

# Identification of Observations of Correct or Incorrect Actions using Second Order Statistical Features of Event Related Potentials

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**Abstract:** The identification of correct or incorrect actions is a very significant task in the field of the brain-computer interface systems. In this paper, observations of correct or incorrect actions are identified by means of event related potentials (ERPs) that represent the brain activity as a response to an external stimulus or event. ERP signals from 47 electrodes, located on various positions on the scalp, were acquired from sixteen volunteers. The volunteers observed correct or incorrect actions of other subjects, who performed a special designed task. The recorded signals were analysed and five second order statistical features were calculated from each one. The most prominent features were selected using a statistical ranking procedure forming a set of 32 feature vectors, which were fed to a Support Vector Machines (SVM) classifier. The performance of the classifier was assessed by means of the leave-one-out cross validation procedure resulting in classification accuracy 84.4%. The obtained results indicate that the analysis of ERP-signals that are collected during the observation of the actions of other persons could be used to understand the specific cognitive processes that are responsible for processing the observed actions.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The participation in joint actions affects significantly our behaviour, since decisions, perceptions and beliefs are modulated by those of others with whom we are together as family, friends, partners or colleagues. Especially, the observation of actions performed by other people contributes considerably in the learning process and the skills we develop. A person will try to reproduce actions that leave positive impressions and avoid actions that are less desirable or have negative impact. Furthermore, if an observed action is recognized as important by others, it is quite probable that the observer will emulate this action.

Several studies suggest that learning by observation and learning through self-action activate similar mechanisms in the human brain. (Petrosini et al., 2003). In particular, it has been observed that when a subject performs an incorrect action, the waveform of the event related potentials (brain activity as a response to an external stimulus or event - ERP) contains a negative peak known as

Error Related Negativity (ERN). ERN appears at around 100ms after the start of the incorrect action and is related with activity in the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) (van Schie et al., 2004). ERN is consistently observed when a mismatch occurs between representations of anticipated and actual responses (Falkenstein et al., 2000). ERN with smaller amplitude and longer latency has also been found in experimental paradigms exploring aspects of error monitoring that cover the observation of actions of persons or artificial agents “exterior” to the observer, termed “observed” ERN (oERN) (van Schie et al., 2004). In correspondence with the ERN measured when a person performs a wrong action, ACC activity was implicated also in observation of errors. It has been found that the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) is activated not only when errors are committed (Ridderinkhof et al., 2004), but also when observing errors of other persons (Newman-Norlund et al., 2009). Furthermore, it has been shown that the MPFC is activated when observing human errors and machine errors (Desmet et al., 2014). Those findings strengthen the hypothesis that

the same mechanisms are activated both when committing and when observing errors. Nevertheless, because it has been found that sometimes a negative ERN-like deflection is produced even for correct actions (Scheffers and Coles, 2000), something similar could happen when observation of the action of other persons takes place. Recently oERN investigations have been expanded also to the context of cooperative and competitive behavior, related to reward-dependency of performance monitoring (de Bruijn and von Rhein, 2012).

ERN presents special interest for implementing Brain-Computer Interface (BCI) systems (Millán et al., 2010). BCI systems decode brain signals into actions controlling devices that will assist the users of the system. In such systems an interface usually has to recognize the user's intent. When the user perceives that the interface made an error in recognizing his/her intent, it has been repeatedly shown that an error-related potential, of a similar kind to ERN is elicited (Ferrez and Millán, 2008). This potential has been termed "interaction ErrP", to reflect the fact that it is produced by the interaction between the computer's actions and the user who recognizes them as incorrect. Interaction ErrP exhibits a different morphology as compared to the ERN elicited in classical forced-choice experiments. In a recent study, it has been shown that oERN can be detected in an observation experiment using single trial signals (Vi et al., 2014). Furthermore, in this study was shown that ERN is also present during the anticipation of an action.

Special efforts have been devoted in implementing classification systems for identifying the existence of oERN and ErrP, for improving the performance of BCI systems (Ferrez and Millán, 2008). The existence of differences in the ERPs of observers, when observing correct or incorrect actions, might foster the development of classification systems capable of detecting performance errors of a human - or an artificial agent - in need of being monitored in a joint-action situation. The primary aim of the present study is to propose a methodology for discriminating observations of correct and incorrect actions, based on scalp-recorded ERPs, using second order statistical features.

