Computational Challenges from the Tree of Life

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Overview

- Phylogenies: What and Why?
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- Phylogenetic Reconstruction: How?
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- Phylogenetic Reconstruction: How?
- Limitations and Challenges
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- The CIPRES Project
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- Research in my Lab
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- Summary and Conclusions
A phylogeny is a reconstruction of the evolutionary history of a collection of organisms.

It usually takes the form of a tree.

- Modern organisms are placed at the leaves.
- Edges denote evolutionary relationships.
- “Species” correspond to edge-disjoint paths.
The Great Apes

Phylogeny

From the Tree of the Life Website, University of Arizona

Orangutan
Gorilla
Chimpanzee
Human
12 Species of Campanulaceae

By Robert Jansen & Linda Raubeson
Phylogenies provide the framework around which to organize all biological and biomedical knowledge.

They help us understand and predict:

- functions of and interactions between genes
- relationship between genotype and phenotype
- host/parasite co-evolution
- origins and spread of disease
- drug and vaccine development
- origins and migrations of humans
Herpes Viruses that Affect Humans

- HVS
- EHV2
- KHSV
- EBV
- HSV1
- HSV2
- PRV
- EHV1
- VZV
- HHV6
- HHV7
- HCMV
Epidemiology of West Nile Virus

- Romania 1996
- Israel 1952
- South Africa
- Egypt 1951
- Senegal 1979
- Italy 1998
- Romania 1996
- Kenya 1998
- New York 1999
- Israel 1998
- Central African Republic 1967
- Ivory Coast 1981
- Kunjin 1966–1991
- India 1955–1980
Drug Design: Antivenins

Recommended Antivenin

- Taipan
- Brownsnake
- Blacksnake
- Death adder
- Tiger snake
The Tree of Life: Scale?

- 20 fully sequenced eukaryotic (plants, animals, protists) genomes
- 600 fully sequenced bacterial genomes
- Several sequenced genes for perhaps 50,000 species
- 1.5 million described species
- Estimates for existing species vary from 10 million to 200 million.
- Genome-based tools can handle 20–50 organisms.
- Gene-based tools can handle 200–500 organisms.
- Both sets of tools scale exponentially with the amount of data.
Phylogenetic Reconstruction: How?

- **Data:**
  behavioral, morphological, metabolic, molecular, etc.
  Main data today are DNA sequence data.

- **Models:**
  models of speciation, of population evolution, of molecular character evolution, etc.

- **Algorithms:**
  clustering, optimization, estimation of distributions, and heuristics.
Molecular Data

Typically the DNA sequence of a few genes. Characters are individual positions in the string and can assume 4 states (nucleotides) or 20 states (codons). Evolve through point mutations, insertions (incl. duplications), and deletions.
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- Find homologous genes across all organisms.
- Align gene sequences for the entire set (to identify gaps—insertions and deletions—and point mutations).
- Decide whether to use a single gene for each analysis or to combine the data.
- Lengths limited by size of genes (typically several hundred base pairs)
Sequence Data: Illustration

AAGACTT

AAGGCCT

AGGGCAT

AGGCAT

TAGCCCA

TAGCCCT

TAGACTT

TAGACTT

TGAACCTT

AGCACAA

AGCGCCTT
Sequence Data: Attributes

- **Advantages:**
  - Large amounts of data available.
  - Accepted models of sequence evolution.
  - Models and objective functions provide a reasonable computational framework.

- **Problems:**
  - Fast evolution restricts use to a few million years.
  - Gene evolution need not be identical to organism evolution.
  - Multiple alignments are not well solved.
Gene-Order Data

The ordered sequence of genes on one or more chromosomes.

Entire gene-order is a single character, which can assume a huge number of states.

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- Identify homologous genes, including duplications.
- Refine rearrangement model for collection of organisms (e.g., handle bacterial operons or eukaryotic exons explicitly).
Gene-Order: Guillardia Chloroplast
Gene-Order Data: Rearrangements

- Transposition
- Inversion
- Inverted Transposition
Gene-Order Data: Attributes

- **Advantages:**
  - No need for multiple alignments.
  - No gene tree/species tree problem.
  - Rare evolutionary events and unlikely to cause "silent" changes—so can go back hundreds of millions years.

- **Problems:**
  - Mathematics *much more complex* than for sequence data.
  - Models of evolution not well characterized.
  - Very limited data (mostly organelles).
Other Data

- **protein folds**
  remarkably conserved, but give rise to very complex models

- **metabolic pathways**
  highly specific, but insufficient for large datasets

- **morphological characters**
  not as clearly inherited and inherently fuzzy

- **etc.**!
Good models emerge from collaborations among biologists, mathematicians, and computer scientists; they are:

- **biologically plausible**: they produce credible data and possess explanatory power.
- **mathematically sound**: it is possible to prove desirable properties (convergence, consistency, etc.).
- **computationally tractable**: producing data is easy and reversing the model is possible.
Speciation Models

Usually based on a birth-death process: in any time interval, there are given probabilities for extinction or speciation; also known as the coalescent or Yule-Harding model.

