



Cornell University
Office of Statistical Consulting

Colleges of Human Ecology and Agriculture and Life Sciences
Division of Nutritional Sciences

StatNews #36: Data Translation Software

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Transferring data files from one statistical software package to another has never been easier. Since we addressed this question more than three years ago in [StatNews #4](#), significant progress has been made regarding choices and flexibility in the transfer process.

Software has been developed whose unique function is to transfer data from one software format to another. The two packages upon which we most rely are DBMS/COPY and Stat/Transfer.

DBMS/COPY version 7 can translate files from over 70 different formats, including SAS versions 7 and 8. This latest version of DBMS/COPY offers quite a worthwhile upgrade. Now it also translates files across platforms seamlessly and very quickly; for example, it can convert a file from SPSS for Macintosh to SPSS for Windows, or from SAS for Unix to SAS for Windows without having to create transport files. It will also transfer the formats associated with the variables so that variable labels and value labels can be preserved, such as during a transfer of a dataset from SPSS to SAS. DBMS/COPY costs \$295 and is available from Conceptual Software, Inc. (1-800-328-2686 or <http://www.conceptual.com/>).

Stat/Transfer 5.0 offers 25 possible formats of data to translate, including some cross-platform transfers. Stat/Transfer is issued by the STATA Corporation (1-800-782-8272 or <http://www.stata.com/info/products/transfer.html>) for \$49.

Most of the statistical software packages will now allow you to open or save a data file in Excel format. One limitation is that some statistical packages might require the Excel file to be saved as an Excel Worksheet (as opposed to the default Workbook format) of a previous version. It is very tempting to use Excel to transfer files between statistical packages, but if you do, check your data thoroughly once they are imported. On several different occasions, I experienced errors creeping into the data during the process. For example, I noticed that under certain conditions a variable could be completely set to missing if the first observation of this variable is missing in the Excel file. Because of the potential of these errors, we do not recommend translating data in this way.

If you cannot justify purchasing DBMS/COPY or Stat/Transfer because your need to transfer data files is only occasional, the Office of Statistical Consulting will gladly help you translate your files or let you use a computer with the required software. If you wish to experiment with these software packages before deciding if you want to purchase one, or for any additional information, do not hesitate to contact me.

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