## 2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

### 2.1 Subjects and ERPs' Recording Procedure

The ERP data used in the present study were collected in previous research (van Schie et al., 2004). The data were acquired from sixteen (16) healthy volunteers (observers), who observed correct or incorrect responses of subjects (actors) performing a special designed task. In particular, the actors were seated in front of a table facing an observer, having in front of them, on the table, two joystick devices positioned to the left and right of a LED stimulus device. The actors were asked to respond to the direction of a center arrowhead surrounded by distracting flankers pointing either in the same direction as the center arrow, or in opposite direction (Fig. 1).

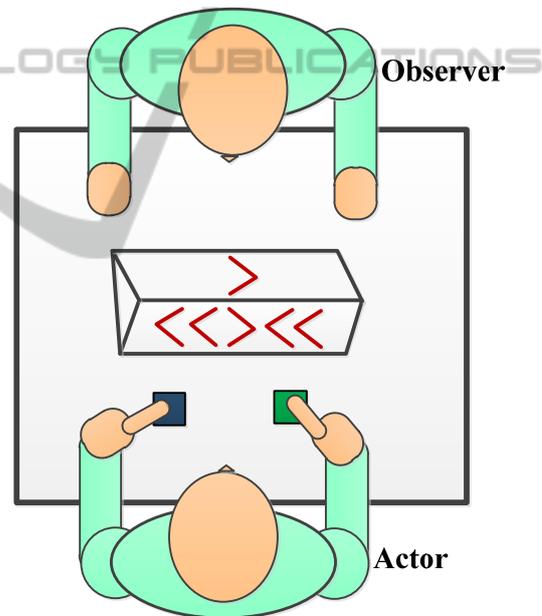


Figure 1: Experimental setup.

The brain electrical activity of the observers was recorded from 47 Ag/AgCl electrodes as well as vertical and horizontal electro-oculograms and was sampled with sampling rate 250 Hz. Electrodes were mounted in an elastic cap (Easy cap, Montage 10) configured for equal arrangement of the electrodes over the scalp (Fig. 2) (van Schie et al., 2004). The electrode common was placed on the sternum. Ocular artifacts were corrected using the method described in (Gratton et al., 1983).

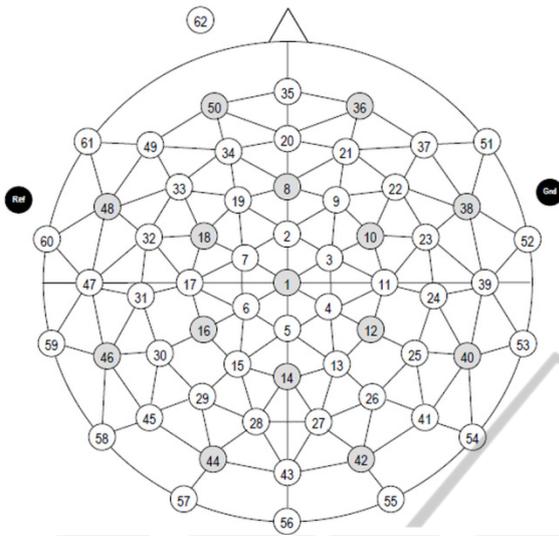


Figure 2: Placement of electrodes.

The experimental session involved 8 runs of 100 trials of the task and the observations of correct or incorrect responses were averaged over a 800ms epoch (baseline [-100 , 0] ms before response) (Fig. 3). This procedure is necessary in order to discriminate the ERP signal from noise (brain activity that is not relevant to the task).

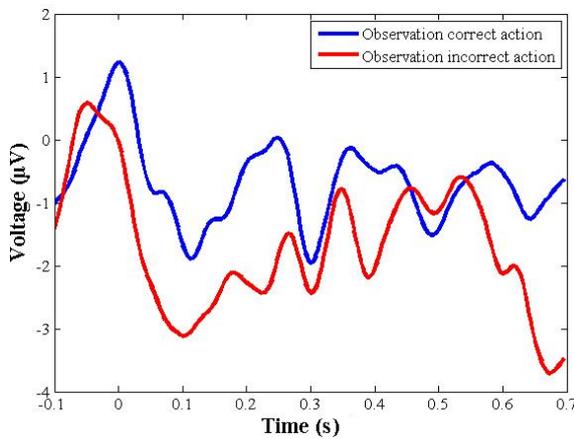


Figure 3: Example of ERP signals from observation of correct (blue line) and incorrect action (red line).

