

RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY

American Journal of
PHYSICAL
ANTHROPOLOGY
The Official Journal of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists

Error in geometric morphometric data collection: Combining data from multiple sources

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Abstract

Objectives: This study compares two- and three-dimensional morphometric data to determine the extent to which intra- and interobserver and intermethod error influence the outcomes of statistical analyses.

Materials and Methods: Data were collected five times for each method and observer on 14 anthropoid crania using calipers, a MicroScribe, and 3D models created from NextEngine and microCT scans. ANOVA models were used to examine variance in the linear data at the level of genus, species, specimen, observer, method, and trial. Three-dimensional data were analyzed using geometric morphometric methods; principal components analysis was employed to examine how trials of all specimens were distributed in morphospace and Procrustes distances among trials were calculated and used to generate UPGMA trees to explore whether all trials of the same individual grouped together regardless of observer or method.

Results: Most variance in the linear data was at the genus level, with greater variance at the observer than method levels. In the 3D data, interobserver and intermethod error were similar to intraspecific distances among *Callicebus cupreus* individuals, with interobserver error being higher than intermethod error. Generally, taxa separate well in morphospace, with different trials of the same specimen typically grouping together. However, trials of individuals in the same species overlapped substantially with one another.

Conclusion: Researchers should be cautious when compiling data from multiple methods and/or observers, especially if analyses are focused on intraspecific variation or closely related species, as in these cases, patterns among individuals may be obscured by interobserver and intermethod error. Conducting interobserver and intermethod reliability assessments prior to the collection of data is recommended.

KEYWORDS

3D scanning, data archiving and sharing, geometric morphometrics, measurement error, MicroScribe digitizer

1 | INTRODUCTION

There is an ever-increasing number of instruments available for collecting linear and three-dimensional (3D) data. These instruments include calipers (and other “traditional” instruments), 3D digitizers such as the MicroScribe and Polhemus Patriot, digital cameras to take pictures for 3D photogrammetry, laser or structured light scanners that create high-density point cloud datasets of the surfaces of objects (e.g., NextEngine

3D laser scanner, HDI blue LED scanners, Artec 3D structured light scanners, etc.), and X-ray computed tomography (CT) systems that create stacks of X-ray images that can be used to generate 3D volumetric models of hard- and soft-tissue structures. The availability of these tools over the past two decades has resulted in the collection of a large number of morphometric datasets that are increasingly being shared and published online via websites such as morphosource.org, digimorph.org, paleo-org.com, primo.nycep.org, and phenome10k.org

(e.g., Adams, Olah, McCurry, and Potze, 2015; Copes, Lucas, Thosten, Hoekstra, and Boyer, 2016). As a result, many studies now include data pooled from multiple observers and/or data collection methods. Pooling data in this way provides multiple benefits to both institutions and researchers (e.g., decreased handling of museum specimens, more wide-spread access to rare or fragile specimens, and increased sample sizes and, thus, statistical power). However, combining data from multiple observers and/or data collection methods also introduces the possibility of increased measurement error resulting from difficulties in consistently identifying the positions of landmarks. In 3D geometric morphometric studies in particular, this error could be derived from any number of sources, including random observer error in placing landmarks by one or more of the observers (i.e., digitizing error), different interpretations among observers of the positions of anatomical landmarks, potentially due to landmark definitions that are too imprecise for geometric morphometric studies (von Cramon-Taubadel, Frazier, & Lahr, 2007), which introduces systematic error into the dataset, and/or variation in the precision of the different instruments used to collect the data. This may lead to a reduction in the “biologically relevant signal to noise ratio” (Fruciano, 2016) due to increasing the Type II error rate, which ultimately functions to reduce statistical power (Arnqvist & Martensson, 1998). While the primary focus of the study presented here is on measurement error due to variation in the repeated placement of 3D landmarks, this same issue is inherent in traditional 2D morphometrics in attempting to determine where to position instruments (e.g., the tips of calipers) when measuring specimens, as has been noted in many previous studies (e.g., Hanihara et al., 1999; Kouchi and Koizumi, 1985; Shaner, Bamforth, Peterson, and Beattie, 1998; Utermohle, Zegura, and Heathcote, 1983).

Many researchers routinely assess intra- and interobserver error when conducting either traditional or geometric morphometric studies by themselves or with colleagues, often in pilot studies on a subset of their sample. However, results of such error analyses are typically either not presented or presented only cursorily. Furthermore, in studies where data are obtained from online or published sources, error analyses such as these are usually not possible. To address this issue, a number of researchers have examined the levels of interobserver and intermethod error that are introduced when combining datasets that include data collected in three dimensions for morphometric analysis (e.g., Badawi-Fayad and Cabanis, 2007; Barbeito-Andrés, Anzelmo, Ventrice, and Sardi, 2012; Campomanes-Álvarez et al., 2015; Dujardin, Kaba, and Henry, 2010; Fourie, Damstra, Gerrits, and Ren, 2011; Gonzalez, Bernal, and Perez, 2009; Hassett and Lewis-Bale, 2016; Katz and Friess 2014; Muñoz-Muñoz and Perpiñán, 2010; Muñoz-Muñoz et al., 2016; Shearer et al., 2014; Sholts, Flores, Walker, and Wärm-länder, 2011; Singleton, 2002; Slizewski, Friess, and Semal, 2010; Tocheri et al., 2011; Williams and Richtsmeier, 2003). However, all of these studies of error have focused on a limited number of methods and/or specimens.

Critically, most of the studies examining the accuracy of morphometric data collection that include data collected in 3D have not explicitly compared whether the results obtained from analyses of the same

specimens are statistically similar when those data are collected by different observers using a variety of methods. Specifically, it remains unclear whether the same phenetic relationships among individuals and species in a given sample would be recovered when different observers measure the same specimens using different methods to obtain 3D landmark data. In other words, how reliably can we come to the same statistical conclusion when different observers and/or methods are employed? Such a study would enable researchers to gauge whether it is appropriate to combine 3D datasets collected by different observers and/or data collection methods (i.e., MicroScribe, surface scan, or CT scan data), when conducting morphometric analyses. Might levels of interobserver (and/or intermethod) measurement error be sufficiently large as to make it difficult to distinguish among individuals within a species (especially those exhibiting limited morphological variation) and/or between closely related species (e.g., Dujardin et al., 2010)?

To address this question, this study compares two- and three-dimensional morphometric data collected on the same 14 anthropoid cranial specimens by 2 observers using 4 methods to determine the extent to which intra- and interobserver and intermethod error influence the outcomes of statistical analyses. Specifically, we assess whether these levels of error are statistically significantly different than variation among individuals of the same species, or individuals in different taxa (e.g., species, genera, or families). In addition, we investigate whether analyses of datasets compiled by different observers and/or using different methods recover the same phenetic relationships among individuals within and between species. Finally, we conduct a preliminary and exploratory comparison of the extent of intraobserver error introduced by different methods of collecting data and of levels of identification precision in digitizing these particular cranial landmarks. It is important to note that the goal of this research is not an assessment of the biological relationships among the focal specimens, but an investigation of the impact of measurement error on the potential to accurately assess relationships among individuals.

