

OPTIMALITY AND ALMOST OPTIMALITY OF MIXTURE STOPPING RULES¹

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It is shown that for a test of a composite hypothesis on the parameter θ of an exponential family of distributions, mixture stopping rules are almost optimal with respect to certain criteria of optimality and a unique stopping rule is to be found among them which is optimal with respect to another type of optimality.

1. Introduction and summary. Let J denote an open interval of real numbers. Assume that for each $\theta \in J$, P_θ is a probability measure under which X_1, X_2, \dots are independent and identically distributed random variables with probability density $h_\theta(x) = \exp\{\theta x - \psi(\theta)\}$ with respect to some σ -finite measure ν . Let $S_n = \sum_{k=1}^n X_k$ ($n = 0, 1, \dots$; $S_0 = 0$). For a given $\theta_0 \in J$ and F a probability distribution on J define

$$(1) \quad f(x, t) = \int_J \exp\{(y - \theta_0)x - t[\psi(y) - \psi(\theta_0)]\} dF(y)$$

and

$$(2) \quad T = \inf \{n \mid f(S_n, n) \geq \varepsilon\} \quad (\varepsilon > 1).$$

Any T of this form shall hence be referred to as a mixture stopping rule. It is shown in Robbins (1970) that

$$(3) \quad P_{\theta_0}(T < \infty) \leq \frac{1}{\varepsilon}$$

and statistical applications of such stopping rules are also discussed there. An approximation for $E_\theta T$ (for $\theta \neq \theta_0$ such that F has a derivative F' with respect to Lebesgue measure in a neighborhood of θ , F' being positive and continuous at θ) is given in Pollak and Siegmund (1975): (as $\varepsilon \rightarrow \infty$)

$$(4) \quad E_\theta T = \frac{1}{2I(\theta)} [2 \log \varepsilon + \log \log \varepsilon] + O(1)$$

where $I(\theta) = (\theta - \theta_0)\psi'(\theta) - (\psi(\theta) - \psi(\theta_0))$. (A more explicit form of $O(1)$ can be found in Pollak and Siegmund (1975).)

The purpose of this article is to present optimality properties of mixture stopping rules.

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For statistical applications, it is desirable to choose a stopping time T such that $E_\theta T$ will be as small as possible for a wide range of values of θ . For a given $\theta \neq \theta_0$, by using a mixture stopping rule whose F assigns unit mass to the single point θ , one may obtain $E_\theta T = (\log \varepsilon)/I(\theta) + O(1)$. This is smaller than (4) by a term which is $O(\log \log \varepsilon)$; but it requires prior knowledge of θ and hence is impossible to implement in general.

A natural consideration under these circumstances would be to employ a minimax approach. (4) would suggest minimizing $\sup_{\theta \neq \theta_0} [E_\theta T - (\log \varepsilon)/I(\theta)]/[(\log \log \varepsilon)/2I(\theta)]$; or equivalently trying to minimize $\sup_{\theta \neq \theta_0} 2I(\theta)E_\theta T$. Unfortunately this is infinite: $\lim_{\theta \rightarrow \theta_0} (\theta - \theta_0)^2 E_\theta T = \infty$ by Theorem 1 of Farrell (1964) and $I(\theta) \sim (\theta - \theta_0)^2$ for θ close to θ_0 ; also, clearly $\lim_{\theta \rightarrow \infty} I(\theta)E_\theta T = \infty$. These considerations lead to attempting to minimize $\sup_{a \leq \theta \leq b} 2I(\theta)E_\theta T$ under the restriction that $P_{\theta=\theta_0}(T < \infty) \leq 1/\varepsilon$, where $[a, b] \subset J$ is an interval of finite length and $\theta_0 \notin [a, b]$.

Theorem 1 states that one cannot hope for anything substantially better than that suggested by (4), i.e., $\inf \sup_{a \leq \theta \leq b} 2I(\theta)E_\theta T = 2 \log \varepsilon + \log \log \varepsilon + O(1)$. Therefore the class of mixture stopping rules is asymptotically almost optimal—optimal up to a term of order $O(1)$. Theorem 2 presents a Bayesian almost optimal property of mixture stopping rules.

