Disclaimer: *These notes have not been subjected to the usual scrutiny for formal publications. They are to be used only for the class.*

Outline:

1. Geometric Distribution
2. Binomial Distribution
3. Birthday Problem
4. Administrivia

1 Geometric Distribution

Consider the probability distribution of

$$\begin{aligned} n &= 1, 2, 3, ... \\ P(n) &= p, p(1-p), p(1-p)^2, ... \end{aligned}$$

In general, $P(n) = p(1-p)^{n-1}$ where $n \geq 1$.

Toss a coin of head probability p. Then $P(n)$ is the probability that the first head occurs in the n-th trial.

Sanity check: does the probability mass sum up to 1?

$$\begin{aligned} \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} P(n) &= p \cdot \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (1-p)^{n-1} \\ &= p \cdot \frac{1}{1-(1-p)} \text{ by the summation of geometric series} \\ &= 1 \end{aligned}$$

What is the mean of the distribution? Recall the definition of "Expected Value" (or "Expectation") in class. Let $X \sim P(n)$,

$$\begin{aligned} E[X] &= \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} n \cdot \Pr[X = n] \\ &= 1 \cdot p + 2 \cdot p(1-p) + 3 \cdot p(1-p)^2 + ... \\ &\equiv I \end{aligned}$$

Each entry in the summation I, i.e., $np(1-p)^{n-1}$, is a product of an arithmetic series (n) and a geometric series ($(1-p)^{n-1}$). A trick for doing such summation is:

$$\begin{aligned} I &= 1p + 2p(1-p) + 3p(1-p)^2 + ... \\ (1-p)I &= 0 + 1p(1-p) + 2p(1-p)^2 + ... \end{aligned}$$

Subtract line 2 from line 1, it follows that $[1-(1-p)]I = p+p(1-p)+p(1-p)^2+... = p\cdot\frac{1}{1-(1-p)}$ (recall the summation of geometric series). Therefore, $I = \frac{1}{p}$.

Exercise: Another way of summing I, by way of calculus, is to express $n(1-p)^{n-1}$ as the derivative of $-(1-p)^n$. Then use the fact that differentiation and summation are inter-changeable. Verify that this method leads to the same answer.

Exercise: Verify that I, as a summation of infinite series, converges. (Consult a calculus book, if necessary)

2 Binomial Distribution

Toss a coin (w/ head probability p) for n times. Let X, a random variable (recall the definition?), be the number of heads that occurred. Then,

$$\Pr[X = k] = \binom{n}{k} p^k (1-p)^{n-k}, k = 0, 1, ..., n$$

Why is it? Consider a sequence of n empty slots in which we can fill in an "H" or a "T". Given the number of "H"s being k, there are $\binom{n}{k}$ ways to fill in the sequence. Each way happens with probability $p^k \cdot (1-p)^{n-k}$ (head probability times tail probability).

Again, verify $\sum_{k=0}^{n} \Pr[X = k] = 1$. Recall binomial coefficients.

Consider the mean of the distribution. Intuitively, what should it be?

By definition,

$$\begin{aligned}
EX &= \sum_{k=0}^{n} k \Pr[X = k] = \sum_{k=0 \leftarrow 1}^{n} k \binom{n}{k} p^k (1-p)^{n-k} \\
\text{Aside: } k\binom{n}{k} &= k \frac{n!}{k!(n-k)!} = \frac{n \cdot (n-1)!}{(k-1)!(n-k)!} = n\binom{n-1}{k-1} \\
&= \sum_{k=1}^{n} n \binom{n-1}{k-1} p^k (1-p)^{n-k} \\
&= np \sum_{k-1=0}^{n-1} \binom{n-1}{k-1} p^{k-1} (1-p)^{n-k} \\
&= np \text{ by summation of binomial coefficients}
\end{aligned}$$

Another way of computing the mean, by the simple but useful linearity of expectation: Write $X = \sum_{i=1}^{n} X_i$, where $X_i = 1$ if the i-th trial shows up head and $X_i = 0$ otherwise. Then,

$$EX = E[\sum_{i=1}^{n} X_i] = \sum_{i=1}^{n} E[X_i] = np$$

This method is simpler and more along the lines of the intuition.

3 Birthday Problem

Consider $Q(n, d = 365)$, the probability that no two people out of a group of n have the same birthday.

$$\begin{aligned}\text{The first person has a choice of all dates}\,\Pr &= \frac{d}{d} \\ \text{The second person has a choice of all dates}\,\Pr &= \frac{d-1}{d} \\ \text{...The } n\text{-th person has a choice of all dates}\,\Pr &= \frac{d-n+1}{d}\end{aligned}$$

Therefore,

$$Q(n,d) = \frac{(d-1)...(d-n+1)}{d^{n-1}} = \frac{d!}{d^{n-1}(d-n)!}$$

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Exercise: Enumerate the total number of possible birthday combinations for a group of n people, and the number of ways that their birthdays don't collide. Verify that the division of the two numbers gives the same answer as above.

Exercise: Rephrase the birthday problem in terms of Balls and Bins. Relate this problem to problems that we covered in class.

Question: How many people does it take to have a 50%+ chance of identical birthdays? That is, we want the smallest n such that $Q(n, d) < .5$. It turns out that $n = 23$. For a class room of size 50, the probability of identical birthdays is $1 - Q(n = 50, d = 365) \approx 0.9674$.

4 Administrivia

Send email to nhz@cs.berkeley.edu with

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SUBJECT: cs174 signup
BODY: <full name>
      <email addr>
      <webpage, if any>
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Separate the fields with new lines.