2 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 | Sample and data collection

We analyzed 14 adult cranial specimens from 11 species ranging in size from *Callicebus* (male body mass = 1.02 kg) to *Gorilla* (male body mass = ~170 kg) (Table 1) (masses taken from Smith and Jungers, 1997). For each cranium, two experienced observers (CAR and CET) collected both 2D and 3D data five times (i.e., “trials”) using each method. Four data collection methods were employed: (1) 15 linear measurements (Table 2) were collected using Mitutoyo digital calipers; and 24 3D landmarks (Figure 1) were collected (2) directly on the specimen using a MicroScribe-3DX (MS) digitizer, on (3) scans obtained using a NextEngine (NE) laser scanner, and on (4) surface models created from microCT scans generated using a GE Phoenix v|tome|x s 240 high-resolution scanner (CT) in Landmark Editor 3.0.0.6 (Wiley et al., 2005). For the NextEngine, each specimen was scanned from at least three different orientations with nine scans per orientation. For each

TABLE 1 Specimens utilized in this study

Taxon	Specimen number(s) (sex)
<i>Aotus azarae</i>	AMNH 36508 (F)
<i>Callicebus cupreus</i>	AMNH 72141 (F), 72143 (M), 75987 (M), 75988 (F)
<i>Allenopithecus nigroviridis</i>	AMNH 86856 (M)
<i>Cercopithecus albogularis</i>	AMNH 27717 ^a (U)
<i>Cercopithecus mitis</i>	AMNH 52355 ^a (M)
<i>Macaca hecki</i>	AMNH 152890 (M)
<i>Macaca sylvanus</i>	AMNH 202391 (M)
<i>Papio hamadryas anubis</i>	AMNH 82185 (M)
<i>Gorilla gorilla</i>	AMNH 99–9686 (M)
<i>Nomascus leucogenys</i>	AMNH 87251 (M)
<i>Pan troglodytes</i>	AMNH 167344 ^a (M)

^aNo CT scan available.

M = male; F = female; U = sex unknown.

orientation, ScanStudio version 2.0.2 software (NextEngine, Inc.) was used to process the images, removing extraneous material (e.g., molding clay), and to fuse the nine images together. The scans of each specimen taken from different orientations were then further digitally cleaned, aligned, and merged in Geomagic Studio 2014 software (3D Systems, Inc.). For the microCT data, scans were taken from at least two different orientations to ensure digital capture of the entire specimen. The different orientations were merged using Phoenix datos|x CT software (General Electric) and VGStudio 2.2 (Volume Graphics) to create .tiff stacks of the entire specimen. The .tiff stacks of microCT data

were loaded into Avizo 8.0 (FEI Software) and the “thresholding” tool was employed to remove extraneous material from the scans. During this process, the full 3D surface of the specimen along with slices in the xy, xz, and yz axes are viewed and the density threshold manually adjusted until only bone is selected in all of the views. The “generate surface” module in Avizo was then used to merge the .tiff stack slices and create a 3D surface model (.ply). While some have noted that different thresholding settings can substantially influence the 3D morphology of the trabecular bone in the resulting models (Fajardo, Ryan, & Kappelman, 2002), it is unlikely that this will have a significant impact on the morphology of the external surface bone, although this may be worth investigating in a future study. The file size was reduced to approximately 5 million “faces” for each scan using the “simplification editor” tool in Avizo so that the files could be opened in Landmark Editor. The MicroScribe has a measured accuracy of approximately 0.23 mm (Immersion Corp.), the NextEngine 0.13 mm (NextEngine, Inc.), and the microCT resolution varied between ~0.049 and 0.142 mm depending on scan parameters (which varied slightly among specimens, as is often the case for data downloaded from online repositories). For comparison with the caliper data, 3D data were converted to linear measurements by calculating interlandmark distances (Table 2). The 3D data were also used in separate geometric morphometric analyses (outlined below).

2.2 | Linear distance data analysis

A series of random effects (Model II) hierarchical (i.e., nested) analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were run on the linear data to explore the extent of variance explained by genus, species, specimen, observer, method, and trial. This analysis was conducted separately for each of the linear variables scaled to size by dividing each measurement by the

TABLE 2 Linear measurements employed in this analysis

Measurement	Abbreviation	Definition
Maximum cranial length	MaxCranLg	Glabella to opisthocranium
Maximum cranial height	MaxCranHt	Basion to bregma
Maxillary breadth	MaxBr	Right ectomolare at M1 to left ectomolare at M1
Nasal breadth	NasalBr	Left alare to right alare
Nasal height	NasalHt	Nasion to nasospinale
Palate breadth	PalateBr	Right endomolare at M1 to left endomolare at M1
Palate length	PalateLg	Orale to staphylion
Facial length	FacialLg	Basion to prosthion
Biarticular breadth	BiArtBr	Right articular eminence midpoint to left articular eminence midpoint
Biporionic breadth	BiPorBr	Right porion to left porion
Bizygomatic breadth	BiZygBr	Maximum distance between the left and right zygomatic arches
Mandible length (on cranium) L	MandLgL	Midpoint of the articular eminence to prosthion, left side
Mandible length (on cranium) R	MandLgR	Midpoint of the articular eminence to prosthion, right side
Biorbital breadth	BiOrbBr	Right ectoconchion to left ectoconchion
Foramen magnum length	FMLg	Basion to opisthion

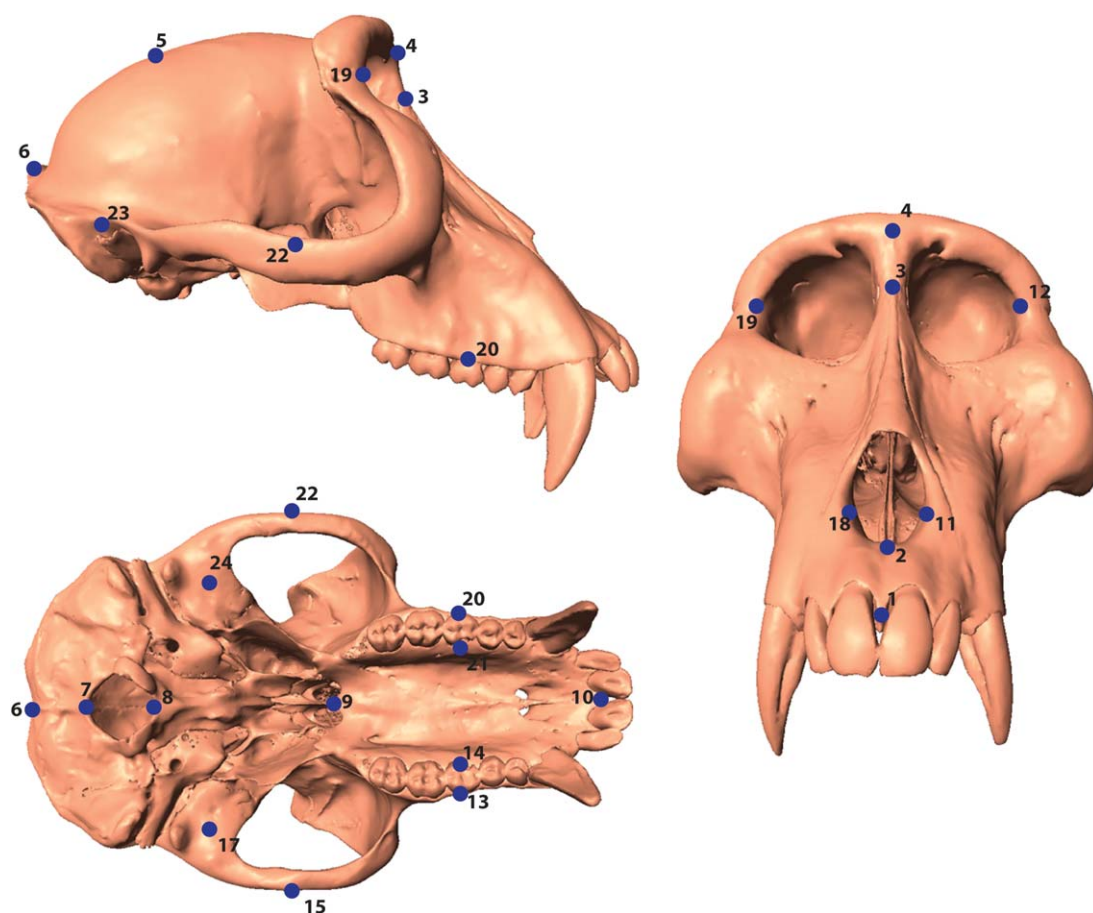


FIGURE 1 Landmarks used in this study as shown on a CT reconstruction of an adult male *Macaca hecki* cranium. Numbers correspond to landmark definitions in Table 3

geometric mean of all measurements, and each of the levels was nested within the other such that the lowest level (trial/error) was nested in all of the other levels. All analyses were performed in the program Statgraphics XVII (Statpoint Technologies, Inc.). In addition, measurement error for the linear data was assessed by calculating the mean error across all linear distances for a given specimen. For each linear variable (e.g., maximum cranial length), this error estimate was calculated using the formula = $ABS((\text{Trial\#} - (\text{mean of all trials})) / (\text{mean of all trials})) \times 100$. We calculated these errors separately for each method and each observer, and we statistically tested for differences in the level of error via a two-way ANOVA with Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) tests for multiple comparisons.

