Febrl – A parallel open source data linkage system

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Project web page: **http://datamining.anu.edu.au/linkage.html**

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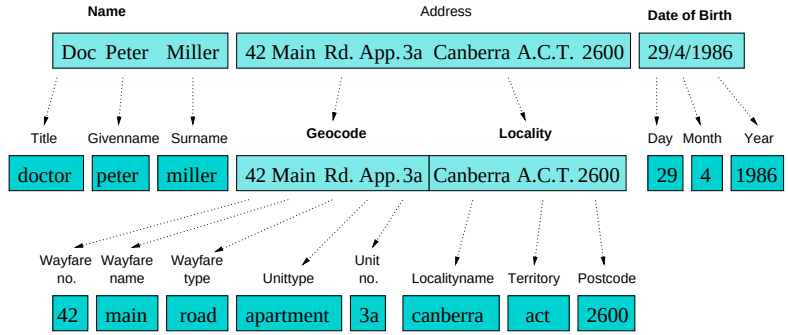
Outline

- Data cleaning and standardisation
- Data linkage
- *Febrl* overview
- Probabilistic data cleaning and standardisation
- Blocking / indexing
- Record pair classification
- Parallelisation in *Febrl*
- Data set generation
- Outlook

Data cleaning and standardisation

- Real world data is often *dirty*
  - Missing values
  - Typographical and other errors
  - Different coding schemes / formats
  - Out-of-date data
- Names and addresses are especially prone to data entry errors
- Cleaned and standardised data is needed for
  - Loading into databases and data warehouses
  - Data mining and other data analysis studies
  - Data linkage and data integration

Data cleaning and standardisation (II)



- Remove unwanted characters and words
- Expand abbreviations and correct misspellings
- Segment data into well defined *output fields*

Data linkage and data integration

- The task of linking together information from one or more data sources representing the same entity
- If no *unique identifier* is available, *probabilistic linkage techniques* have to be applied
- Applications of data linkage
  - Remove duplicates in a data set (internal linkage)
  - Merge new records into a larger master data set
  - Create customer or patient oriented statistics
  - Compile data for longitudinal studies

Data cleaning and standardisation are important first steps for successful data linkage

Data linkage techniques

- Deterministic or exact linkage
  - A *unique identifier* is needed, which is of high quality (precise, robust, stable over time, highly available)
  - For example *Medicare* number (?)
- Probabilistic linkage (*Fellegi & Sunter*, 1969)
  - Apply linkage using available (personal) information
  - Examples: *name*, *address*, *date of birth*
- Other techniques
  (rule-based, fuzzy approach, information retrieval)

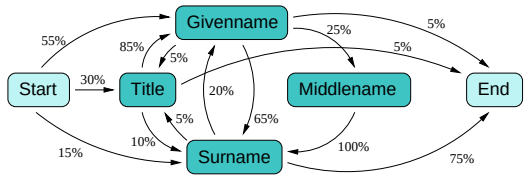
Febrl – Freely extensible biomedical record linkage

- An experimental platform for new and improved linkage algorithms
- Modules for data cleaning and standardisation, data linkage, deduplication, and geocoding
- Open source **https://sourceforge.net/projects/febrl/**
- Implemented in *Python* **http://www.python.org**
  - Easy and rapid prototype software development
  - Object-oriented and cross-platform *(Unix, Win, Mac)*
  - Can handle large data sets stable and efficiently
  - Many external modules, easy to extend

Probabilistic data cleaning and standardisation

- Three step approach
  1. Cleaning
     – Based on look-up tables and correction lists
     – Remove unwanted characters and words
     – Correct various misspellings and abbreviations
  2. Tagging
     – Split input into a list of words, numbers and separators
     – Assign one or more tags to each element of this list (using look-up tables and some hard-coded rules)
  3. Segmenting
     – Use either rules or a *hidden Markov model (HMM)* to assign list elements to *output fields*