With respect to a different criterion mixture stopping rules form a complete class. Since (4) is exact up to order $O(1)$, multiplying ε by a constant will not change the right-hand side of (4). Thus if T is defined as the first crossing time of a boundary in the (n, S_n) plane, one would suspect a similar minimax result if one changes $(P_{\theta_0}(T < \infty), E_\theta T)$ to the expected (θ_0, θ) number of times the process (n, S_n) remains (above, below) the stopping boundary respectively. Theorem 3 states that the (unique) minimax solution is a mixture stopping rule.

2. Almost optimality. Without loss of generality it may be assumed that $0 = \phi(0) = \psi'(0)$.

LEMMA 1. Let $0 < a \leq b < \infty$ satisfy $\psi'(a) > \psi(b)/b$, $[a, b] \subset J$. For any $\xi > 1$ and probability measure G on $[a, b]$ define $N(\xi; a; b; G) = \inf \{n \mid \int_a^b \exp\{yS_n - n\psi(y)\} dG(y) \geq \xi\}$. There exist constants $0 < A, B < \infty$ independent of ξ, G such that $E_\theta N(\xi; a; b; G) \leq A \log \xi + B$ for all $\theta \in [a, b]$ and $\xi > 1$.

PROOF. Define $M(\gamma) = \inf \{n \mid \exp\{\gamma S_n - n\psi(\gamma)\} \geq \xi\}$. It follows from Theorem 1 of Lorden (1970) that there exists $0 < D < \infty$ such that $E_\theta \{S_{M(\gamma)} - [M(\gamma)\psi(\gamma) + \log \xi]/\gamma\} \leq D$ uniformly in $\theta \in [a, b]$, $\gamma \in [a, b]$, $\xi > 1$ and so (by Wald's lemma) for all $\theta, \gamma \in [a, b]$

$$(5) \quad \begin{aligned} E_\theta M(\gamma) &\leq [(\log \xi)/\gamma + D]/[\psi'(\theta) - \psi(\gamma)/\gamma] \\ &\leq [(\log \xi)/a + D]/[\psi'(a) - \psi(b)/b]. \end{aligned}$$

From $\int_a^b \exp\{yS_n - n\psi(y)\} dG(y) \geq \min(\exp\{aS_n - n\psi(a)\}, \exp\{bS_n - n\psi(b)\})$ it follows that $N(\xi; a; b; G) \leq \max(M(a), M(b)) \leq M(a) + M(b)$. This and (5) complete the proof of Lemma 1.

LEMMA 2. Let $\gamma \in (0, 1)$, let F_0 be the probability measure wholly concentrated at $\{0\}$, let G be a probability on $[a, b]$, $0 < a \leq b < \infty$, $[a, b] \subset J$, $\psi'(a) > \psi(b)/b$ and denote $F = \gamma F_0 + (1 - \gamma)G$. Consider the optimal stopping problem defined by a prior distribution F on θ when X_1, X_2, \dots are i.i.d.— P_θ and each observation costs $c > 0$ if $\theta \neq 0$, zero if $\theta = 0$, with loss = 1 for stopping if $\theta = 0$. There exists a constant $0 < M < \infty$ independent of c, F such that a Bayes procedure (with probability one) continues sampling whenever the posterior risk of stopping is at least Mc .

PROOF. That a Bayes rule exists can be seen from considerations similar to those of page 108 and Theorem 4.5' (page 82) of Chow, Robbins and Siegmund (1971).

Let $\infty > Q > A/e$ where A is defined in Lemma 1 and define T_{Qc} to be the first time $n \leq \infty$ that the posterior risk of stopping is at most Qc . It is sufficient to prove for some $Q < M < \infty$ that the (integrated) risk of T_{Qc} is less than γ if $\gamma \geq Mc$. Since the (integrated) risk of any generalized stopping time T is the expected posterior risk of stopping plus $c(1 - \gamma) \int_a^b E_\theta T dG(\theta)$ it is sufficient to prove for some $0 < M < \infty$ that $(1 - \gamma) \int_a^b E_\theta T_{Qc} dG(\theta) < \gamma/c - Q$ if $\gamma \geq Mc$.