2.3 | 3D data analysis

The 3D data were analyzed using geometric morphometric methods. In addition to an analysis of all trials of all specimens (i.e., the entire dataset), six separate analyses (broken down by observer/method) were run on the 11 specimens for which CT scans were available (Table 1). For each analysis, specimens were superimposed using Procrustes methods and a principal components analysis (PCA) was performed in Morphologika (O'Higgins & Jones, 1998) to examine how specimens were distributed in morphospace. If error is low, we would anticipate

that all trials of the same individual, even those derived from data gathered by different observers using different methods, group together in morphospace.

Procrustes distances were calculated among trials of the same specimen, among observers, among methods, and all combinations therein (a total of 15,355 distances). This enabled us to document the extent of differences in the overall shape of the same specimen in multiple ways: measured by (1) the same observer using the same method (intraobserver error), (2) different observers using the same method (interobserver error), and (3) the same observer using a different method (intraobserver + intermethod error). We compared these distances to distances between specimens in the same species (intraspecific distances), the same genus (intrageneric distances), and among genera (intergeneric distances) and superfamilies (interfamily+ distances) that were collected by the same observer using the same method. Procrustes distances were also used to generate Unweighted Pair Group Method with Arithmetic Mean (UPGMA) trees to explore whether all trials of the same individual grouped together and whether the topologies of the six trees generated when the data were collected by the two different observers using different methods were the same.

To assess how each experimental level contributed to shape variation among configurations, we performed a Procrustes ANOVA (Anderson, 2001; Collyer, Sekora, & Adams, 2015; Goodall, 1991). As

TABLE 3 Landmarks used in this analysis and their levels of error

Landmark #	Landmark Name	Mean deviation from centroid of landmark
1	Prosthion	0.0044
2	Nasospinale	0.0056
3	Nasion	0.0070
4	Glabella	0.0055
5	Bregma	0.0125
6	Opisthocranium	0.0105
7	Opisthion	0.0049
8	Basion	0.0041
9	Staphylion	0.0058
10	Orale	0.0055
11	L alare	0.0065
12	L ectoconchion	0.0117
13	L ectomolare	0.0046
14	L endomolare	0.0045
15	L zygion	0.0151
16	L porion	0.0071
17	L articular eminence midpoint	0.0069
18	R alare	0.0056
19	R ectoconchion	0.0122
20	R ectomolare	0.0044
21	R endomolare	0.0046
22	R zygion	0.0162
23	R porion	0.0072
24	R articular eminence midpoint	0.0068

with the 2D ANOVA, all levels were nested within one another such that the lowest level (trial/error) was nested in all of the other levels. All factors were considered to be random effects. Per Collyer et al. (2015), we utilized a residual randomization permutation procedure with 9,999 iterations to assess the significance of the model. This analysis was performed in the program R (R Development Core Team, 2008) using the package "Geomorph" (Adams & Otárola-Castillo, 2013).

To assess whether the amount of measurement error for each specimen is influenced by size (i.e., is it more difficult to precisely replicate the placement of landmarks on smaller or larger specimens?), we regressed Procrustes distances against centroid size. For example, given two trials of the same specimen (collected by a single observer using the same method), we calculated the Procrustes distance between those trials and regressed this distance on the mean centroid size of those two trials. We did this for all possible combinations of the five trials conducted for each specimen by each observer using each method. This gave us a measure of the relationship between

intraobserver error and overall size of the specimen. Mean centroid size was log transformed for analysis, and regression analyses were conducted in Microsoft Office Excel 2007.

Finally, an exploratory assessment of which landmarks were most difficult to consistently identify in the 3D analyses was performed. First, for each specimen, the mean landmark configuration was calculated based on the data for all trials of that specimen. Second, the distance between each landmark mean and the position of that landmark for each trial was calculated and an average of the deviation of all landmarks from the centroid was determined. Third, mean deviations for all specimens for each landmark were added together and averaged. While this method is effective for determining which landmarks exhibit the highest intraobserver error levels, the true difference in error between landmarks exhibiting the largest dispersion and other landmarks cannot be precisely determined using this method and will be larger than we report due to the "Pinocchio effect" (e.g., von Cramon-Taubadel et al., 2007).

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Linear distance data analysis

The ANOVA results show that the most variance in the linear data was at the genus level (24.0–90.1%) other than for the measurement of relative foramen magnum length for which the most variance was at the level of the specimen (69.9% of variance) and relative nasal height where the most variance was at the level of the species (48.4%) (Figure 2 and Table 4). The second-most variance was found at the level of specimen (i.e., differences among *Callicebus* individuals), although the amount of variance specimen differences contribute to the overall variance differs substantially among the measurements. Following that, the most variance was at the level of species, but again the amount of variance attributed to species was considerably different for the different measurements. The next-most variance was at the level of observer (i.e., interobserver error)—contributing up to 18% of the variance—followed by trial (i.e., intraobserver error). Error due to use of different methods was minimal. On average, measurement error was highest for the MicroScribe data, followed closely by the caliper data, with the lowest errors for the NextEngine (NE) and CT scan data (Figure 3). These trends were similar when the data from each observer were examined separately. The two-way ANOVA revealed that both method ($F = 10.621$, $p < 0.0001$) and observer ($F = 10.225$, $p = 0.002$) were significant factors, though there was no interaction effect between method and observer. The Tukey's HSD test indicated that error was significantly higher for MicroScribe data than for data collected using any of the other three methods (Figure 3).

3.2 | 3D data analysis

Not surprisingly, Procrustes distances were smallest between trials of specimens measured by the same observer using the same method (intraobserver error), although distances between the trials using the MicroScribe were slightly higher than for those using the other two

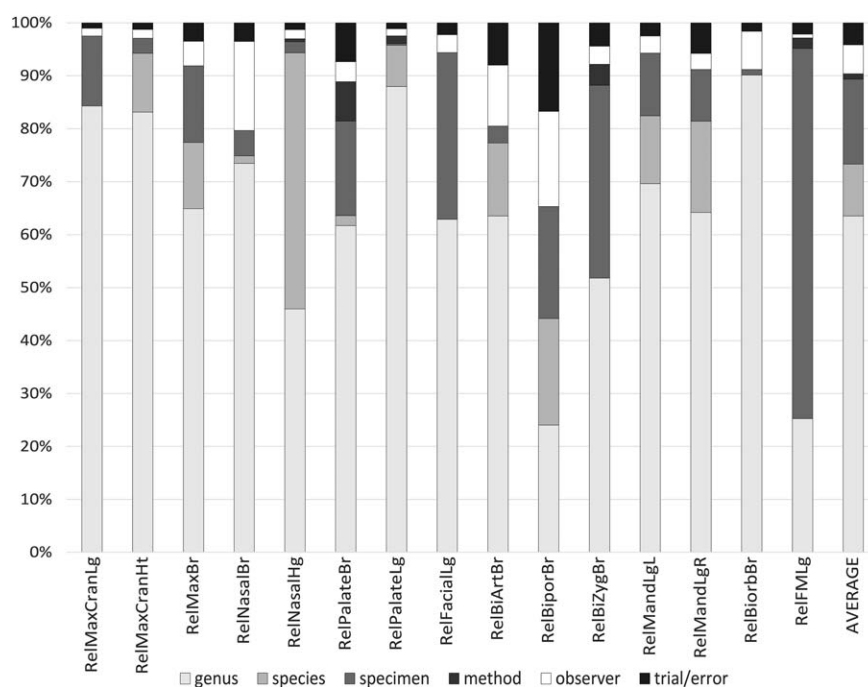


FIGURE 2 Bar chart showing the percentage variance attributed to each of the experimental levels in the hierarchical (nested) ANOVA model for each linear measurement and the average for all measurements