A time window, starting at -6 msec and ending at 700 msec (corresponding to 176 samples) after the response, was selected for analysis. A total of  $32 \times 47 = 1504$  ERP recordings were available for analysis. From the available recordings,  $16 \times 47 = 752$  recordings corresponded to observation of correct actions and the rest  $16 \times 47 = 752$  recordings corresponded to observations of incorrect actions.

## 2.2 Proposed Methodology

The proposed methodology aims to classify feature vectors that are extracted from the available raw data into two classes of interest:

- Observation of correct actions
- Observation of incorrect actions

The methodology involves three tasks:

- Feature calculation: in this task, a number of quantitative features that provide a compact description of the available raw data is extracted. The features are organized in feature vectors, also known as patterns.
  - Feature selection: this task aims to select a subset of features from the original set of the available features in order to achieve the best classification performance.
  - Classification: in this task, the available patterns, using the selected features, are classified in the classes of interest.
- Each task is described below.

### 2.2.1 Feature Calculation

Various features have been used to describe ERP waveforms, such as first order statistical features (Ventouras et al., 2011), features from frequency domain (Liang et al., 2010), wavelet coefficients (Aniyan et al., 2014). In this paper, it is proposed the calculation of second order statistical features that describe the morphology of an ERP waveform. These features have been used widely in image analysis in order to represent the texture of an image (Haralick et al., 1973).

In particular, let  $\{x_n\}$  ( $n = 1, 2, \dots, 176$ ) denotes a discrete time ERP recording,  $x_{\min} = \min_n \{x_n\}$  and  $x_{\max} = \max_n \{x_n\}$ . Then, the values of the ERP recording can be quantized into  $N$  levels by means of the formula:

$$y_n = \left\lceil 0.5 + (N - 1) \frac{x_n - x_{\min}}{x_{\max} - x_{\min}} \right\rceil \quad (1)$$

where  $y_n$  is an integer between zero and  $N - 1$ .

The co-occurrence matrix (Haralick et al., 1973),  $C^{(d)}$ , with point distance  $d$  has dimensions  $N \times N$  and each element  $c_{i,j}^{(d)}$  provides the probability of co-occurring the values  $y_i$  and  $y_j$  between two sample points with distance  $d$ . The co-occurrence matrix can be used to provide 2<sup>nd</sup> order statistical features related with the “texture” of a signal. From

the co-occurrence matrix the following features can be calculated (Haralick et al., 1973):

1. Maximum probability entry:

$$f_1 = \max_{i,j} \{c_{i,j}^{(d)}\}$$

2. Element difference moment of 2<sup>nd</sup> order:

$$f_2 = \sum_i \sum_j (i-j)^2 c_{i,j}^{(d)}$$

This feature has relatively low values when the high values of C are near the main diagonal.

3. Entropy:

$$f_3 = - \sum_i \sum_j c_{i,j}^{(d)} \log c_{i,j}^{(d)}$$

This is a measure of randomness, having its highest value when the elements of  $C^{(d)}$  are all equal.

4. Energy:

$$f_4 = \sum_i \sum_j [c_{i,j}^{(d)}]^2$$

This feature has relatively low values when all entries of co-occurrence matrix are equal. It measures the uniformity of a signal.

5. Homogeneity:

$$f_5 = \sum_i \sum_j \frac{c_{i,j}^{(d)}}{1+|i-j|}$$

This feature has relatively high value when the values of co-occurrence matrix are concentrated on the main diagonal.

In total, from each participant's ERPs,  $47 \times 5 = 235$  features were calculated.

## 2.2.2 Feature Selection

One of the most important tasks in a classification application is the selection of a subset of features from a (usually) large set of available features. If non-relevant features or features that characterized by low discriminatory power are selected, then the classification accuracy will be negatively affected. Additionally, reducing the number of features results in faster execution time of the classification task, making it possible to develop real time applications.

The feature selection methods can be grouped into two broad classes: filter methods and wrapper methods (Chandrashekar and Sahin, 2014). The filter methods perform feature selection using a criterion that is not dependent on the classifier to be used later. The most well-known criteria are the Pearson correlation coefficient (Guyon and Elisseeff, 2003) and the mutual information (Sotoca and Pla, 2010). On the other hand, the wrapper

methods use the performance of the classifier as a criterion.

