

Leaving the Comfort Zone:

Analyzing the association between students' initial interests and choice of projects in a humanities class

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Introduction

- 60 Students from new UM class "22 Ways to Think about Translation" (Comp Lit 240 / Undergraduate Courses 256)
- Part of U of M's 'Sophomore Initiative'
- "Translation" in the **many** meanings of the word: *literary translation*, *Google Translate...*
- Goal: That students step outside their comfort zones.

Methods

- Randomly chose 30 students from class
- Three points of data:
 - a. Each student classified into a population, "High" or "Low" level of background in language / literature (*index cards*)
 - b. Each student's attended events rated between 1 and 3 (*blog posts*)
 - c. Each student's final *project proposal* rated between 1 and 3
- Ratings obtained by averaging our independent ratings (to minimize bias)

Methods

Two tests with one population, two variables each, measuring relationship between population class and interests pursued

Sample size (expected cell counts) not big enough for chi-square tests, so used Fisher's exact test

Results (2-sided, at 10% alpha)

1) Is there an association between students' literary/language backgrounds and the technical level of the events they chose to attend?

P-value: 1.000, **Fail to reject H0**

2) Is there an association between students' literary/language backgrounds and the technical level of their choice of final project?

P-value: 0.115, **Fail to reject H0**

Results (2-sided, at 10% alpha)

3) For **lower** literary/language backgrounds: is there an association between events and final projects?

P-value: 0.217, **Fail to reject H0**

4) For **higher** literary/language backgrounds: is there an association between events and final projects?

P-value: 0.081, **Reject H0**

Conclusion

- From (4): For students with a **high** literary/language background, there was in fact statistically significant evidence to say that **there was an association between the kinds of events they chose to attend and their choice of a final project** (at the 10% significance level).
- This result is *interesting*: Why? For students with a **low** literary/language background, there is **no statistically significant evidence of such association**.
- The result shows that, **for students who entered the class with high literary/language skills**, the events to which they were exposed in course of the class seems to have “nudged” them in specific directions. **Tentative conclusion: More literary-minded students are more influenced by what happens in this class!**