methods (Figure 4). Interobserver and intermethod (i.e., comparisons of different methods of data collection by the same observer) error are similar to, but slightly smaller than, intraspecific distances among *Callicebus cupreus* individuals, which are only slightly less than intrageneric distances between the two *Cercopithecus* species. Interobserver error was higher on average than intermethod error. However, distances between data collected using a MicroScribe and data collected with the NextEngine or CT scan were considerably higher than distances between data collected with the NextEngine and CT scan. This may be due to the greater similarity between the methods of data collection on the CT and NextEngine scans (i.e., in both cases, landmarks are placed on 3D models using the program Landmark Editor).

In the PCA of the entire dataset (Figure 5), taxa were generally well-separated from one another and different trials of the same specimen typically grouped together on the plot of PCs 1 and 2 (which account for approximately 65% of the overall variance). In many cases, trials of one specimen by the same observer, using the same method, clustered most closely together. For some specimens (e.g., *Macaca sylvanus* and *Nomascus*), most trials by one observer grouped together, while for other specimens (e.g., *Cercopithecus albogularis*), most trials using the same method grouped together. Notably, the four *Callicebus* specimens overlap substantially such that different trials of these individuals do not consistently group with one another. There is also overlap between the trials of the two *Cercopithecus* taxa and between *Allenopithecus* and *Pan*, though the distributions for the latter two taxa were clearly separated on PC 3 (not shown).

When PCAs were performed separately by observer and method (Figure 6), specimen distributions on PC1 and 2 (which account for over 65% of the variance in all six analyses) are broadly similar across

all plots, particularly on PC 1. On PC 2, the positions of the platyrrhine specimens and *Nomascus* are fairly consistent on the six PCAs (with the exception of *Aotus* grouping with *Nomascus* in the CETNE plot), while there is more variation in the loadings of other catarrhine species. In general, the three PCAs derived from data collected by each observer using different methods are more similar to one another than to those derived from data collected by the other observer using the same method, although the two MicroScribe PCAs exhibit similarities (particularly in the relative positions of the catarrhine taxa on the positive end of PC 1).

Trials of each specimen generally grouped together in the UPGMA tree of the entire dataset (Figure 7 and Supporting Information, Figures 1–4). The most notable exception to this is with the *Callicebus* specimens for which there were no consistent groupings. In addition, seven trials of *Cercopithecus albogularis* group together with the *Cercopithecus mitis* trials and five trials of *Macaca sylvanus* form an outgroup for the *Allenopithecus* and *M. sylvanus* grouping. The topologies of the six UPGMA trees (Supporting Information, Figures 5 and 6) based on data collected by different observers/methods are similar to one another, with the exception of the *Callicebus* specimens, with different combinations of specimens (and, in a few cases, trials) grouping most closely together in the six trees. In addition, three *Macaca* trials do not group with the other trials collected on that specimen in the CARMS and CARCT trees (Supporting Information, Figure 5).

Results of the Procrustes ANOVA (Table 5) echo those of the ANOVA models of the linear distance data. All factors were significant ($p = 0.0001$) contributors to shape variation in the model except for trial/error. The factor with the highest R^2 value was genus ($R^2 = 0.7422$), followed by species ($R^2 = 0.07$), observer ($R^2 = 0.06$), method ($R^2 =$

TABLE 4 Percentage variance attributed to each of the experimental levels for each 2D linear variable

	RelMaxCranLg	RelMaxCranHt	RelMaxBr	RelNasalBr	RelNasalHg	RelPalateBr	RelPalateLg	RelFacialLg	RelBiArtBr	RelBiporBr	RelBiZygBr	RelMandLgL	RelMandLgR	RelBiorBr	RelFMLg	Average
Genus	84.3	83.2	64.9	73.5	46.0	61.7	88.0	62.9	63.5	24.0	51.8	69.6	64.2	90.1	25.2	63.5
Species	0.0	11.1	12.5	1.5	48.4	1.9	7.8	0.0	13.8	20.1	0.0	12.8	17.3	0.0	0.0	9.8
Specimen	13.2	2.8	14.5	4.8	2.1	17.9	0.3	31.5	3.2	21.2	36.5	11.8	9.8	1.0	69.9	16.0
Method	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	7.4	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	1.0
Observer	1.5	1.7	4.6	16.8	1.7	3.8	1.3	3.4	11.5	18.0	3.4	3.2	3.0	7.2	0.7	5.5
Trial/Error	1.0	1.2	3.5	3.5	1.3	7.4	1.1	2.3	8.0	16.7	4.4	2.5	5.8	1.6	2.1	4.2

Values correspond to Figure 2.

0.03), and specimen ($R^2 = 0.01$). This suggests that shape variation among taxa swamps error related to different observers or methods.

Overall, the correlation between mean centroid size and Procrustes distance is weak but significant ($p = 0.006$), with a correlation coefficient of 0.01 (Figure 8). However, in general there is less error in measurements of larger specimens and there is less variance in the extent of error for larger specimens. This weak relationship, with a trend toward measurements of larger specimens exhibiting less error than smaller individuals, was particularly notable for the MicroScribe data ($R^2 = 0.052$, $p = 0.0001$) (Figure 8).

The investigation of which landmarks were most difficult to consistently position precisely found that four landmarks (bregma, opisthocranion, ectoconchion, and zygion) had substantially greater mean deviations from the centroid landmark than all other landmarks (Table 3). Deviations from the mean were very similar between the left and right sides for landmarks that were collected bilaterally.

4 | DISCUSSION

Limited access to museum collections, reductions in available funding (along with increasing numbers of researchers applying for those funds), and/or a lack of time to devote to data collection often necessitates researchers pooling their data and/or including data from online or published sources in their analyses. While this necessity is understandable, in studies where it is possible (e.g., where data are derived from multiple colleagues or students contributing to the same project), intra- and interobserver reliability tests should be (and typically are) conducted prior to and following data collection to ensure comparability of data. This is clearly important even for experienced researchers as colleagues may have varying interpretations of the position of some landmarks. However, when this is not possible, the results of this study suggest that researchers should be cautious in compiling data collected by multiple observers and/or using different methods, particularly if the goal of the study in question is to examine intraspecific variation or relationships among closely related species. In general, we found that interobserver error is slightly greater than intermethod error and that in general both overlap substantially with the levels of variance among *Callicebus cupreus* individuals and that as well as with levels of variance between *Cercopithecus* species. The one exception was the lower levels of error produced when combining data derived from the NextEngine and CT scans. This suggests that combining datasets collected by multiple observers and/or using different methods may obscure researchers' abilities to identify differences within and among closely related species. It should be noted, however, that *Callicebus cupreus* is a relatively monomorphic species (Ford, 1994) and, thus, one would expect intraspecific variation to be relatively low in this taxon. It is possible that in more dimorphic species, intraspecific variation may be significantly greater than interobserver and intermethod error.

