

ECON 626: Applied Microeconomics

## Lecture 11:

### Maximum Likelihood

Professors: Pamela Jakiela and Owen Ozier

Department of Economics  
University of Maryland, College Park

## Maximum Likelihood: Motivation

So far, we've been thinking about average treatment effects, but the ATE may or may not be the main quantity of interest research-wise

- Imperfect compliance  $\Rightarrow$  LATE/TOT estimates
- Outcomes may be censored (as in a tobit model)
  - ▶ OLS estimates of the treatment effect are inconsistent
- Treatments may impact specific parameters in a structural or theoretical model; may want to know how much parameters change
  - ▶ Theory can provide a framework for estimating treatment effects

ML approaches can help to translate treatment effects into “economics”

## Maximum Likelihood: Overview

In ML estimation, the data-generating process is the theoretical model

- First key decision: what is your theoretical model?
  - ▶ Examples: utility function, production function, hazard model
- Second key decision: continuous vs. discrete outcome variable
  - ▶ Censoring, extensions lead to intermediate cases
- Third key decision: structure of the error term
  - ▶ Today: additive, normally-distributed error

## OLS in a Maximum Likelihood Framework

Consider a linear model:

$$y_i = X_i' \beta + \varepsilon_i \text{ where } \varepsilon_i | X_i \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2)$$
$$\Rightarrow y_i \sim \mathcal{N}(X_i' \beta, \sigma^2)$$

The normal error term characterizes the distribution of  $y$ :

$$f(y|X; \theta) = \frac{1}{\sigma \sqrt{2\pi}} \cdot e^{-\left[\left(\frac{y - X' \beta}{\sigma}\right)^2 / 2\right]}$$
$$= \frac{1}{\sigma} \phi\left(\frac{y - X' \beta}{\sigma}\right)$$
$$= \mathcal{L}(\theta)$$

where  $\theta = (\beta, \sigma)$

## OLS in a Maximum Likelihood Framework

Knowing  $f(y|X; \theta)$ , we can write down the log-likelihood function for  $\theta$ :

$$\begin{aligned}\ell(\theta) &= \sum_i \ln[f(y_i|X_i; \theta)] \\ &= \sum_i \ln \left[ \frac{1}{\sigma} \phi \left( \frac{y_i - X_i' \beta}{\sigma} \right) \right]\end{aligned}$$

## ML Estimation in Stata

Estimating  $\hat{\beta}$  in Stata:

```
capture program drop myols
program myols
  args lnf beta sigma
  quietly replace `lnf' = log((1/`sigma') * normalden((`ML_y1' - `beta') / `sigma'))
end

ml model lf myols (beta: y = x) /sigma
ml maximize
```

where `$ML_y1` is the dependent variable

- By default, Stata imposes a linear structure on independent variable

## Tobit Estimation

Suppose we only observe  $y_i^*$  if  $y_i^* > 0$

$$C_i = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } y_i^* > 0 \\ 1 & \text{if } y_i^* \leq 0 \end{cases}$$

So, we observe:  $(X_i, y_i^* \cdot (1 - C_i), C_i)$  for each observations  $i$

With censoring of  $y_i^*$  at 0, the likelihood function takes the form:

$$\mathcal{L}_i(\theta) = [f(y_i^* | X_i; \theta)]^{1-C_i} \cdot [\Pr(y_i^* \leq 0 | X_i; \theta)]^{C_i}$$

## Tobit Estimation

Since  $\varepsilon_i = y_i^* - X_i' \beta$ , we know that:

$$\begin{aligned} \Pr(y_i^* \leq 0 | X_i; \theta) &= \Pr(\varepsilon_i < -X_i' \beta) \\ &= \Phi\left(-\frac{X_i' \beta}{\sigma}\right) \\ &= 1 - \Phi\left(\frac{X_i' \beta}{\sigma}\right) \end{aligned}$$

We can re-write the likelihood as:

$$\mathcal{L}_i(\theta) = \left[ \frac{1}{\sigma} \phi\left(\frac{y - X' \beta}{\sigma}\right) \right]^{1-C_i} \cdot \left[ 1 - \Phi\left(\frac{X_i' \beta}{\sigma}\right) \right]^{C_i}$$

## Tobit ML Estimation in Stata

Modifying the Stata likelihood function to adjust for censoring:

```
capture program drop mytobit
program mytobit
  args lnf beta sigma
  quietly replace `lnf'=log((1/'sigma')*normalden(($ML_y1-'beta')/'sigma'))
  quietly replace `lnf'= log(1-normal('beta'/'sigma')) if $ML_y1==0
end

ml model lf myols (beta: ystar = x) /sigma
ml maximize
```

## Tobit ML Estimation in Matlab

Shell program calls the likelihood function using fminunc command:

```
... clear all, read in data, declare globals, define variables

beta=[0.01];
beta_cons=[0.01];
sigma=[0.5];
param=[beta_x;beta_cons;sigma];

MAXITERS=[]; % Maximum number of iterations.
PARAMTOL=[]; % Convergence criterion based on the change in parameters.
LLTOL=[]; % Convergence criterion based on change in the log-likelihood.

disp('Starting estimation');
tic; %Starts the timer
options=optimset('LargeScale','off','Display','iter','GradObj','off',...
  'MaxFunEvals',10000,'MaxIter',MAXITERS,'TolX',PARAMTOL,'TolFun',LLTOL,'Deri
[paramhat,fval,exitflag,output,grad,hessian]=fminunc(@ll_tobit,param,options);

ihess=inv(hessian);
stderr=sqrt(diag(ihess));
```