Choose $M > Q$ such that $(1 - A/(Qe))M - (B + A/e) > Q$ where A, B are the constants defined by Lemma 1. It is enough to look at c for which $Qc < 1$. Notice that

$$\begin{aligned}
 (6) \quad T_{Qc} &= \inf \{n \mid Qc \geq \gamma h_0(x_1) \cdots h_0(x_n) / [\gamma h_0(x_1) \cdots h_0(x_n) \\
 &\quad + (1 - \gamma) \int_a^b h_\theta(x_1) \cdots h_\theta(x_n) dG(\theta)] \\
 &= \inf \left\{ n \mid \int_a^b \exp\{yS_n - n\psi(y)\} dG(y) \geq \frac{\gamma}{1 - \gamma} \frac{1 - Qc}{Qc} \right\} \\
 &\leq \inf \left\{ n \mid \int_a^b \exp\{yS_n - n\psi(y)\} dG(y) \geq \frac{\gamma}{(1 - \gamma)Qc} \right\}.
 \end{aligned}$$

Noticing that $\sup_{0 < y < 1} -y(\log y) = 1/e$, apply Lemma 1 to get that if $1 > \gamma \geq Mc$

$$\begin{aligned}
 (1 - \gamma) \int_a^b E_\theta T_{Qc} dG(\theta) &\leq (1 - \gamma) \left[A \left(\log \frac{\gamma}{Qc} + \log \frac{1}{1 - \gamma} \right) + B \right] \\
 &\leq \frac{\gamma}{c} \frac{A}{Q} \frac{Qc}{\gamma} \log \frac{\gamma}{Qc} + B + A(1 - \gamma) \log \frac{1}{1 - \gamma} \\
 &\leq \frac{\gamma}{c} \frac{A}{Qe} + B + \frac{A}{e} \\
 &\leq \frac{\gamma}{c} - \left(1 - \frac{A}{Qe} \right) M + B + \frac{A}{e} \\
 &< \frac{\gamma}{c} - Q.
 \end{aligned}$$

This completes the proof of Lemma 2.

LEMMA 3. Let $0 < a_1 < a < b < b_1 < \infty$ and let G be a probability on $[a_1, b_1] \subset J$

with derivative $g(x) = dG(x)/dx$ which is positive and continuous on $[(a_1 + a)/2, (b_1 + b)/2]$. Let $T = \inf \{n \mid \int_{a_1}^{b_1} \exp\{yS_n - n\phi(y)\} dG(y) \geq \varepsilon\}$. Then for all $\theta \in [a, b]$

$$(7) \quad E_\theta T = \frac{1}{2I(\theta)} [2 \log \varepsilon + \log \log \varepsilon] + O_\theta(1)$$

where $\limsup_{\varepsilon \rightarrow \infty} \sup_{a \leq \theta \leq b} |O_\theta(1)| < \infty$.

PROOF. Notice that Theorem 1 of Pollak and Siegmund (1975) holds uniformly for $\theta \in [a, b]$ so that the right-hand side of (7) is a lower bound for $E_\theta T$. Similar manipulations show the right-hand side of (7) to be an upper bound for $E_\theta T$ uniformly for $\theta \in [a, b]$. See also Lai and Siegmund (1977).

THEOREM 1. Let $\theta_0 < a < b < \infty$, $[a, b] \subset J$, $\theta_0 \in J$.

$$(8) \quad \inf_{\{T\}P_{\theta_0}(T < \infty) \leq 1/\varepsilon} \sup_{a \leq \theta \leq b} 2I(\theta)E_\theta T = 2 \log \varepsilon + \log \log \varepsilon + O(1)$$

where $\limsup_{\varepsilon \rightarrow \infty} |O(1)| < \infty$, and equality is attained by a mixture stopping rule.