4.1 | Interobserver error

Previous studies examining interobserver error in collecting 3D data have come to a variety of conclusions about whether it is advisable to

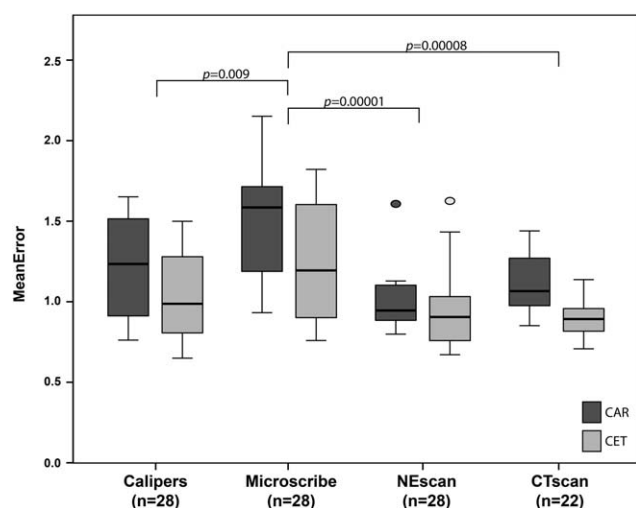


FIGURE 3 Box plots of mean error among specimens per method for each observer for the linear measurements. Darkened bars represent the median value for each group, boxes show the interquartile range (25th to 75th percentile), and the whiskers extend to 1.5 times the interquartile range. Outliers are designated by circles. *p* values represent the significance of differences in error among methods

combine datasets collected by different observers. Using angular, relative area, and curvature data derived from CT and NextEngine scans, one analysis found that the effects of interobserver error were small compared to differences between *Gorilla* taxa (Tocheri et al., 2011). Another study reported that interobserver error of landmarks, while

three times greater than intraobserver error, was also acceptably small compared to the size of the specimens (Singleton, 2002). Similarly, interobserver variance in the position of landmarks and semilandmarks was found to be quite small and had no influence on estimating the sex of human crania using 3D morphometrics (Gonzalez et al., 2009). Others, however, reported results similar to the current study by finding significant interobserver error (Dujardin et al., 2010; Shearer et al., 2014). One analysis (Shearer et al., 2014) that collected data using laser/structured light and CT scans found rates of interobserver error that were substantially higher than intraobserver and intermethod error, to the extent that interobserver error was approximately equivalent to the difference between two macaque species. Consequently, this study concluded that interobserver error can potentially influence the ability to correctly identify biological differences among species (Shearer et al., 2014). Similarly, Dujardin et al. (2010) found that classification errors of individuals to one of two closely related species increased when multiple observers digitized specimens, rather than when all data were collected by a single individual; thus, the repeatability of landmark position identification was reduced when multiple observers collected the data. Dujardin et al. (2010) subsequently noted that web-based repositories for images would enable researchers to download and digitize all specimens themselves, thereby eliminating interobserver error. Another possibility, not discussed by those authors, is to share the images among those collecting data for the project and run interobserver reliability tests on a subset of the data to reduce error due to multiple observers. This may be necessary if sample sizes are large and/or researchers are constrained by a limited time budget.

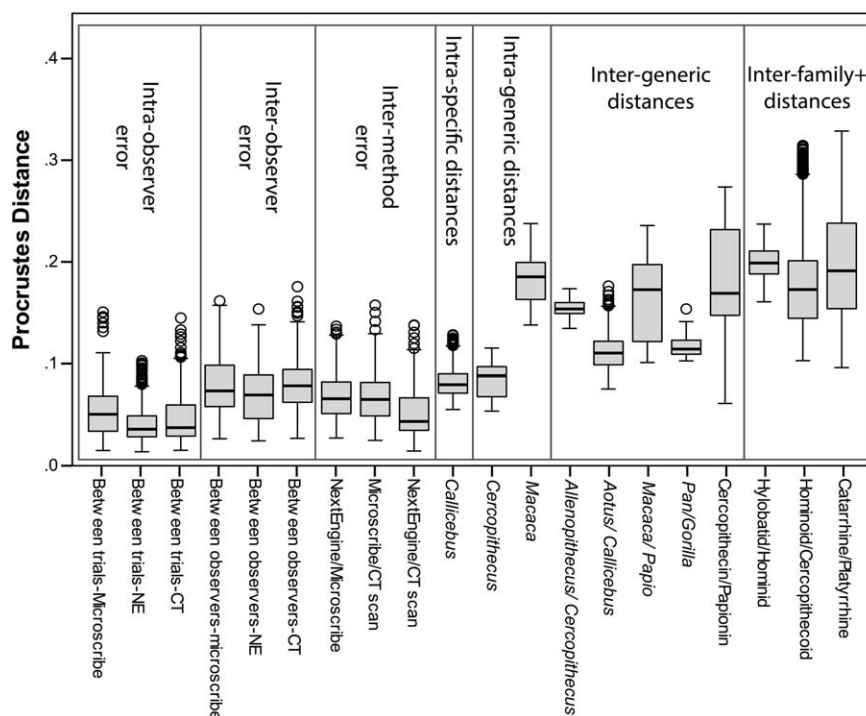


FIGURE 4 Box plot of Procrustes distances within and among observers, methods, and taxa. Darkened bars represent the median value for each group, boxes show the interquartile range (25th to 75th percentile), and the whiskers extend to 1.5 times the interquartile range. Outliers are designated by circles

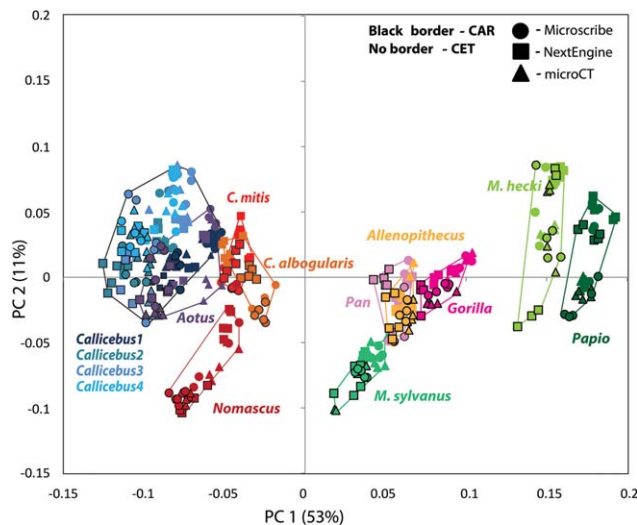


FIGURE 5 Bivariate plot of PC 1 (x-axis) versus PC 2 (y-axis) for the entire sample, where all trials by observer, method, and for all specimens are included. Convex hulls show distributions in morphospace for each specimen. Note that there are no microCT data for *Pan*, *C. albogularis*, or *C. mitis*

While the observers in this study both have extensive experience with the collection of 3D landmark data on primate crania, interobserver error levels could potentially be influenced by observers with differing amounts of experience with identifying landmarks (Barbeito-Andrés et al., 2012; Fruciano, 2016; Shearer et al., 2014) or by the extent to which researchers discuss how to define the positions of landmarks prior to data collection. One recent study found no statistically significant difference between the placement of landmarks by students and experts on photographs of faces from various orientations (Campomanes-Álvarez et al., 2015). However, another argued that interobserver differences in the placement of landmarks and semi-landmarks on 3D models derived from CT scans may be due to previous experience with landmarking and suggested that measurement error may be reduced as researchers gain experience (Barbeito-Andrés et al., 2012).