Having selected the criterion, the next step is to determine the optimization strategy to be applied in order to achieve the best value of the criterion with respect to the available features. Several methods have been proposed in the literature, from simple ones like the sequential forward selection, sequential backward selection, sequential floating forward selection (Chandrashekar and Sahin, 2014), to more advanced ones, such as genetic algorithms (Tsai et al., 2013) or artificial immune networks (Yue et al., 2008).

In this paper, a simple feature selection method (Liu and Motoda, 1998), using as criterion the Wilcoxon test (Montgomery and Rumger, 2003) was applied. In particular, let  $\mathbf{D}$  be a matrix with  $Q$  rows and  $P$  columns. Each row corresponds to a feature vector that is formed by concatenating all the feature values from the 47 recordings of an observer. Each column corresponds to a feature. In our case,  $Q=32$  and  $P=235$ . Furthermore, let  $\mathbf{C}$  be a vector with  $Q$  elements, whose values belong to the set  $\{1,2\}$ . If the element of  $\mathbf{C}$  with index  $i$  has value 1 (respectively 2), then the  $i$ th row of  $\mathbf{D}$  corresponds to observation of correct (incorrect) action. Finally, let  $Z_j$  denote the Wilcoxon score using the  $j$ th column of  $\mathbf{D}$  and the vector  $\mathbf{C}$ . Then, the feature selection produces a vector of binary values  $\mathbf{x} = (x_1, x_2, \dots, x_P)$ , where  $x_i = 1$  (respectively  $x_i = 0$ ) indicates that the feature  $i$  has been selected (not selected) ( $i = 1, 2, \dots, P$ ). The algorithm evolves as follows:

- Initialization:
  - $\mathbf{f} = (\underbrace{1, 1, \dots, 1}_P), \mathbf{x} = (\underbrace{0, 0, \dots, 0}_P), k = 0$
  - Calculate the Wilcoxon score  $Z_j$  for each feature.
  - Find the most significant feature:
 
$$p = \arg \max_{\{j: f_j=1\}} \{Z_j\}$$
  - $f_p = 0, x_p = 1$
  - $k = k + 1$
- while  $k < K$  ( $K$  is the desired number of features):
  - For each  $i$  with  $f_i = 1$ , calculate the mean value of cross-correlation,  $\bar{\rho}_i$ , of the  $i$  column of  $\mathbf{D}$  with all previously selected columns of  $\mathbf{D}$ :

$$\bar{\rho}_i = \frac{1}{\sum_{j=1}^p x_j} \sum_{\{j:x_j=1\}} \frac{\sum_{q=1}^Q D_{qi} D_{qj}}{\sqrt{\sum_{q=1}^Q D_{qi}^2 \sum_{q=1}^Q D_{qj}^2}} \quad (2)$$

- Get a weighted Z score:

$$WZ_i = Z_i \cdot (1 - a \cdot \bar{\rho}_i) \quad (3)$$

- Select the feature with the highest weighted Z score

$$p = \arg \max_{\{j:f_j=1\}} \{WZ_j\}$$

- $f_p = 0, x_p = 1$
- $k = k + 1$

The parameter  $a$  ( $0 \leq a \leq 1$ ) sets a weighting. When  $a = 0$ , potential features are not weighted. A value of  $a$  close to 1 outweighs the significance statistic; this means that features that are highly correlated with the features already picked are less likely to be included in the output list.

### 2.2.3 Classification

The classification task aims to assign a feature vector to one of a predefined number of classes. There are two major types of classification algorithms: unsupervised and supervised. The unsupervised algorithms, also known as clustering algorithms, group the available feature vectors into clusters without prior knowledge of the true class of each feature vector. Representative algorithms are the k-means (Hartigan, 1975), fuzzy c-means (FCM) (Bezdek, 1981), self-organizing maps (SOMs) (Kohonen, 1982).

The supervised algorithms incorporate a training phase, using feature vectors with known class labels, which adjusts the parameters of the algorithms to (sub)optimal values. After the training phase, the algorithm can be used to classify feature vectors with unknown class labels. The most widely used supervised classification algorithms are the k-nearest neighbour algorithms, the artificial neural networks and the support vector machines (SVM) (Theodoridis and Koutroumbas, 2009).