Need more data and refinements:

- inheritance of tendency to speciate
- punctuated equilibrium
- connection to population genetics
Molecular Evolution Models

Based on large amounts of data, models build transition matrices ($4 \times 4$ for nucleotides, $20 \times 20$ for amino acids).

- Widely used to estimate evolutionary rates and well supported by data.
- Still assume independence among sites (e.g., each nucleotide or codon evolves independently of the others).
- Remain unconnected to speciation model.
Algorithms

Two main categories of methods:

- **Distance-based** methods (UPGMA, neighbor-joining) work from a matrix of pairwise distances.
- **Criterion-based** methods (Minimum Evolution, Maximum Parsimony, and Maximum Likelihood) rely on an underlying model and attempt to infer or reconstruct additional data.

In addition:

- **Meta-methods** (quartet-based methods, disk-covering method) decompose the data into smaller subsets, construct trees on those subsets, and use the resulting trees to build a tree for the entire dataset.
True evolutionary distance:
the actual number of permitted evolutionary events that took place to transform one datum into the other.

Edit distance:
the minimum number of permitted evolutionary events that can transform one datum into the other.

Expected true evolutionary distance:
obtained from the edit distance by correcting for the known (model or experiments) statistical relationship between true and edit distances.
Distance-Based Methods

- Use edit or expected true evolutionary distances.
- Usually run in *low polynomial time*.
- Reconstruct *only topologies*: no ancestral data.
- Prototype is **Neighbor-Joining**.
- NJ is optimal on additive distances (where the distance along a path in the true tree equals the pairwise distance in the matrix).
- NJ is statistically consistent (produces the true tree with probability 1 as the sequence length goes to infinity).
The Number of Trees for N Organisms

- 3 organisms: 1 tree
- 4 organisms: 3 trees
- 5 organisms: 15 trees
- 13 organisms: 13.5 billion trees
- \( n \) organisms: \((2n-5)!!\) trees
  \[ (2n-5)!! = (2n-5)*(2n-7)*...*5*3 \]
Parsimony-Based Methods

- Aim to minimize total *number of character changes* (which can be weighted to reflect statistical evidence).
- Assume that characters are *independent*.
- Reconstruct *ancestral data*.
- Are known not to be statistically consistent with sequence data (but examples are fairly contrived).
- Finding most parsimonious tree is computational very expensive (NP-hard).
- Optimal solutions limited to sizes around 30; heuristic solutions appear fairly good to sizes of 500.
Likelihood-Based Methods

- Are based on a specific model of evolution and must estimate all model parameters.
- Produce likelihood estimate (prior or posterior conditional) for each tree.
- Are statistically consistent.
- Reconstruct only topologies.
- Are prone to numerical problems: likelihood of typical trees is infinitesimal.
- Are presumably NP-hard; even scoring one tree is very expensive.
- Optimal solutions limited to sizes below 10; heuristic solutions appear fairly good to sizes of 100.
**Meta-Methods**

**General Principle:**

decompose the dataset into smaller, overlapping subsets, reconstruct trees for the subsets (by some base method), and combine the results into a tree for the entire dataset.

Quartet-based methods:

use all possible smallest subsets (quartet: set of 4 genomes); best-known is Tree-Puzzle. Slow and inherently inaccurate for any base method.

Disk-covering method (**DCM**):

set up graph from distance matrix, nd overlapping triangulated subgraphs, use them for decomposition. High-powered machinery succeeds very well, especially when tree is imbalanced.
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  High-powered machinery *succeeds* very well, especially when tree is imbalanced.
Limitations and Challenges

- **Accuracy**
  not a matter of optimization, but of *scientific truth*!
  how does it scale? how do we evaluate it?

- **Computational Demands**
  all criterion-based optimizations are NP-hard
  the more accurate the model, the worse the problem

- **Data Integration**
  a single type of data cannot answer all questions
  but integration is beyond our reach

- **Database Design**
  database “search” is often a linear search: complex
  objects give rise to difficult queries
Limitations on Accuracy

- true distances cannot be computed
- insufficient sequence length
- primitive or erroneous models
- algorithmic idiosyncrasies
  (NJ suffers with high diameter, MP suffers from long branch attraction, ML from numerical problems)
- gene evolution is not species evolution
- not a tree, but a directed acyclic graph
  (due to hybridization, lateral gene transfer, etc.)
Evaluating Accuracy

- there is only one instance!
- we want the truth, but it cannot be known or measured
- optimization is done on surrogate criteria
- simulation studies are only as good as models
- parameter space is ridiculously large
- what matters: tree structure? edge lengths? data at internal nodes?
Database Challenges

A simple query such as

what is the percentage of trees in the DB in which organisms $x_1, \ldots, x_m$ and organisms $y_1, \ldots, y_n$ occur in distinct subtrees?

requires a linear search through the DB.