4.2 | Intermethod error

Researchers often either assess themselves or use published data to determine which methods afford the greatest degree of replicability, making necessarily subjective decisions on their research design based on how much error is acceptable for their particular study and also the time and financial budget available. Certain methods—using a MicroScribe digitizer, for example—are substantially faster than others, while other techniques are much more expensive and time consuming and do not employ transportable instruments (e.g., microCT). However, these more demanding methods collect much more detailed information about the specimen, including its internal structure, and, as the results above suggest, may allow for more precision in the placement of landmarks. Moreover, for some features, 3D surface or volumetric scans may be necessary to sufficiently document their morphology.

While some have argued that scanners provide a preservational benefit over digitizers in reducing contact with specimens (Friess, 2012), specimens must still be handled and secured for scanning, which seems more likely to cause damage than, for example, the tip of the MicroScribe stylus. However, if scans are taken only once and then placed in a repository, total handling of specimens via repeated data collection can be decreased. The data presented in the current study show that collecting linear data from scans rather than directly on the specimens using calipers or a MicroScribe reduces error, although the differences are fairly minor and the extent of intraobserver error is similar among the three 3D methods. Muñoz-Muñoz and Perpiñán (2010) also documented greater measurement error in general when collecting data with calipers than in linear data derived from landmarks placed on 2D computerized images. While earlier studies found evidence that coordinate data collected using digitizers were more precise than those collected from CT scans (Williams & Richtsmeier, 2003), this may be due to the lower resolution of the CT scanner used in those analyses. In addition, Fernandes et al. (2015) found that measurements derived from landmarks placed on 3D CT scans of human mandibles were systematically lower than those collected using calipers. They argued that this may reflect a systematic error in the measurement software they employed or could be related to the difficulty of taking measurements on 3D volumetric specimens and suggested caution in collecting linear data on 3D models. We found no evidence of such a systematic difference between the linear distances collected using calipers and from CT scans. It should be noted, though, that different observers collected the caliper and CT scan data in the Fernandes et al.'s (2015) study, which potentially could have impacted their results.

Badawi-Fayad and Cabanis (2007) found that the repeatability of digitizing the positions of landmarks for both the MicroScribe and CT scans is very high ($R = 0.99$ for both), which implies similarly low levels of intraobserver error in using these methods. Similarly, Fourie et al. (2011: 133) reported no “clinical differences” between the accuracy and reliability of anthropometric measurements taken from cadaver heads using calipers and on 3D models created using data from laser and CT scans and photogrammetry and suggested that datasets from all of these sources could be combined in collaborative studies where not all researchers have access to the same instruments. However, they drew landmarks on the specimens using a black marker prior to data collection, making the identification of those landmarks substantially easier than in this study. Others have found that Type I and II landmarks (Bookstein, 1991) can be more precisely identified using digitizers such as the MicroScribe than on scans derived from NextEngine laser scanners (Sholts et al., 2011). Part of the reason for the difference between the current results and those of Sholts et al. (2011) may be that in the latter study, the researchers reported greater difficulties in identifying landmarks on scans where the sutures were not clearly visible due to altered surfaces on some of the crania in their study. However, the authors of that study suggest that Type I and II landmarks may be easier to identify on specimens than scans due in part to the ability to palpate specimens when determining the position of some anatomical features. Sholts et al. (2011) therefore advised

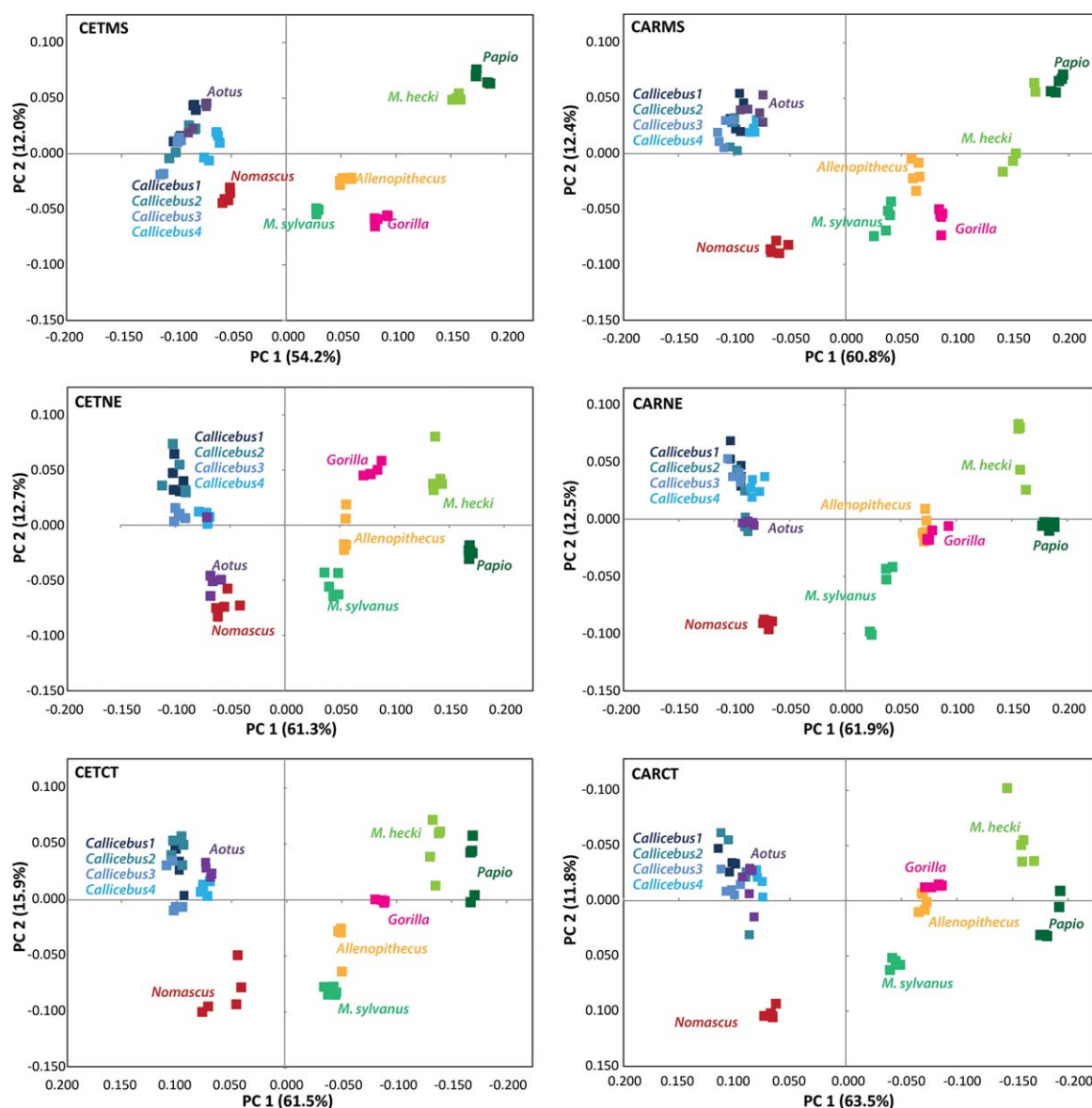


FIGURE 6 Bivariate plots of PC 1 (x-axis) versus PC 2 (y-axis) for each observer*method (CETMS = Terhune MicroScribe data; CARMS = Robinson MicroScribe data; CETNE = Terhune NextEngine data; CARNE = Robinson NextEngine data; CETCT = Terhune microCT data; CARCT = Robinson microCT data). Note that no data are shown for *Pan*, *C. albogularis*, or *C. mitis*; because there are no CT data for these specimens, they have been omitted from all plots to make the distributions comparable. Axes for the CT scan plots have been flipped to make them more visually comparable with the other PC plots

labeling certain anatomical landmarks prior to scanning (as in Fourie et al., 2011). Another possible reason for the discrepancy between our results and those of Sholts et al. (2011) is that both observers in this study had physically examined all crania prior to placing landmarks on 3D models of those same crania and are experienced in collecting data on 3D models, both of which Sholts et al. (2011) suggest may reduce observer error. Sholts et al. (2011) also argue that Type III landmarks may be more precisely identified on 3D scans of specimens rather than using digitizers, due in part to the ability to rotate and carefully examine the positions of those landmarks after they are placed in programs such as Landmark. In fact, they were able to identify Type III landmarks with more precision than Type I landmarks on the 3D models in their study.