The SVM algorithm (Steinwart and Christmann, 2008) was incorporated in the present work, due to the fact that it has been successfully applied to various classification tasks in multidisciplinary scientific fields. It is primarily an algorithm for binary (two classes) classification problems, but it can be extended to multiclass problems. Given a set feature vectors with known class labels, the

algorithm finds the hyperplane, among all possible hyperplanes, that has the maximum distance from the closest feature vectors of the two classes. The closest to the hyperplane feature vectors are called support vectors.

The hyperplane is a linear decision boundary. The SVM algorithm can be extended to use non-linear decision boundaries by means of the so-called kernels (Boser et al., 1992). One of the most widely used kernels is the radial basis function (RBF) kernel, with parameter  $\gamma > 0$  which is defined by the following equation:

$$k(\mathbf{d}_i, \mathbf{d}_j) = e^{-\gamma \|\mathbf{d}_i - \mathbf{d}_j\|^2} \quad (4)$$

where  $\mathbf{d}_i, \mathbf{d}_j$  denote two feature vectors. Obviously, the RBF kernel is a multidimensional Gaussian with variance  $1/2\gamma$ .

The performance of a classifier is usually evaluated by means of a cross validation scheme (Seymour, 1993), which involves the random separation the available feature vectors into training and testing sets. The training set is used in order to estimate the parameters of the classifier (support vectors in the case of SVM) and the testing set provides a benchmark for evaluating its performance. This process is repeated several times and the average performance is calculated. One of the most widely used forms of cross validation is the k-fold cross validation, where the available feature vectors are divided randomly into k equal sets. One set is used for testing the classifier and the remaining k-1 form the training set. The procedure is repeated k times, each time using a different set for testing purposes. One special case of the k-fold cross validation is the leave-one-out (LOO) cross-validation procedure, where each sets contains only one feature vector (i.e. k = number of feature vectors). Thus, each time one feature vector is left out for testing and the remaining ones are used for training. The LOO procedure was adopted in order to evaluate the performance of the SVM classifier in a reliable manner, taking into account the limited number of cases available in the classes, and in the same time avoid overtraining and achieving an acceptable generalization in the classification.

## 3 RESULTS

As was mentioned before, 235 features were calculated from each participant's ERPs. The feature selection algorithm was applied using the 32

available feature vectors (16 feature vectors from observations of correct actions and 16 feature vectors from observation of incorrect actions). In order to determine the number of features to be selected ( $K$ ), as well as the value of the weighting factor  $a$ , the value of the parameter  $\gamma$  of the radial basis function, the distance  $d$  between samples and the number of quantization levels  $N$ , all the combinations  $(K, a, \gamma, d, N)$ , for  $K = 1, 2, \dots, 10$ ,  $a = 0, 0.1, 0.2, \dots, 1$ ,  $\gamma = 0.5, 1.0, 1.5, \dots, 5$ ,  $d = 1, 2, \dots, 5$  and  $N = 25, 50, 75, 100$  were investigated. For each combination, feature selection method and the SVM classifier with the LOO approach were applied. The best classification results were 81.3% for Class 1 (observation of correct actions) and 87.5% for Class 2 (observation of incorrect actions), providing total classification accuracy 84.4%. Table I lists the results in the form of a confusion matrix.

Table 1: Confusion matrix.

Actual Class	Predicted Class	
	Class 1	Class 2
Class 1	13	3
Class 2	2	14

The aforementioned results were obtained for  $(K, a, \gamma, d, N) = (2, 0.8, 1, 1, 50)$ . The selected features were the entropy and uniformity of electrode 24. Table II presents the mean value and the standard deviation of each selected feature for the two classes.

Table 2: Mean values and standard deviations in parentheses of selected Features for the two classes.

Feature	Class	
	Class 1	Class 2
Entropy of electrode 24	4.66 (0.098)	4.47 (0.16)
Energy of electrode 24	0.012 (0.002)	0.017 (0.005)

As can be observed, the entropy is in average slightly higher in Class 1 than in Class 2, which means that the co-occurrence matrices of the ERPs from observations of correct actions are in general more uniform than the ones from observations of incorrect actions. On the other hand, the energy is in average slightly lower in Class 1 than in Class 2, which also means that the co-occurrence matrices of the ERPs from observations of correct actions are in general more uniform than the ones from observations of incorrect actions.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, the identification of observations of correct or incorrect actions was studied by means of event related potentials. A methodology using statistical feature selection and the SVM algorithm was applied. The proposed methodology reduced significantly the initial large number of features, providing satisfactory classification results.

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