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Appendix G

Maximum likelihood estimation of discrete choice models

The most common method for estimating the parameters of discrete choice models is maximum likelihood. The likelihood is defined as the joint density for the parameters of interest θ conditional on the data X_t . For binary choice models and $D_t = 1$ the contribution to the likelihood is $F(X_t^T \theta)$, and for $D_t = 0$ the contribution to the likelihood is $1 - F(X_t^T \theta)$ where these are combined as binomial draws and $F(X_t^T \theta)$ is the cumulative distribution function evaluated at $X_t^T \theta$. Hence, the likelihood is

$$L(\theta|X) = \prod_{t=1}^n F(X_t^T \theta)^{D_t} [1 - F(X_t^T \theta)]^{1-D_t}$$

The log-likelihood is

$$\ell(\theta|X) \equiv \log L(\theta|X) = \sum_{t=1}^n D_t \log(F(X_t^T \theta)) + (1 - D_t) \log(1 - F(X_t^T \theta))$$

Since this function for binary response models like probit and logit is globally concave, numerical maximization is straightforward. The first order conditions for a maximum, $\max_{\theta} \ell(\theta|X)$, are

$$\sum_{t=1}^n \frac{D_t f(X_t^T \theta) X_{ti}}{F(X_t^T \theta)} - \frac{(1-D_t) f(X_t^T \theta) X_{ti}}{1-F(X_t^T \theta)} = 0 \quad i = 1, \dots, k$$

where $f(\cdot)$ is the density function. Simplifying yields

$$\sum_{t=1}^n \frac{[D_t - F(X_t^T \theta)] f(X_t^T \theta) X_{ti}}{F(X_t^T \theta) [1 - F(X_t^T \theta)]} = 0 \quad i = 1, \dots, k$$

Estimates of θ are found by solving these first order conditions iteratively or, in other words, numerically.

A common estimator for the variance of $\hat{\theta}_{MLE}$ is the negative inverse of the Hessian matrix evaluated at $\hat{\theta}_{MLE}$, $\left[-H(D, \hat{\theta})\right]^{-1}$. Let $H(D, \theta)$ be the Hessian matrix for the log-likelihood with typical element $H_{ij}(D, \theta) \equiv \frac{\partial^2 \ell_t(D, \theta)}{\partial \theta_i \partial \theta_j}$.¹

¹Details can be found in numerous econometrics references and chapter 4 of *Accounting and Causal Effects: Econometric Challenges*.