This study also found there was no notable difference in intraobserver error levels for the linear distances or 3D data derived from NextEngine and CT scans. This comports well with previous work finding no significant effects when data collected on medial cuneiforms of gorillas using a CT scanner and a NextEngine were pooled (Tocheri et al., 2011). However, as some researchers have noted, the likelihood that random errors in the positioning of landmarks on lower resolution scans influence the results of a study depends on the size of the specimens and structures being analyzed (i.e., for larger specimens/structures, higher resolution is not necessary to precisely identify the position of a landmark) (Fernandes et al., 2015; Muñoz-Muñoz & Perpiñán, 2010; Muñoz-Muñoz, Quinto-Sánchez, & González-José, 2016; von Cramon-Taubadel et al., 2007). It appears that the resolution

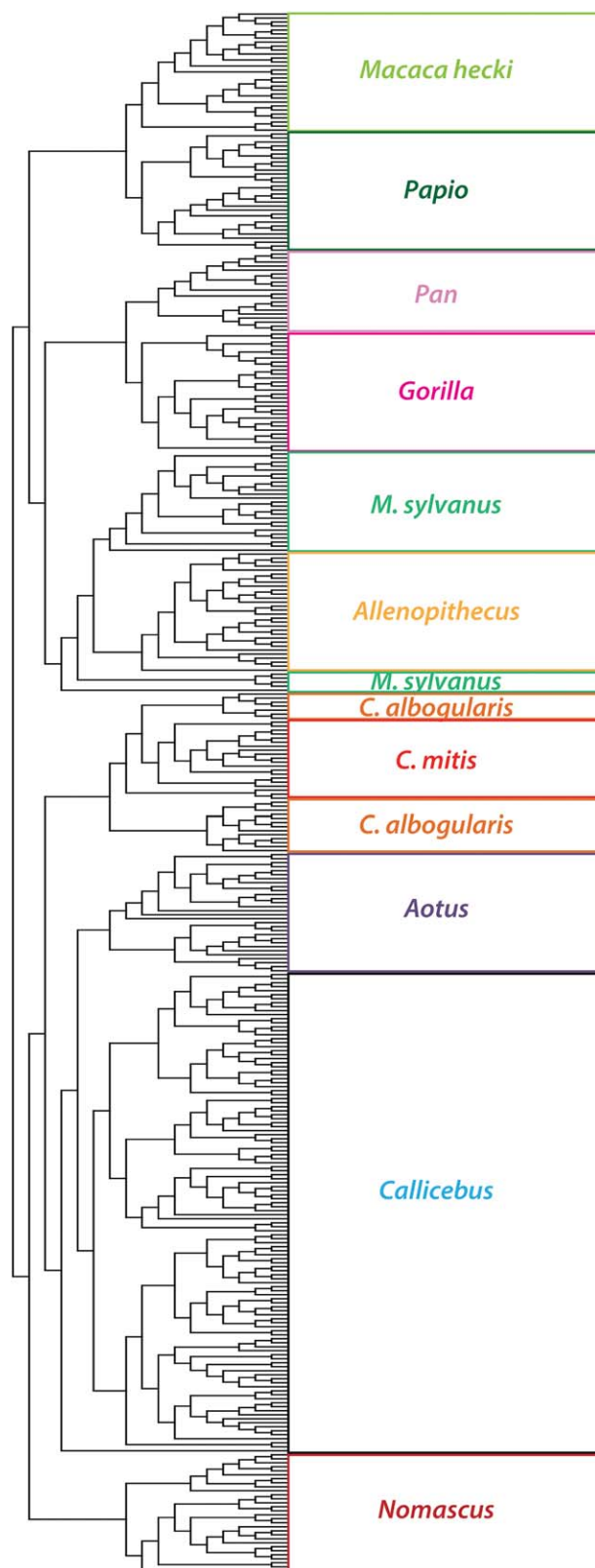


FIGURE 7 UPGMA tree for the entire sample (i.e., all trials from all observers (CET and CAR) and all methods (MS, NE, and CT)). All trials from the same specimen are labeled and color coded

TABLE 5 Results of the Procrustes ANOVA

	Df	SS	MS	R ²	F	Z	p value
Genus	8	4.81	0.60	0.74	243.57	32.93	0.0001
Species	2	0.48	0.24	0.07	97.95	45.87	0.0001
Specimen	1	0.06	0.06	0.01	22.53	16.09	0.0001
Method	19	0.16	0.01	0.03	3.50	2.95	0.0001
Observer	30	0.38	0.01	0.06	5.18	5.10	0.0001
Trial/error	239	0.36	0.00	0.06	0.61	1.01	0.37
Residuals	90	0.22	0.00				
Total	389	6.49					

Note that each level was nested within the other such that the lowest level (trial/error) was nested in all other levels.

of the NextEngine scans for the smaller specimens in our study is sufficient to identify sutural intersections and other landmarks given that there is no trend for intraobserver error to be substantially greater in those specimens than in larger specimens using either the NextEngine or CT scan datasets (Figure 8). As Friess (2012: 9) notes, the primary question for researchers when deciding what surface scanner to use is whether the resolution is “good enough for the purpose at hand.” For example, the resolution of the NextEngine is likely insufficient to document the detailed morphology of dental elements (Slizewski et al., 2010).

One important factor to note is that, during data collection, we observed substantial variation in the resolution of NextEngine scans, which was especially influenced by lighting conditions such that when specimens have substantial amounts of ambient light striking them during the scanning process, the resolution of the resulting scans is greatly reduced. In addition, it was often difficult to obtain merged specimens with sufficient resolution unless three or four scans from different angles were obtained, which significantly increases the time needed for data collection. It has also been suggested that interobserver error may be higher with the NextEngine because more operator decisions must be made in creating 3D models than with other laser scanners (Sholts, Wärmländer, Flores, Miller, & Walker, 2010). We did not assess this in this study as only one of us (CAR) scanned the specimens using the NextEngine and created the 3D models from those scans. The NextEngine scanner is frequently used in data collection due to both its portability and affordability but there are additional types of 3D laser scanners that offer greater resolution (e.g., the Artec Eva, Nikon ModelMaker, FARO Focus, HDI Advance, etc.).

This study also found that there is greater intermethod error when combining 3D data derived from a MicroScribe digitizer with data derived from landmarks placed on CT or NextEngine scans. One possible explanation for this result is that because landmarks on both the NextEngine and CT scans were collected in the program Landmark Editor, the results may be more comparable to one another than to results from data collected using a MicroScribe. As noted by Friess (2012:8), “locating landmarks on a real object and on a computer screen can be two different things.” Moreover, intraobserver error was found to be