PROOF. Without loss of generality assume $\theta_0 = 0$ and $\psi'(a) > \psi(b)/b$. That the equality is attained by a mixture stopping rule is the content of Lemma 3. To see that the right side of (8) is a lower bound of the left side of (8), consider the Bayesian problem defined in Lemma 2 when $\gamma = \frac{1}{2}$ and $dG(y)/dy = I(y)/\int_a^b I(y) dy$ on $[a, b]$. Let M be the constant derived in Lemma 2 and let T_{Mc} be T_{Qc} for $Q = M$ where T_{Qc} is defined in (6). T_{Mc} is a mixture stopping rule defined by G and $\varepsilon = (1 - Mc)/(Mc)$. By virtue of Lemma 2 there exists a Bayes rule which continues sampling at least as long as T_{Mc} . Hence the Bayes risk is at least the sampling cost of T_{Mc} , whence for any stopping rule T

$$P_{\theta_0}(T < \infty) + c \int_a^b E_\theta T dG(\theta) \geq c \int_a^b E_\theta T_{Mc} dG(\theta).$$

Thus if $P_{\theta_0}(T < \infty) \leq 1/\varepsilon = Mc/(1 - Mc)$

$$(9) \quad \int_a^b E_\theta T dG(\theta) \geq \int_a^b E_\theta T_{Mc} dG(\theta) - M/(1 - Mc).$$

There exist a_1, b_1 such that $0 < a_1 < a < b < b_1 < \infty$ and $\psi'(a_1) > \psi(b_1)/b_1$. Define $\Lambda = \inf \{n \mid \int_{a_1}^{b_1} \exp\{yS_n - n\phi(y)\}I(y) dy / \int_{a_1}^{b_1} I(y) dy \geq \varepsilon\}$. By definition, $T_{Mc} \geq \Lambda$. Λ is a mixture stopping rule defined by $dF(y)/dy = I(y)/\int_{a_1}^{b_1} I(y) dy$ on $[a_1, b_1]$ and $\varepsilon' = \varepsilon \int_a^b I(y) dy / \int_{a_1}^{b_1} I(y) dy$. Thus by Lemma 3

$$(10) \quad E_\theta T_{Mc} \geq E_\theta \Lambda = \frac{1}{2I(\theta)} [2 \log \varepsilon + \log \log \varepsilon] + O_\theta(1)$$

where $\limsup_{\varepsilon \rightarrow \infty} \sup_{a \leq \theta \leq b} |O_\theta(1)| < \infty$. Combining (9) and (10) yields

$$\int_a^b E_\theta T dG(\theta) \geq \int_a^b [2 \log \varepsilon + \log \log \varepsilon + O(1)] d\theta / (2 \int_a^b I(y) dy)$$

whence by definition of G

$$\int_a^b [2I(\theta)E_\theta T - (2 \log \varepsilon + \log \log \varepsilon)] d\theta \geq O(1)$$

for all T satisfying $P_{\theta_0}(T < \infty) \leq 1/\varepsilon$, thus completing the proof of (8).

THEOREM 2. Let F be a probability on J with $F\{(0, \infty)\} > 0$, $T(\varepsilon) = \inf \{n \mid \int_J \exp\{yS_n - n\phi(y)\} dF(y) \geq \varepsilon\}$ and let $0 < \gamma < 1$. There exists an interval $[a, b] \subset J$ with $0 < a \leq b < \infty$, $\phi'(a) < \phi(b)/b$ such that $T(\varepsilon)$ is a δ -Bayes solution of the optimal stopping problem described in Lemma 2 (with $dG(y) = dF(y)/F\{[a, b]\}$ for $y \in [a, b]$ and with c defined by $\varepsilon = [\gamma/(1 - \gamma)][(1 - Mc)/(Mc)]/F\{[a, b]\}$ where M is defined in Lemma 2) where the Bayes solution has a risk of order $(\log \varepsilon)/\varepsilon$ and $\delta = O(1/\varepsilon)$ as $\varepsilon \rightarrow \infty$.

PROOF. There exist a, b satisfying $0 < a \leq b < \infty$, $[a, b] \subset J$, $\phi'(a) \leq \phi(b)/b$, $F\{[a, b]\} > 0$. Let G, c be defined as above and consider the optimal stopping problem described in Lemma 2. Let T_{Mc} be T_{Qc} for $Q = M$ as defined in (6). Clearly $T_{Mc} \geq T(\varepsilon)$. Therefore and by virtue of Lemma 2 there exists a Bayes solution which samples at least as many observations as $T(\varepsilon)$ and so the Bayes risk of $T(\varepsilon)$ cannot exceed that of the Bayes solution by more than $\gamma P_0(T(\varepsilon) < \infty) \leq \gamma/\varepsilon$. Since c is of the order $1/\varepsilon$ and $ET(\varepsilon)$ is of the order $\log \varepsilon$, the order of the risk of sampling of the Bayes solution is $(\log \varepsilon)/\varepsilon$ and the proof is complete.

