PROBABILITY THEORY

MATH 154

Unit 12: Chebyshev-Markov-Chernoff-Gibbs

Chebyshev

12.1. We use the short-hand notation $\mathrm{P}[X \geq c]$ for $\mathrm{P}[\{\omega \in \Omega \mid X(\omega) \geq c\}]$.

Theorem 1 (Chebyshev-Markov inequality). *Let h be a monotone function on $\mathbb{R}$ with $h \geq 0$. For every $c > 0$, and $h(X) \in \mathcal{L}^1$ we have*

$$h(c) \cdot \mathrm{P}[X \geq c] \leq \mathrm{E}[h(X)] .$$

Proof. Integrate the inequality $h(c)1_{X \geq c} \leq h(X)$ and use the monotonicity and linearity of the expectation. $\square$

12.2. $h(x) = |x|$ leads to $\mathrm{P}[|X| \geq c] \leq ||X||_1/c$ which implies for example the statement

$$\mathrm{E}[|X|] = 0 \Rightarrow \mathrm{P}[X = 0] = 1 .$$

12.3. For $X \in \mathcal{L}^\infty$ we had used the moment generating function $M_X(t) = \mathrm{E}[e^{Xt}]$. For every $t \geq 0$ we have

$$e^{tc}\mathrm{P}[X \geq c] \leq M_X(t) .$$

This gives the

Theorem 2 (Chernoff bound).

$$\mathrm{P}[X \geq c] \leq \inf_{t \geq 0} e^{-tc} M_X(t) .$$

12.4. An important case of the Chebyshev-Markov inequality is the **Chebyshev inequality**:

Theorem 3 (Chebyshev inequality). *If $X \in \mathcal{L}^2$, then*

$$\mathrm{P}[|X - \mathrm{E}[X]| \geq c] \leq \frac{\mathrm{Var}[X]}{c^2} .$$

Proof. Take $h(x) = x^2$ and apply the Chebyshev-Markov inequality to the random variable $Y = X - \mathrm{E}[X]$ which is in $\mathcal{L}^1$ because $X \in \mathcal{L}^2$. $\square$

Entropy

12.5. If $(\Omega, \mathcal{A}, \mathrm{P})$ is a probability space and $X \in \mathcal{S}$, $X = \sum_{k=1}^n x_k 1_{A_k}$ is a random variable taking finitely many values x_k, its **entropy** is defined as $\sum_k \log(\frac{1}{p_k})p_k$, where $p_k = P[X = x_k]$ and $\log(\frac{1}{p_k})p_k = 0$ if $p_k = 0$. It has been introduced by Ludwig Bolzmann in statistical mechanics ("$S = k\log[W]$") and Claude Shannon in information theory.

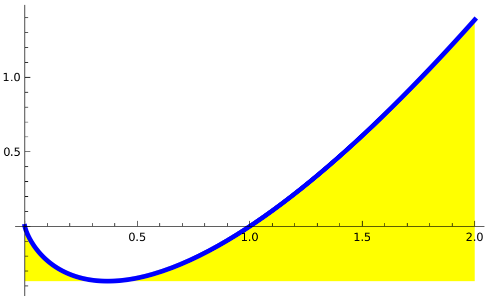

FIGURE 1. The convex function $x\log(x)$.

12.6. The entropy of a finite sub-algebra $\mathcal{B}$ of $\mathcal{A}$ is defined as $\sum_{A\in\mathcal{B}} \mathrm{P}[A]\log(\frac{1}{\mathrm{P}[A]})$. This is well defined, if we understand that $\mathrm{P}[A]\log(\frac{1}{\mathrm{P}[A]}) = 0$ for $\mathrm{P}[A] = 0$. It is a common assumption to extend the convex function $h(x) = x\log(x)$ to $x = 0$ by setting it to $h(0) = 0$.

12.7. Any random variable $X \in \mathcal{S}$ defines a finite probability distribution and so a finite set p_k of probabilities. We now take two distributions with $p_k, q_k, k = 1, \dots n$. The **relative entropy** is defined as

$$D[p,q] = \sum_k p_k \log(\frac{p_k}{q_k}) \ ,$$

We can rewrite this as $S(p,q) - S(p)$, where

$$S(p,q) = \sum_k p_k \log(\frac{1}{q_k})$$

is the **cross entropy**.

12.8. The relative entropy is also known as the **Kullback-Leibler divergence**. In nice cases, this goes over to more general random variables like continuous distributions where entropy is $S(f) = \int f(x)\log(\frac{1}{f(x)})\,dx$ and $D[f,g] = \int f(x)\log(\frac{f(x)}{g(x)})\,dx$. [1]

Theorem 4 (Gibbs inquality)**.** *The relative entropy is non-negative:* $D[p,q] \geq 0$.

Proof. Since $-\log$ is convex, we get from the Jensen inequality $D(p,q) = -\sum_k p_k \log(\frac{q_k}{p_k}) \geq -\log(\sum_k p_k \frac{q_k}{p_k}) = \log(\sum_k q_k) = \log(1) = 0$. $\square$

12.9. For $p_k = 1/n$, the uniform distribution, then entropy is $\log(n)$. It is an multi-variable calculus verification that $0 \leq S(p) \leq \log(n)$, where $S(p) = 0$ in the deterministic case where only one $p_k = 1$ and the others are zero. The uniform distribution has maximal entropy.

12.10. Remark. Here is an experimental observation for which I do not know the answer. Pick a large n and random p_k a random permutation $\pi \in S_n$ and $q_k = p_{\pi(k)}$, then the Kullback-Leibler divergence $D(p,q) = O(1)$. For $n \to \infty$ it seems to converge. For 30'000'000 we measure it to be around 3.29.

OLIVER KNILL, KNILL@MATH.HARVARD.EDU, MATH 154, SPRING, 2026

[1]Entropy and relative entropy is not defined for some perfectly nice bounded smooth distributions!