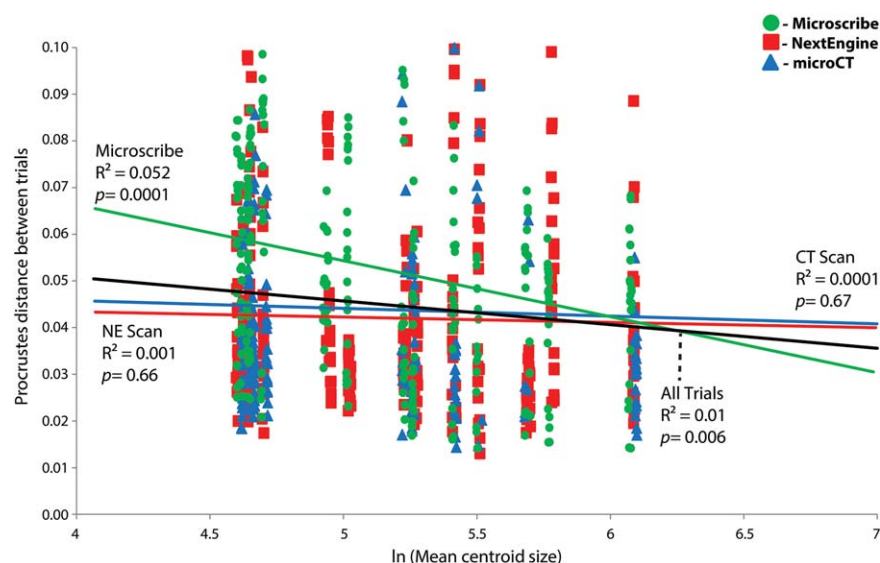


FIGURE 8 Bivariate plot of the Procrustes distance between trials of the same specimen (y-axis) measured by the same specimen using the same methods versus the natural log of the mean centroid size for those trials (x-axis). The black line indicates the overall regression trend line, while the thinner colored lines correspond to the trend lines for data derived from each of the three methods separately. The significance levels (i.e., p values) and correlation coefficients are provided for the overall trend line, along with the trend lines for each of the methods.

greater with the data derived from the MicroScribe, which likely increases intermethod error when combining the MicroScribe and the scan datasets. The increased variance in the data obtained using the MicroScribe (especially for small specimens) could potentially be attributed to the difficulties in holding the stylus steady during digitization and the inability to verify the position of landmarks after their placement on the specimen. Some researchers have expressed reservations about combining 3D data derived from digitizers such as the MicroScribe and from landmarks placed on scans due to the differences discussed above in their precision in identifying different types of landmarks (Sholts et al., 2011).

4.3 | Size and intraobserver error

A number of researchers have found evidence that measurement error decreases as the size of a trait increases, although there is some disagreement about this correlation in the literature (Muñoz-Muñoz and Perpiñán, 2010). In this study, we found a weak but significant tendency for greater levels of error in smaller specimens (particularly for data collected via MicroScribe), and greater variation in the extent of intraobserver error among smaller specimens. However, it is possible that the latter result is due to the greater number of smaller specimens included in this analysis. One potential reason that intraobserver error is slightly greater, or at least more variable, for smaller specimens is that mistakes in the placement of a landmark (e.g., 1 mm to the right of its true position) on a smaller specimen leads to a higher percentage error (and, thus, a more consequential error) on that specimen than on a larger one (Arnqvist & Martensson, 1998; Muñoz-Muñoz & Perpiñán, 2010; von Cramon-Taubadel et al., 2007), even though an observer is equally likely to make that error on small and large specimens. However, even though several of the correlations we observed between error and size were

significant, the correlation coefficients between centroid size and Procrustes distances among trials were quite small and one could argue that the data suggest, as others have found (albeit with specimens that only vary to a small extent in size), that specimen size has little effect on the extent of measurement error (Fruciano, 2016).

4.4 | Consistency of landmark identification

With respect to which landmarks were most difficult to consistently identify, this study found that zygion, the most lateral point on the zygomatic arch, exhibited the greatest mean deviation, followed by bregma, ectoconchion, and opisthocranion. It is important to again emphasize that the figures in Table 3 do not accurately reflect the relative error magnitude for the landmarks due to the "Pinocchio effect" (e.g., von Cramon-Taubadel et al., 2007), although they are useful in tentatively identifying which landmarks are most prone to being inaccurately located. In addition, euryon was removed from the analysis after it was found that we could not consistently identify its anatomical position with confidence, which others have found as well (Ross & Williams, 2008). Other than bregma, what all these landmarks have in common is that they all are extremal points, defined based on their positions relative to other structures (e.g., being more lateral or posterior than any other point on the cranium) (i.e., they are Type III landmarks; Bookstein, 1991), which makes the identification of their position more subjective. Typically researchers have found that the locations of these types of landmarks are identified with the lowest precision (see Sholts et al., 2011 for review). In fact, other studies have also specifically noted the difficulty in consistently identifying the positions of opisthocranion (Ross & Williams, 2008; Slice, Unteregger, Schaefer, & Bookstein, 2004) and zygion (Campomanes-Álvarez et al., 2015). Some have found greater measurement error in placing neurocranial

landmarks on 3D models of CT scans than those on the facial skeleton, and attributed that finding to the higher number of Type III landmarks on the neurocranium (Barbeito-Andrés et al., 2012). In the case of bregma (a Type I landmark), particularly for the scans (and especially on the NextEngine scans), it was often difficult to identify where the sagittal and coronal sutures intersected, which, others have argued, would make bregma a Type II landmark (Sholts et al., 2011). In an analysis using a MicroScribe, intra- and interobserver error for identifying bregma was very low (von Cramon-Taubadel et al., 2007), suggesting that it may be easier to consistently digitize on the actual specimen.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

Our results suggest that researchers should be cautious when compiling data from multiple methods and/or observers, especially if their analyses are focused on intraspecific variation or differences among closely related species, as in these cases patterns among individuals may be obscured by interobserver and intermethod error. As others have noted, the extent to which researchers need to be concerned about measurement error is inversely proportional to the extent of interindividual differences in the sample, with it being a particular problem in studies of shape variation within species (Arnqvist & Martensson, 1998), especially in species that exhibit limited intraspecific variation. Conducting interobserver and intermethod reliability assessments prior to the collection of data is recommended, and compiling data from published sources should be avoided if possible for studies of closely related individuals. Unfortunately, researchers at many institutions and/or in many parts of the world do not have access to the funding and infrastructure resources necessary to conduct interobserver reliability assessments and, consequently, often must rely on published datasets or data collected by colleagues. This problem may be somewhat alleviated in the future with the greater availability of 3D scans in online repositories (e.g., morphosource.org, digimorph.org) and researchers should be encouraged to contribute their data to these sources to help reduce the inequalities of access to data. These repositories serve a dual purpose of providing more researchers access to data from museum collections and preserving those valuable collections from wear and breakage due to repeated handling. However, until such time as sample sizes increase in these online collections and they become more widely available, researchers will need to work together in combining datasets. In doing so, we urge them to think carefully about their research design and whether the error introduced in using multiple methods and/or data from multiple observers could influence the results of their study.

In addition, it appears that there is some preliminary evidence that repeatability and precision are greatest using landmarks placed on microCT and NextEngine scans and least using the MicroScribe, followed by calipers. However, the differences among methods are not substantial and researchers should weigh cost, time, and accuracy in deciding which method to use for their study. Similarly, this study provides preliminary evidence, in support of the results published by other researchers, that the repeatability of some Type III landmarks is lower

than that of Type I and II landmarks, but some structures cannot be characterized using only Type I and II landmarks; thus, the inclusion of Type III landmarks and/or semilandmarks in some studies will be necessary if they can be identified with reasonable consistency.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank the New York Consortium in Evolutionary Primatology and Eric Delson for access to the NextEngine scanners housed at the American Museum of Natural History and for their permission to use the CT scans in the PRIMO database (primo.nycep.org). The authors would also like to thank Lauren Halenar for her help in facilitating access to and for discussions about the scans in the PRIMO repository and the methods used in this study. In addition, the authors thank Eileen Westwig at the American Museum of Natural History for access to the primate skeletal collections under her care. Travel support for CET was provided by the University of Arkansas. This is NYCEP Morphometrics contribution number 102. The authors thank two anonymous reviewers and an associate editor who kindly provided feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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How to cite this article: Robinson C, Terhune CE. Error in geometric morphometric data collection: Combining data from multiple sources. *Am J Phys Anthropol*. 2017;164:62-75. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.23257>