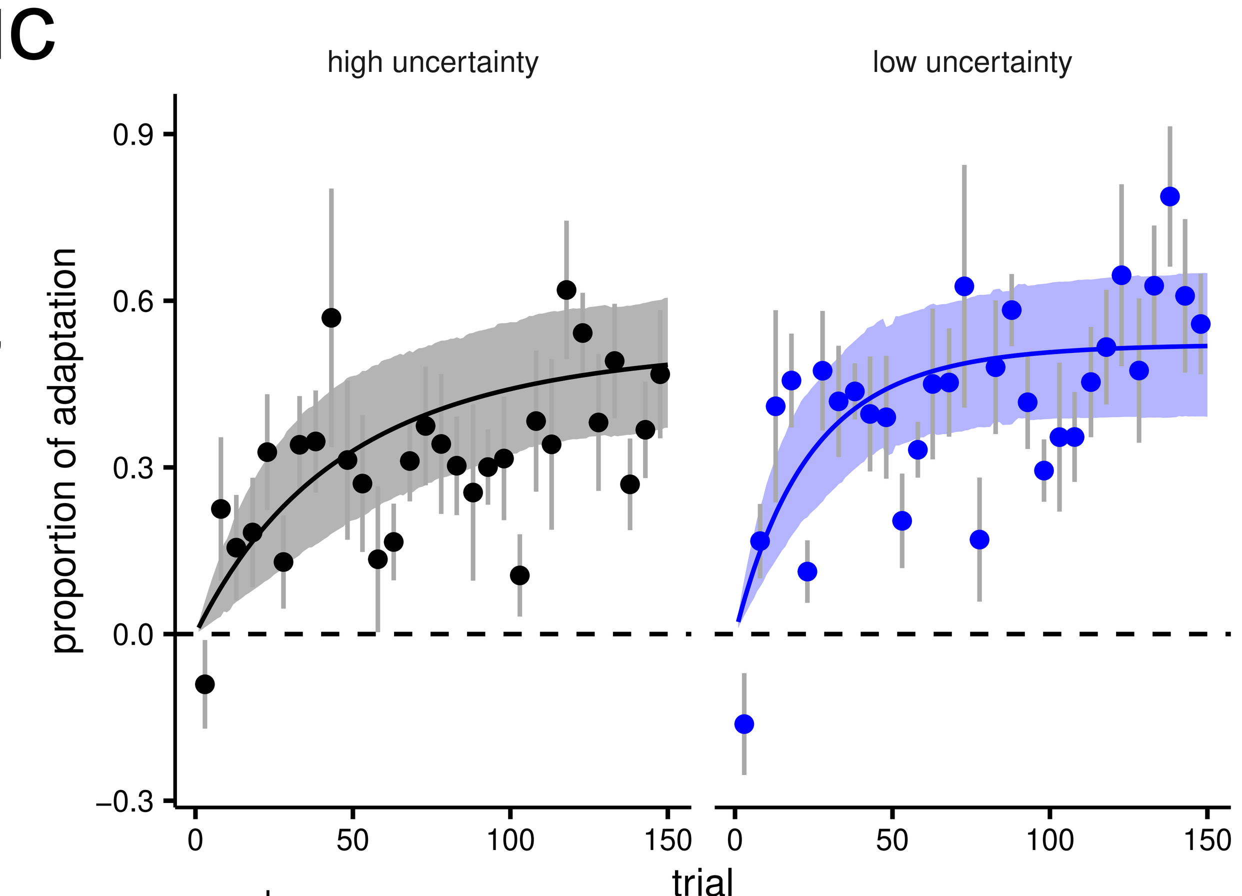
Classical saccadic adaptation

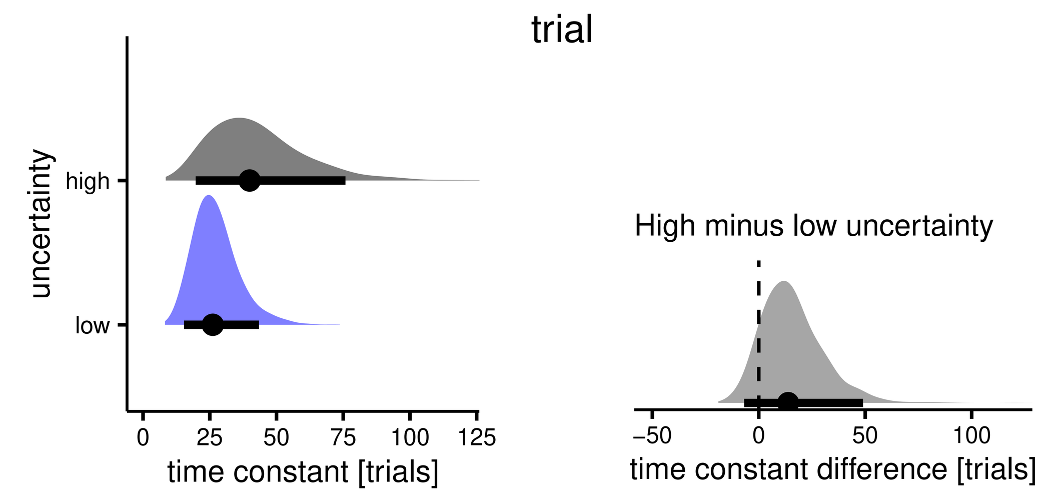
High and low uncertainty sessions run on separate days (1 week apart), order counterbalanced

Target distance: 11 dva

Intra-saccadic step: -1dva







Summary

- Little or no evidence for an effect of uncertainty on adaptation rate in classical saccadic adaptation paradigm. This may be because the target location is highly predictable and saccades are strongly influenced by expectation [5].
- In a global saccadic adaptation paradigm [4] the target moves in a random-walk preventing precise expectations about its future locations. Here we find a strong effect of target luminance contrast on adaptation rate (as predicted by probabilistic models of motor learning [3]).
- However, manipulation check in the global saccadic adaptation paradigm failed to provide evidence for an effect of luminance contrast on saccadic variability (but: small N, data collection not yet complete).
- It is possible that 'true' uncertainty of saccadic system about its post-saccadic landing errors in the current experiment was greater than what suggested by saccadic variability. (Possibly because noise background was resampled at the same time of intra-saccadic target step.)

References

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