3. Exact optimality. Let h_θ^{*n} be the n -fold convolution of h_θ with itself with respect to ν ; let H_θ^{*n} be the measure whose derivative with respect to ν is h_θ^{*n} , and understand $H_\theta^{*n}(z) = H_\theta^{*n}\{(-\infty, z]\}$. Let $0 \in J$. Denote: $\mathbf{c} = (c_1, c_2, \dots)$ where $-\infty \leq c_j \leq \infty, j = 1, 2, \dots$. Denote

$\chi(A)$ = the indicator function of the event A ;

$\mathcal{C}_\varepsilon = \{\{\mathbf{c}, \boldsymbol{\alpha}\} \mid 0 \leq \alpha_j \leq 1 \text{ for all } j,$

$$\sum_{j=1}^\infty [1 - (H_\theta^{*j}(c_j) - \alpha_j H_\theta^{*j}\{c_j\})] = 1/\varepsilon, \quad \varepsilon > 1;$$

$\mathcal{G} = \{G \mid G \text{ is a probability on } \{\theta \mid a \leq \theta \leq b\}\};$

$\mathcal{M}_\varepsilon = \{\mu \mid \mu \text{ is a probability measure on } \{\mathbf{z} \mid \sum_{i=1}^\infty (1 - z_i) = 1/\varepsilon\}\};$

$\mathcal{E}_\varepsilon = \{W \mid W = \sum_{j=1}^\infty [\chi(S_j \leq c_j^w) - \alpha_j^w \chi(S_j = c_j^w)], (\mathbf{c}^w, \boldsymbol{\alpha}^w) \in \mathcal{C}_\varepsilon\};$

$\mathcal{R}_\varepsilon = \{T \mid T \text{ is a stopping variable defined by (2), } \varepsilon > 1 \text{ fixed}\};$

$\mathcal{R} = \bigcup_{\varepsilon > 1} \mathcal{R}_\varepsilon;$

$\mathcal{Q}_\varepsilon = \{T \mid T \text{ is a stopping variable for } \{S_k\}_{k=1,2,\dots} \text{ whose stopping boundary is concave, } P_0(T < \infty) = 1/\varepsilon \text{ (where randomization on the boundary is permitted to let this equality hold)}\}.$

$A_T(j)$ is the stopping boundary defining $T \in \mathcal{Q}_\varepsilon$.

THEOREM 3. Let $r(\theta)$ be any continuous nonnegative function of θ in $[a, b] \subset J$, $0 < a < b < \infty$, such that r is not identically zero in the interval. Then: $\inf_{w \in \mathcal{C}_\varepsilon} \sup_{a \leq \theta \leq b} r(\theta)E_\theta W$ is attained by a unique (up to probability one) $L \in \mathcal{E}_\varepsilon$ defined by coordinates c_j^L which are boundary values defining some $T \in \mathcal{R}$.

SKETCH OF PROOF. Suppose that the closure of the support of ν is convex (otherwise minor changes must be made in the following). Denote $z_j^0 = H_\theta^{*j}(c_j) - \alpha_j H_\theta^{*j}\{c_j\}$. Clearly, there is a 1:1 correspondence between z_j^0 and $(\mathbf{c}, \boldsymbol{\alpha})$, and z_j^0 is a continuous and increasing function of z_j^0 . Denote:

$g(\theta, \mathbf{z}^0) = \sum_{j=1}^{\infty} z_j^\theta$. By the minimax theorem (cf. Fan (1952)) there exist $\mu_0 \in \mathcal{M}_\varepsilon, G_0 \in \mathcal{G}$ such that