The famous BLAST algorithm was designed to speed up a similar linear search.

*How can we preprocess and store the data so as to avoid linear searches?*
Research in my Laboratory

- Scaling up methods through algorithm design, algorithm engineering, and high-performance computing.
- Whole-genome rearrangements in phylogenetic analysis and comparative genomics.
- Reticulate (non-tree) evolution and its reconstruction.
- Computing directly from databases (rather than in-core).

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Scaling Up

Distance-based methods scale poorly in accuracy, so use criterion-based methods. Criterion-based methods scale poorly for computation, so use meta-methods.

Our latest findings:

- To ensure 95% accuracy in reconstructing trees on $n$ leaves, the criterion must be optimized with less than $\frac{1}{n}$ error! (Unheard of in normal approximation problems!)

- Using recursion and iteration, our latest Disk-Covering Method (Rec-I-DCM3) can handle datasets of 10,000–50,000 sequences as well as previous algorithms could handle 100–500.

- Another DCM approach can scale whole-genome analysis from 10 to over 1,000 genomes.
**Gene Rearrangement Phylogeny**

### Theory

- **1995**
  - Inversion distance
    - Hannenhalli & Pevzner

- **1997**
  - Breakpoint phylogeny
    - Blanchette, Bourque, & Sankoff

- **2000**
  - Inversion + deletion distance
    - El-Mabrouk

- **2001**
  - Distance correction
    - Wang, Warnow, & Moret

- **2003**
  - Inversion + deletion + insertion distance
    - Marron, Swenson, & Moret

### Example

- **12 Campanulaceae + Tobacco**
  - Jansen, Moret, & Warnow 2000

### Reconstruction Software

- **1998** BPAnalysis
  - Sankoff
  - 8 taxa ⇒ 1 day
  - 13 taxa ⇒ 250 years

- **2000** GRAPPA
  - Moret, Bader, & Warnow
  - 13 taxa ⇒ 1 day (512-proc.)
  - (200 serial, 100,000 parallel speedup)

- **2001** GRAPPA
  - Moret, Tang, Wang, & Warnow
  - 13 taxa ⇒ 1 hr (laptop)
  - (2,000,000 serial speedup)
  - 20 taxa ⇒ 3 million years

- **2003** DCM-GRAPPA
  - Tang, Moret, & Warnow
  - 1,000 taxa ⇒ 2 days
  - (effectively unbounded speedup)

- **2004** DCM-GRAPPA
  - Tang & Moret
  - Handles unequal gene content
  - (first method with that capability)
Unequal Gene Content

Tang/Moret/Cui/DePamphilis (2004): chloroplast data

organismal

NJ (inv.)

Tang/Moret GRAPPA

breakpoint GRAPPA
13 gamma proteobacteria (Lerat/Daubin/Moran 2003)
Only gene families occurring in at least 3 species.
Over 3,400 genes, with 540–3,000 genes and 3%–30% duplications per genome; pairwise distances from 170 to 1700 events.

Only one error in red tree: \{P. multocida/H. influenzae\} moved (long branch attraction in NJ).
The CIPRES Project

Cyber Infrastructure for Phylogenetic Research

www.phylo.org

A community project funded for 5 years by the US National Science Foundation for $12M under the ITR program, with the aim to develop the infrastructure (hardware, software, and databases) to support the reconstruction of the Tree of Life.

- over 15 institutions, including three museums
- over 40 researchers, evenly split between CS and Biology
- director: Bernard Moret
CIPRES: Participants

CIPRES Members

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Conclusions

- Computational Molecular Biology is a marvelous playground for algorithm design, algorithm engineering, database design, etc.
- The computational challenges are truly awe-inspiring: scaling by at least four more orders of magnitude and ensuring 99.999999% accuracy!
- The Tree of Life project is active in Asia, New Zealand, Europe, and North and South America. Data are being collected at a rate that far exceeds Moore’s law.
- Assembling the Tree of Life will be a major milestone in understanding life on Earth, and mankind in particular.
Laboratory for High-Performance Algorithm Engineering and Computational Molecular Biology

Includes all publications by our lab, GRAPPA source files, email addresses, and links to our main collaborators.