## Tobit ML Estimation in Matlab

Likelihood function calculates the log likelihood:

```
function [ll]=ll_tobit(param)

global ystar x obs cens

beta=param(1:2,1);
sigma=param(3,1);

A = vars*beta;
dens=(normpdf((ystar-A)/sigma))/sigma;
dist=1-normcdf(A/sigma);
like=(1-cens).*dens+cens.*dist;
like=max(like,0.0000001);
ll=-sum(log(like),1);
```

## Why Use Maximum Likelihood?

Many economic applications start from a non-linear model of an individual decision rule some other underlying structural process

- Impacts on preferences (e.g. risk, time)
- Duration of unemployment spells
- CES production, utility functions

Maximum likelihood in Stata vs. Matlab:

- Stata is fast and (relatively) easy, if it converges
- No restrictions on the functional form of the likelihood in Matlab
- Broader range of optimization options in Matlab

## Maximum Likelihood Estimation

Let  $y_i$  be the observed decision in choice situation  $i$  for  $i = 1, \dots, I$

$$y_i = g(x_i; \theta) + \varepsilon_i$$

where  $x_i$  denotes the exogenous parameters of the situation (e.g. price),  $\theta$  denotes the preference/structural parameters, and  $\varepsilon_i \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^s)$

- Space of outcomes/choices is continuous (i.e. not discrete)
- $g(x; \theta) + \varepsilon_j$  is the structural model (e.g. demand function)
  - ▶ Often derived by solving for utility-maximizing choice

Because  $\varepsilon_i \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^s)$ , we know that  $y_i - \underbrace{g(x_i; \theta)}_{\varepsilon_i} \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2)$

$$\Rightarrow y_i \sim \mathcal{N}(g(x_i; \theta), \sigma^2)$$

## Maximum Likelihood Estimation: CRRA Example

Assume utility over income takes the constant relative risk aversion (CRRA) form given risk aversion parameter  $\rho > 0$ :

$$u(x) = \frac{x^{1-\rho}}{1-\rho}$$

Agent chooses an amount,  $z \in [0, b]$ , to invest in a risky security that yields payoff of 0 with probability  $\frac{1}{2}$  and payoff of  $\lambda z$  with probability  $\frac{1}{2}$

$$\max_{z \in [0, b]} \frac{1}{2(1-\rho)} \left[ (b-z)^{1-\rho} + (b+\lambda z)^{1-\rho} \right]$$

The optimal interior allocation to the risky security is given by

$$z^*(b, \lambda) = b \left( \frac{\lambda^{1/\rho} - 1}{\lambda^{1/\rho} + \lambda} \right)$$

## Maximum Likelihood Estimation: CRRA Example

People implement their choices with error:

$$z_i = z^*(b, \lambda) + \varepsilon_i \text{ where } \varepsilon_i | b, \lambda \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2)$$

The normal error term characterizes the distribution of  $y$ :

$$\begin{aligned} f(z_i | b, \lambda; \theta) &= \frac{1}{\sigma\sqrt{2\pi}} \cdot e^{-\left[\left(\frac{y - z_i^*(b, \lambda)}{\sigma}\right)^2 / 2\right]} \\ &= \frac{1}{\sigma} \phi\left(\frac{y - z_i^*(b, \lambda)}{\sigma}\right) \end{aligned}$$

where  $\theta = (\rho, \sigma)$

## Maximum Likelihood Estimation: CRRA Example

We only observe  $z_i^*$  if  $z_i^* < b$

$$C_i = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } z_i^* < b \\ 1 & \text{if } z_i^* \geq b \end{cases}$$

With censoring, the likelihood function takes the form:

$$\mathcal{L}_i(\theta) = [f(z_i | b, \lambda; \theta)]^{1-C_i} \cdot [\Pr(z_i \geq b; \theta)]^{C_i}$$

Log likelihood takes the form:

$$\ell_i(\theta) = (1 - C_i) \ln [f(z_i | b, \lambda; \theta)] + C_i \ln [\Pr(z_i \geq b | \theta)]$$



## Maximum Likelihood Estimation: CRRA Example

Because we know that  $\varepsilon_i|b, \lambda \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2)$ , we can calculate:

$$\begin{aligned}\Pr(z_i \geq b|\theta) &= \Pr(z_i^*(b, \lambda) + \varepsilon_i \geq b|\theta) \\ &= 1 - \Pr(\varepsilon_i \leq b - z_i^*(b, \lambda)|\theta) \\ &= 1 - \Phi\left(\frac{b - z_i^*(b, \lambda)}{\sigma}\right)\end{aligned}$$

We can re-write the log likelihood as:

$$\ell_i(\theta) = (1 - C_i) \ln \left[ \frac{1}{\sigma} \phi \left( \frac{y - z_i^*(b, \lambda)}{\sigma} \right) \right] + C_i \ln \left[ 1 - \Phi \left( \frac{b - z_i^*(b, \lambda)}{\sigma} \right) \right]$$

## Maximum Likelihood Estimation: CRRA Example

Stata program for ML estimation in a non-linear framework:

```
capture program drop mymodel
program mymodel

    args lnf rho sigma
    tempvar ratio res

    quietly gen double 'ratio' = $ML_y2* (($ML_y3^(1/'rho') - 1)/($ML_y3^(1/'rho')))
    quietly gen double 'res' = $ML_y1 - 'ratio'

    quietly replace 'lnf' = ln((1/'sigma')*normalden(('res')/'sigma'))
    quietly replace 'lnf' = ln(1-normal(('ratio')/'sigma')) if $ML_y4=1

end

ml model lf mymodel (rho: investment budget return censor = ) (sigma: )
ml maximize
```