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \inf_{(\mathbf{c}, \mathbf{a}) \in \mathcal{C}_\varepsilon} \sup_{a \leq \theta \leq b} r(\theta)g(\theta, \mathbf{z}^0) \\
 (11) \quad & = \inf_{(\mathbf{c}, \mathbf{a}) \in \mathcal{C}_\varepsilon} \sup_{G \in \mathcal{G}} \int r(\theta)g(\theta, \mathbf{z}^0) dG(\theta) \\
 & \geq \inf_{\mu \in \mathcal{M}_\varepsilon} \sup_{G \in \mathcal{G}} \int \int r(\theta)g(\theta, \mathbf{z}^0) dG(\theta) d\mu(\mathbf{z}^0) \\
 & = \max_{G \in \mathcal{G}} \min_{\mu \in \mathcal{M}_\varepsilon} \int \int r(\theta)g(\theta, \mathbf{z}^0) dG(\theta) d\mu(\mathbf{z}^0) \\
 & = \min_{\mu \in \mathcal{M}_\varepsilon} \int \int r(\theta)g(\theta, \mathbf{z}^0) dG_0(\theta) d\mu(\mathbf{z}^0).
 \end{aligned}$$

Clearly, any $\mu \in \mathcal{M}_\varepsilon$ attaining this minimum must give all of its mass to points \mathbf{z}^0 for which $\int r(\theta)g(\theta, \mathbf{z}^0) dG_0(\theta)$ reaches its minimum. Since

$$\int r(\theta)g(\theta, \mathbf{z}^0) dG_0(\theta) = \int r(\theta) \sum_{j=1}^{\infty} z_j dG_0(\theta)$$

and

$$\frac{dz_j^\theta}{dz_j^0} = \exp\{\theta c_j - j\phi(\theta)\}$$

where c_j is that corresponding to z_j^0 , one can minimize $\int r(\theta)g(\theta, \mathbf{z}^0) dG_0(\theta)$ subject to the constraint $\sum_{i=1}^{\infty} (1 - z_i^0) = 1/\varepsilon$ by the method of Lagrange multipliers (cf. Luenberger (1969) page 186). By differentiating $[\int r(\theta)g(\theta, \mathbf{z}^0) dG_0(\theta) + \lambda(\sum_{i=1}^{\infty} (1 - z_i^0) - 1/\varepsilon)]$ with respect to z_j^0 , one gets that extremum points \mathbf{z}^0 must satisfy

$$(12) \quad \int \exp\{\theta c_j - j\phi(\theta)\}r(\theta) dG_0(\theta) = \lambda$$

for the corresponding \mathbf{c} . Here c_j increases if λ is increased. So, because of the constraint, corresponding to λ there exists a unique solution \mathbf{c}^* to (12). Because of the constraint, there can be only one λ for which a solution to (12) exists. Thus there is a unique λ and a unique \mathbf{c}^* satisfying (12), and so \mathbf{z}^{0*} corresponding to \mathbf{c}^* must be the unique point of minimum. Therefore there is equality in (11) and the proof is complete.

4. Remarks. (a) Lemmas 1 and 2 and Theorem 2 are modeled after Lemmas 2.1 and 2.2 and Theorem 2.1 of Lorden (1967). Obviously, the condition $\phi'(a) < \phi(b)/b$ appearing in Lemma 1 (and in the sequel) can be dispensed with. Theorem 2 can be reformulated to be an analog of Theorem 2.1 of Lorden (1967).

(b) Under certain conditions one can show that λ of (12) is of the order of magnitude of ε as $\varepsilon \rightarrow \infty$.

(c) Theorems and lemmas similar to these presented in this article can be formulated for Brownian motion; denote standard Brownian motion by $\omega(t)$ and set $X(t) = \theta t + \omega(t)$, let $I(\theta) = \theta^2/2$, let

$$T_{Qc} = \inf \left\{ t \mid \int_a^b \exp\{yS_t - t\phi(y)\} dG(y) \geq \frac{\gamma}{1-\gamma} \frac{1-Qc}{Qc} \right\}$$

replace T_{Qc} of (6) and let c be the cost of sampling per unit time if $\theta \in [a, b]$. An invariance argument leads to an analog of Theorem 3.

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