Probabilistic data cleaning and standardisation – Example



- Uncleaned input string: *'Doc. peter Paul MILLER'*
  Cleaned into string: *'dr peter paul miller'*
- Word and tag lists:
  `['dr', 'peter', 'paul', 'miller']`
  `['TI', 'GM/SN', 'GM', 'SN' ]`
- Two example paths through HMM
  1: `Start -> Title (TI) -> Givenname (GM) -> Middlename (GM) -> Surname (SN) -> End`

  2: `Start -> Title (TI) -> Surname (SN) -> Givenname (GM) -> Surname (SN) -> End`

Blocking / indexing

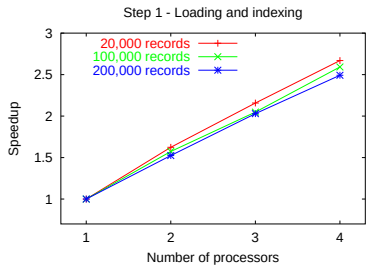
- Number of possible links equals the product of the sizes of the two data sets to be linked
- Performance bottleneck in a data linkage system is usually the (expensive) evaluation of similarity measures between record pairs
- Blocking / indexing techniques are used to reduce the large amount of record comparisons
- *Febrl* contains (currently) three indexing methods
  - Standard blocking
  - Sorted neighbourhood approach
  - Fuzzy blocking using n-grams (e.g. bigrams)

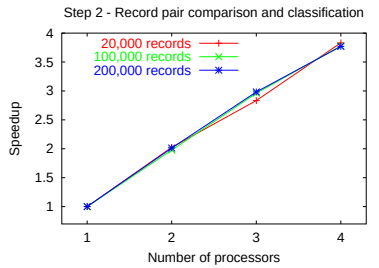
Record pair classification

- For each record pair compared a vector containing *matching weights* is calculated
  Example:
  Record A: `['dr', 'peter', 'paul', 'miller']`
  Record B: `['mr', 'pete', '', 'miller']`
  Matching weights: `[0.2, 0.8, 0.0, 2.4]`
- Matching weights are used to classify record pairs as *links*, *non-links*, or *possible links*
- *Fellegi & Sunter* classifier simply sums all the weights, then uses two thresholds to classify
- Improved classifiers are possible
  (for example using machine learning techniques)

Parallelisation

- Implemented transparently to the user
- Currently using *MPI* via Python module *PyPar*
- Use of supercomputing centres is problematic (privacy) → Alternative: *In-house office clusters*
- Some initial performance results (on *Sun SMP*)





Data set generation

- Difficult to acquire data for testing and evaluation
  (as data linkage deals with names and addresses)
- Also, linkage status is often not known
  (hard to evaluate and test new algorithms)
- *Febrl* contains a data set generator
  - Uses frequency table for given- and surnames, street names and types, suburbs, postcodes, etc.
  - *Duplicate records* are created via random introduction of modifications (like insert/delete/transpose characters, swap field values, delete values, etc.)

Data set generation – Example

- Data set with 4 original and 6 duplicate records

REC_ID	ADDRESS1	ADDRESS2	SUBURB
rec-0-org,	wylly place,	inverpine ret vill,	taree
rec-0-dup-0,	wyllyplace,	inverpine ret vill,	taree
rec-0-dup-1,	inverpine ret vill,	wylly place,	taree
rec-0-dup-2,	wylly place,	inverpine ret vill,	tared
rec-0-dup-3,	wylly parade,	inverpine ret vill,	taree
rec-1-org,	stuart street,	hartford,	menton
rec-2-org,	griffiths street,	myross,	kilda
rec-2-dup-0,	griffith sstreet,	myross,	kilda
rec-2-dup-1,	griffith street,	mycross,	kilda
rec-3-org,	ellenborough place,	kalkite homestead,	sydney

- Each record is given a unique identifier, which allows the evaluation of accuracy and error rates for data linkage

Outlook

- Several research areas
  - Improving probabilistic data standardisation
  - New and improved blocking / indexing methods
  - Apply machine learning techniques for record pair classification
  - Improve performances (scalability and parallelism)
- Project web page
  http://datamining.anu.edu.au/linkage.html

Febrl *is an ideal experimental platform to develop, implement and evaluate new data standardisation and data linkage algorithms and techniques*